

ITALY IN LATE ANTIQUITY AND THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES



Marco Papasidero

Thefts of Relics in Italy

From Late Antiquity to the
Central Middle Ages, 300–1150

Amsterdam
University
Press

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Italy in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages

The enduring culture of Italy has sustained and transformed human life and experience throughout its long history. Undoubtedly the transformations of the peninsula in the Late Antique and Early Medieval periods are redolent of change and challenge for societies and individuals. This series aims to bridge the gap between Anglophone and Italian scholarship, and more broadly to make works of Italian scholars better known throughout Europe. The series aims to present the best high quality research on the Italian peninsula and the Central Mediterranean in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. It covers the period from the end of the Western Roman Empire to the Ottonians in Italy encompassing Ostrogothic, Lombard and Carolingian Italy. An important aim of this series is to encourage cross-disciplinarity in research associated not only with history, but also archaeology, art history, religious studies and all cognate disciplines. In publishing scholarship from the Anglophone world and from Italy and beyond the series will encourage and deepen knowledge of the central Mediterranean in this fascinating formative period.

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Table of Contents

Abbreviations	7
List of figures	9
Acknowledgements	11
Introduction	13
1. Relics and Thefts: A Preliminary Approach	19
1.1. <i>Furta sacra</i> between history, anthropology and hagiography	19
1.2. A historiography of <i>furta sacra</i> : some remarks	32
1.3. The sources, the authors and the geography	39
2. Thefts of Relics in Late Antiquity (300–600)	47
2.1. The ‘archaeology’ of thefts of relics	47
2.2. Stealing and taking care of martyrs’ bodies: Lucina and the other women	55
2.3. The role of men in ‘stealing’ martyrs’ relics	62
2.4. Towards the theft of relics: the example of Sts Festus and Desiderius	69
3. Thefts of Relics in the Early Middle Ages (600–950)	75
3.1. The Early Middle Ages and the theft of St Leucius	75
3.2. Thefts of relics and political sacralisation in Benevento	78
3.3. The stabilisation of the <i>furta sacra</i> tradition: St Mark’s relics	87
3.4. Theft for compensation: the cases of Larino, Lesina and Lucera	93
3.5. The body of St Juvenal in Narni and the legends regarding the theft of St Magnus	96
3.6. An attempt at theft: the case of St Appianus	101
3.7. Two female saints: Sts Margaret and Euprepia	103
4. Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages (950–1150)	107
4.1. Thefts in the Central Middle Ages and the case of St Metrone	107
4.2. The role of bishops in the thefts of St Himerius and Sts Felinus and Gratian	111
4.3. St John of Spoleto’s and St Martin of Mont Massico’s relics: <i>furta</i> and attempts at theft	115

4.4. From Myra to Italy: the relics of St Nicholas and St John the Baptist	120
4.5. Between weapons and devotion: St Adam of Guglionesi and St Maurus in Lavello	132
4.6. Two other Venetian thefts: the relics of St Stephen and St Isidore of Chios	136
4.7. Theft of a female saint: St Agatha from Constantinople to Catania	142
5. The Accounts of Translation: Historical, Literary and Visual Representations	147
5.1. The characters	147
5.2. <i>Topoi</i> and narrative themes	153
5.3. The lexicon of theft	158
5.4. The memory of theft and visual culture	165
6. Anthropology of the Thefts of Relics	187
6.1. Sounds, feelings and emotions	187
6.2. Smells, liquids and material culture	195
6.3. The natural world	201
6.4. Bodies, clothes and blood	212
7. Dreams, Rituals and Spaces	223
7.1. Dreams and visions	223
7.2. The <i>evocatio</i> and the opening of the tomb	231
7.3. The rituals of translation, the urban context and the relics' authenticity	236
Conclusions: Thefts of Relics: A Never-Ending Story	245
Appendix	253
Maps of the Thefts of Relics	258
Bibliography	261
Primary sources	261
Secondary sources	266
Index	291

Abbreviations

AASS	<i>Acta Sanctorum</i> , third edition, 62 vols (Brussels, Rome and Paris: Victor Palmé, 1863–1925)
BHL	<i>Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina antiquae et mediae aetatis</i> , 2 vols (Brussels: Sociétés des Bollandistes, 1898–1911)
CSLA	Online Database ‘The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity’, http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk
DBI	<i>Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani</i> (Rome: Treccani, 1960–)
EC	<i>Enciclopedia Cattolica</i> , 12 vols (Vatican City: Sansoni, 1948–1954)
MGH	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica</i> (Berlin, Leipzig and Hannover 1826–)
PL	<i>Patrologia Latina</i> , ed. by Jacques Paul Migne, 221 vols (Paris: Garnier, 1844–1864)
RIS	<i>Rerum Italicarum Scriptores</i> , ed. by Ludovico Antonio Muratori, 28 vols (Milan: ex typographia Societatis Palatinae in Regia Curia, 1723–1751)
<i>Sanctuarium</i>	<i>Sanctuarium seu Vitae Sanctorum</i> , ed. by Boninus Mombritius, new edition, 2 vols (Paris: Albert Fontemoing, 1910)

List of figures

Cover image	<i>The translation of the body of St Nicholas</i> , British Library, Royal 20 D VI, f. 153v, second quarter of the thirteenth century, © Courtesy of British Library Board.	
Figure 1	<i>Stories of St Magnus: the translation of St Magnus' body from Fondi to Veroli</i> , Crypt of Anagni Cathedral, © Courtesy of the Chapter of the Cathedral Basilica of Anagni.	167
Figure 2	<i>Stories of St Magnus: the body of St Magnus in Veroli</i> , © Courtesy of the Chapter of the Cathedral Basilica of Anagni.	167
Figure 3	<i>The arrival of the body of St Pardus in Larino</i> , fourteenth-century wooden bas-relief, Cathedral of Larino, © Courtesy of Diocesan Historical Archive of Termoli and Larino.	169
Figure 4	<i>The body of St Mark is stolen</i> , Pala D'Oro, Basilica of St Mark in Venice, © Courtesy of the Procuratoria di San Marco.	170
Figure 5	<i>The body of St Mark arrives in Venice and is handed over to the bishop</i> , Pala D'Oro, Basilica of St Mark, Venice, © Courtesy of the Procuratoria di San Marco.	171
Figure 6	<i>The extraction of St Mark's body in Alexandria and its transfer into baskets</i> , Chapel of St Clement, Basilica of St Mark, Venice, © Courtesy of the Procuratoria di San Marco.	172
Figure 7	<i>St Mark saves sailors from shipwreck</i> , Chapel of St Clement, Basilica of St Mark, Venice, © Courtesy of the Procuratoria di San Marco.	174
Figure 8	<i>The translation of the relics of St Mark</i> , Door of St Alipius, Basilica of St Mark, Venice, © Courtesy of the Procuratoria di San Marco.	175
Figure 9	<i>The theft and translation of St Mark's body</i> , cod. Lat. III, 111 (2116), fol. 134r © Courtesy of the Ministry of Culture – Marciana National Library. Prohibition of reproduction.	176

Figure 10	<i>The transfer of the relics of St Isidore of Chios, Chapel of St Isidore, Basilica of St Mark, Venice, © Courtesy of the Procuratoria di San Marco.</i>	178
Figure 11	<i>The extraction of the body of St Isidore of Chios, Chapel of St Isidore, Basilica of St Mark, Venice, © Courtesy of the Procuratoria di San Marco.</i>	178
Figure 12	Radul, <i>The translation of the relics of St Nicholas, Church of St Nicholas, Monastery of the Patriarchate of Peć, Kosovo, 1673–1674, Courtesy of the BLAGO Fund.</i>	181
Figure 13	Scipione di Guido, <i>The appearance of St Agatha to Gislebertus in a dream, wooden choir stall, Cathedral of Catania, 1591–1598, © Courtesy of the Cathedral of Catania.</i>	182
Figure 14	Scipione di Guido, <i>The theft of the body of St Agatha, wooden choir stall, Cathedral of Catania, 1591–1598, © Courtesy of the Cathedral of Catania.</i>	182
Figure 15	Scipione di Guido, <i>Gislebertus and Goselinus arrange St Agatha's relics in their quivers and bowls, wooden choir stall, Cathedral of Catania, 1591–1598, © Courtesy of the Cathedral of Catania.</i>	182
Figure 16	Scipione di Guido, <i>St Agatha appears to Gislebertus to make him leave Corinth, wooden choir stall, Cathedral of Catania, 1591–1598, © Courtesy of the Cathedral of Catania.</i>	184
Figure 17	Scipione di Guido, <i>Gislebertus and Goselinus forget a saint's breast in Taranto, wooden choir stall, Cathedral of Catania, 1591–1598, © Courtesy of the Cathedral of Catania.</i>	184
Map 1	Thefts of relics in central and northern Italy, © Mappamundi Cartography.	258
Map 2	Thefts of relics in southern Italy, © Mappamundi Cartography.	259

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Introduction

Abstract: The introduction sets out the aims of the book, highlighting its novelty in relation to the author's previous volume that was published in Italian. In addition to a radical change in the chronology, the introduction notes a further refinement of the methodology used, with an increased focus on the cultural aspects that emerge from the texts.

Keywords: *furta sacra*; thefts of relics; *Translatio sanctitatis*; hagiography; cultural history; cultural anthropology

The aim of this book is to analyse the phenomenon of the theft of relics in Italy from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages. It is not a translation of our previous Italian work *Translatio sanctitatis: I furti di reliquie nell'Italia medievale* (Firenze University Press, 2019), but a profoundly enriched and rewritten version, with some aspects analysed in a different way and with the incorporation of many sources that previously had not been considered.¹ Among the most important novelties of this research it is worth mentioning: (i) the analysis of late antique thefts, with a specific focus on the stealing of martyrs' relics; (ii) a deeper study of some anthropological aspects included in the hagiographic tales of theft; namely, the presence of emotions, feelings, but also sensorial elements (smells, colours, sounds), animals and objects; (iii) the consideration of artistic representations of thefts as historical sources, sometimes elaborated decades after the theft and, in other cases, centuries later; and (iv) a new organisation of the index, in which the chronology is clearer and more incisive, and the sources are organised differently.

The Italian book, published thanks to the *Istituto Sangalli per la storia e le culture religiose*, which awarded us one of the two prizes in 2018, represented our first attempt to reconstruct the phenomenon of *furta sacra* (i.e., thefts

¹ This work was supported by the PNRR project Italian Strengthening of Esfri RI Resilience (ITSERR) funded by the European Union – NextGenerationEU (CUP:B53C22001770006).

of relics) in medieval Italy, using sources and examining thefts that had allegedly occurred on the peninsula until the Late Middle Ages. This book endeavours to provide a different perspective by examining some of the narratives previously discussed, along with others, through the lens of cultural history.

The most significant change relates to the chronology. While in the previous book we examined thefts that took place in the Early Middle Ages and also focused on the numerous cases occurring in the following centuries (1150–1350), here we decided to start our research in Late Antiquity in order to better understand how the phenomenon began and subsequently evolved over the centuries. The endpoint of the analysis is the Central Middle Ages, approximately 1150. Although this period and the subsequent century marked some of the most significant occurrences of the *furta sacra* phenomenon – notably the operations of the Fourth Crusade in 1204, which facilitated the clandestine transfer of numerous relics from Constantinople and the Middle East to Italy and beyond – it remains crucial to concentrate on the Early Middle Ages. This focus enables a deeper understanding of the phenomenon's development during those centuries sometimes overlooked by scholars. The decision to focus on the first few centuries (300–500) also allowed us to investigate the possible connection between the recoveries of martyrs' bodies – which were narrated between Late Antiquity and the very beginning of the Early Middle Ages – and the robberies of relics that occurred in subsequent centuries.

The attempt to trace a history of theft constitutes a further significant innovation. While previously we emphasised the features of the texts, in this current work we have endeavoured to show the evolution of the phenomenon by analysing the thefts in chronological order. This had already been partially attempted in our prior research, but not systematically, making it difficult to determine whether these thefts and their modalities evolved throughout the centuries or maintained the same patterns.

Emphasis has been placed on anthropological aspects. Theft of relics must be viewed as a way to interpret reality, and the cultural devices used by hagiographers to explain what was said to have occurred are crucial to understanding the phenomenon as a whole. In addition to a clear description of several themes related to the bodies of saints, their presence in their relics, the 'homes' in which they might reside, etc., we wanted to devote a chapter to the analysis of many details that constitute the cultural context in which the theft occurred, including the landscape, the sounds and the emotions described in the tales.

A first investigation of the visual representation of theft in manuscript miniatures, frescoes and woodworks is also featured in the book. This is

only a preliminary analysis of a few cases that may inspire further research on this topic. The presence of painted translations of relics, or *furta sacra*, should be thoroughly analysed by comparing and cross-referencing images and texts, especially since these images frequently serve as transmission of the memory of theft across the centuries.

A multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary methodology has been applied. A historical approach was adopted in the description and analysis of sources, contexts and periods; an historical-anthropological method allowed us to reflect on the cultural system that emerges from the hagiographical tales; while a literary analysis showed how these legends work and the way in which the tales were written and composed. The overarching goal is to reconstruct the context and cultural significance embedded within these texts.

In the general design, 'Italy' is a historiographical category that helps us consider a specific geographical context, in which clearly there was great political and social complexity.

The book presents a chronology characterised by three periods: Late Antiquity (300–600); the Early Middle Ages (600–950); and the Central Middle Ages (950–1150). The purpose of this subdivision is to facilitate analysis, especially on the basis of the various political contexts and sources considered.

The book is composed of seven chapters. After the introduction, the first chapter, 'Relics and Thefts: A Preliminary Approach', introduces the reader to the topic of devotion to relics from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages, focusing on the phenomenon of theft. It underlines the relation between two important aspects; namely, history and hagiography, highlighting the methodology and criteria used for selecting the sources. In addition, there is an explanation of the typologies of sources employed: accounts of translations of relics (*translationes*), passions of saints (*passiones*), lives of saints (*vitae*) and lists of miracles (*miracula*). The chapter focuses on the cultural perspective on devotion to and translations of relics, including a reflection on the historiography of theft of relics. Finally, the sources are presented with an initial analysis of the geographical area considered.

The second chapter, 'Thefts of Relics in Late Antiquity (300–600)', aims to describe the importance of the phenomenon during this period, considering the 'archaeology of thefts of relics' and several translations that occurred, according to the hagiographical sources, after the executions of martyrs, especially at the end of the third century and the beginning of the fourth century. The chapter also explains the relation between late antique thefts and certain medieval traditions that justify the possession of a relic by

a particular city, church or monastery after the martyrdom. Numerous examples of *passiones* are considered. The chapter illustrates how these tales provided a first notion of 'stealing relics' that has numerous similarities – especially from a hagiographic perspective – with the medieval thefts.

The third chapter, 'Thefts of Relics in the Early Middle Ages (600–950)', is dedicated to the analysis of the thefts documented in the first part of the Middle Ages. Specific cases are considered, such as St Mark and Venice; the political and spiritual use of thefts of relics in Benevento; the practice of compensation of relics (a town whose relics have been stolen decides to replace them by stealing relics from another place) in the case of Larino and Lesina; and so on. Lesser-known translations are also considered (e.g., St Juvenal of Narni, St Magnus of Anagni, etc.). This chapter shows how the thefts of relics in this period were mainly tied to sieges and war, and to the neglect or abandonment of tombs under particular historical conditions.

The fourth chapter, 'Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages (950–1150)', aims to study the phenomenon in the following centuries, until 1150. It includes the analysis of a small group of monastical thefts in the tenth century (St Margaret, St John of Spoleto, Sts Felinus and Gratian); the complex case of St Nicholas, whose relics were disputed between Bari and Venice (and, just secondarily, Benevento); and the cases of St Adam of Guglionesi and St Agatha of Catania. Lesser-known translations are also examined (e.g., St Metrone, St Himerius, etc.). The chapter considers the commencement of a new epoch for the theft of relics – which no longer occurred in perilous conditions such as wars and sieges, while tombs appeared to be better guarded – characterised by the diffuse resort to secret nocturnal translations.

The fifth chapter, 'The Accounts of Translation: Historical, Literary and Visual Representations', further analyses the hagiographical tales, examining their meaning and structure; the writings and rewritings of the accounts themselves; the literary *topoi* and narrative themes; the lexicon; and the medieval visual representations of thefts (frescoes, mosaics, canvases). The aim of the chapter is to enter the 'laboratory' of the hagiographers in order to understand their writing and painting strategies and purposes.

The sixth chapter, 'Anthropology of the Thefts of Relics', takes stock of certain elements pertaining to medieval culture and included in the hagiographical accounts, useful for describing some aspects of the mentality and sensibility of the period considered. It analyses key elements included in all hagiographical tales, such as feelings and emotions, sounds, smells, colours, objects, animals, and the topics of body and blood. The analysis is vital to understanding the importance of these sources not only as regards

the comprehension of the phenomenon of *furta sacra*, but also of numerous aspects of medieval society.

The seventh chapter, 'Dreams, Rituals and Spaces', is devoted to the analysis of various religious aspects that have a pivotal role in the accounts of thefts. The parts played by dreams and visionaries in the finding of the relics are studied, as are the rituals carried out, especially after the theft, including the procession, the arrival in the new town and the deposition of the relics; the functions and characteristics of miracles and signs are explored. The main focus is on the actions performed in each phase of the theft, such as the opening of the tomb. A reflection is also devoted to the spatial dimension, including the urban one.

The conclusion, 'Thefts of Relics: A Never-Ending Story', attempts to recapitulate the results of the research, emphasising the fact that it is a long-lasting phenomenon, with some occurrences also in the modern and contemporary era, even if often with different aims and purposes.

1. Relics and Thefts: A Preliminary Approach

Abstract: The first chapter presents an analysis of the *furta sacra* legends written on the Italian peninsula between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. A methodological introduction clarifies the approach taken, which combines contributions from different disciplines and places the legends somewhere between hagiographic tales and historical narratives. It then examines the history of studies on the subject, starting with the early modern period and a reflection on relics in the Protestant context. Finally, the corpus of sources is presented, with some observations on the authors (who are often anonymous) and on the main geographical areas that emerge.

Keywords: thefts of relics; cultural anthropology; *furta sacra*; hagiography; cultural history

1.1. *Furta sacra* between history, anthropology and hagiography

The subject of this book is the cultural phenomenon of the theft of relics in Italy from Late Antiquity to the Central Middle Ages (1150). With the Latin expression *furta sacra*, elaborated by Patrick Geary, we mean a transfer of relics from one place to another conducted by one or more people, often described as thieves, through the use of force or violence, sometimes in a war or siege context or, more often, during the night or by deceit. The sources often show a divine inspiration behind the actions of the pious thieves, justifying these thefts as something wanted by God.

Among the first examples of the *furta sacra* genre is that of the *Translatio sanctorum Marcellini et Petri*, composed by Einhard between 830 and 831, some years after the theft of St Mark by the Venetians.¹ On the grounds of previous

¹ Stella (ed.), *Traslazione e miracoli*, p. 12. On this text, see also Veronese, *Reliquie in movimento*, pp. 116–134.

hagiographic sources linked to the idea of theft of relics, he could elaborate a new historical and literary model based on the fact that it was possible to steal relics, transferring them from one place, generally Rome and its catacombs, to other sites, above all beyond the Alps. The text of the translation of Sts Marcellinus and Peter, which appears more like an elaborated 'novel', influenced many other legends, such as the *Historia translationis sancti Benedicti* and the *Miracula sancti Benedicti* composed by Andrew of Fleury about St Benedict,² the *Translatio sanctae Helenae in Altumvillare*, written in 841–842 and related to St Helena, the mother of Constantine, the *Translatio sancti Valentini* elaborated in 1010, or the *Translatio sancti Callisti* of 1020.

Before analysing the main features of this hagiographic genre, it is worth mentioning what could be considered one of the earliest narratives of relic theft in Christianity. Jerome (ca. 341–420), in the *Vita Hilarionis* (BHL 3879), written around 390 in Bethlehem, recounts the events of the life of the monk Hilarion (ca. 291–371), who lived in Palestine and was, according to the author, one of the most prominent hermits and miracle-workers of his time.³ After his death in Cyprus, his disciple Hesychius, who had heard of the saint's death, went to the island to retrieve his body. He pretended to settle in the same garden where Hilarion lay dead so as not to arouse the suspicion of the locals who were guarding his holy body, but after about ten months he succeeded in stealing it ('*corpus eius furatus est*'). He then took it to Maiuma, in Palestine, accompanied by a crowd of hermits and locals, and buried it in the ancient monastery. Jerome also stresses that the saint's clothes – his tunic (*tunica*), cocolla (*cuculla*) and cloak (*palliolo*) – were intact, as was his body, which smelt as though it had been smeared with ointment ('*tantisque fragrante odoribus, ut delibitum unguentis putares*').⁴ This episode, which dates back to the fourth century, is certainly a very early example of the interest in sacred bodies and the writings that sought to certify their transfer by theft. As we shall see, this single episode already contains all the characteristic details of the tales of theft, including secrecy and deception, the surveillance of the tomb, the incorruptibility of the body, and the lexicon used.

The *furta sacra* genre is characterised by a deep intertwining of historical, literary and hagiographic elements, which requires a complex

2 On this case, see Geary, *Furta sacra*, pp. 120–122; Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind*, pp. 209–210; Galdi, 'S. Benedetto tra Montecassino e Fleury'.

3 On this text, see Mohrmann, 'Introduzione', pp. xl–li; Nehring, 'Jerome's *Vita Hilarionis*'; Weingarten, 'The *Vita Hilarionis*'. On the saint, see Gordini and Celletti, 'Ilarione di Gaza'.

4 Jerome, *Vita Hilarionis*, 32.6–7 (p. 142).

methodological approach.⁵ On the one hand, thefts are supposed to be historical events that happened at a specific moment, thanks to which saints' relics could be transferred from one place to another without the permission of their owners. On the other hand, the phenomenon is not verifiable, and the legends written as proof of its historicity (i.e., the *translationes*) have been elaborated as hagiographic accounts, full of *topoi* and literary themes. In the *furta sacra* tales, the historical and the mythopoeic coexist and must be considered two sides of the same coin. Studying the history of thefts of relics means entering into people's mentalities, reflecting on how the bodies of saints have been considered for centuries, and reading the hagiographic stories as precious sources for understanding continuities and changes in the evolution of the phenomenon over time.⁶

The objects of value at the centre of these tales are the bodies and relics of saints.⁷ The advent of Christianity introduced a new perspective on the dead body in Roman culture. While the Romans considered corpses to be foul and burned or buried them outside the towns, Christians started to house the bodies and relics of martyrs and other saints within the city – translations of this nature are documented in ancient Greek texts from the middle of the fourth century, and in Latin sources towards the end of the same century⁸ – marking a shift in the boundaries between life and death.⁹ In the Hebrew Bible, too, there was a negative attitude regarding contact with corpses, but even in that context there was evidence of practices that could be compared to the Christian cult of saints; for example, the veneration of patriarchs' and prophets' bodies, like those of the ancient Greek heroes.¹⁰ Nonetheless, during Late Antiquity, there were those who disagreed with the veneration of bodies and relics, deeming it too close to idolatry and 'paganism', such as the presbyter from Aquitaine, Vigilantius,

5 On this topic, see Golinelli, 'Lagiografia tra storia e letteratura'; Klaniczay, 'Hagiography and Historical Narrative'.

6 Canetti, 'Santuari e reliquie tra Antichità e Medioevo'; Canetti, 'Culti, credenze, santità', p. 98.

7 On the beginnings of the cult of relics, see Wiśniewski, *The Beginnings of the Cult of Relics*, pp. 8–26.

8 Iadanza, *Principi, vescovi e reliquie a Benevento*, p. 87.

9 Delehaye, *Les origines du culte des martyrs*, pp. 24–49; Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, pp. 1–22; Salisbury, *The Blood of Martyrs*, pp. 30–32. On the cult of saints in the Antiquity, see also Delehaye, *Sanctus: Essai sur le culte des saints dans l'antiquité*.

10 Wortley, 'The Origins of Christian Veneration of Body-parts', pp. 14–15. On the cult of Greek heroes, see Brelich, *Gli eroi greci*, pp. 92, 116, 188, 229; Osborne, 'Relics and Remains in an Ancient Greek World'. On the therapeutic power of certain bodies in Antiquity, see, for example, Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, XXVIII.30–34 (vol. 8, pp. 22–27).

whose perspective emerges from Jerome's treatise *Contra Vigilantium* written in 406.¹¹

The term relic (from the Latin *reliquiae*, meaning 'remains') defines two different typologies of objects: the first is the remains of saints' bodies, such as bones, skin, hair, etc.; the second is the things used by them or placed in contact with their bodies, such as clothes, shoes, the instruments of their martyrdom, and so on.¹² In general, the history of Christianity has known the practice of creating new relics since Late Antiquity in order not to destroy the bodies of saints by breaking them up.¹³ These are the so-called 'contact relics' (*ex contactu*) that are generally cloths (*brandea*, *palliola*, *sanctuarium*), but also stones and earth,¹⁴ put in proximity with the saints' tombs so as to receive part of their miraculous 'virtue' (the Latin *virtus* and the Greek *dynamys*),¹⁵ and thus acquiring themselves the status of relics. Evidence of this practice emerges from the words attributed to Pope Gregory I (590–604), who told a Roman matron that directly touching the bodies of martyrs was not permitted.¹⁶ Relics could be obtained from cloths that had come into contact with them.¹⁷ The case of a fabric sacralised in this

11 Grig, *Making Martyrs*, pp. 89–90; on the cult of relics during the first centuries, see also Rinaldi, *Pagani e cristiani*, pp. 373–376.

12 Scudamore, 'Relics'; Martigny, *Dictionnaire des antiquités chrétiennes*, pp. 692–695. On medieval devotion to relics, see also Canetti, *Frammenti di eternità*; Stelladoro, 'Significato, ruolo, culto e potere delle reliquie'; Bozóky, *La politique des reliques*; Freeman, *Holy Bones, Holy Dust*; George, *Reliques*; Boesch Gajano, *Res sacrae*. On relics from a multicultural and long-term perspective, see Walsham, *Relics and Remains*.

13 Fragmentation of relics was prohibited several times; for example, in 519 in a letter from Iustinian I to Pope Hormisdas, and in 594 by Gregory I. However, several elements, including hagiographic texts and epigraphs, indicate that this 'rule' was frequently disobeyed (Michaud, 'Cultes des reliques et épigraphie', pp. 200–203); on the diffusion of relics, see Hunt, 'The Traffic in Relics'.

14 According to Gregory of Tours, *brandea* and *palliola* acquired weight when they were put in contact with the tomb of St Peter, a phenomenon that was considered an expression of the growth of heavenly virtue (Canetti, 'Culti, credenze santità', p. 100). On touching relics, see Wiśniewski, *The Beginnings of the Cult of Relics*, pp. 122–143.

15 'According to Christian tradition, the saints, in compensation for their merits and the suffering they endured, were rewarded by God with a force (*virtus*) which remained present and continued to act in their remains after death' (Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 425); see also Wortley, 'The Origins of Christian Veneration of Body-parts'.

16 'consuetudo non est, quando sanctorum reliquias dant, ut quidquam tangere praesumant de corpore', 'it is not customary, when giving relics of the saints, to presume to touch anything of the body' (quoted in Delehaye, *Les origines du culte des martyrs*, p. 51).

17 'in buxide brandeum mittitur atque ad sacratissima corpora sanctorum ponitur', 'a cloth is placed in a container and laid upon the sacred bodies of the saints' (quoted in Delehaye, *Les origines du culte des martyrs*, p. 51).

way that bled after being cut with scissors was proof of the alleged value of *ex contactu* relics.¹⁸ Although this practice was very diffuse in the first centuries of Christianity and continued through the following centuries until the contemporary era, the phenomenon of theft does not concern these kinds of relics: the aim of the thieves under discussion here was to take the actual bodies of the saints and bring them to their villages, cities or monasteries. The relics *ex contactu* were reproducible – and therefore movable – while the actual source of the *virtus*, which was the holy body itself, remained in one place. Stealing the objects without taking the body would not have guaranteed the full transfer of the miraculous virtue and the exclusivity of the remains. The phenomenon of theft of relics was also able to acquire relevance because of the possibility of moving the bodies of saints. An early reflection on the ownership of martyrs' tombs – and, by extension, of their bodies – is included in an epistle by Constantine, cited in Eusebius' *Life of the emperor*.¹⁹ The first reference to the Imperial legislation is found in the Code of Justinian and is attributed to Diocletian; it relates to the possibility of transferring the body of a deceased person only if it has not yet been interred,²⁰ in accordance with the Roman perspective on the impurity of corpses and the religious status of tombs. According to the *Codex Theodosianus*, which was promulgated by Theodosius in 438, it was forbidden and considered sacrilegious to violate tombs by removing even a single stone or handful of soil.²¹ Moreover, it explicitly refers to the prohibition against transferring or selling martyrs' bodies ('*nemo martyrem distrahat, nemo mercetur*'),²² except for locations where the relics were positioned in order to construct a place of worship.²³ Punishments for tomb violators are mentioned in the *lex Romana Visigothorum* of 506 and in the *Edictum* attributed to Theodoric the Great but more probably elaborated by the Visigothic Theodoric II written about the end of the fifth and the beginning of the sixth century.²⁴ Later, in a letter from Pope John II (533–535),

18 'praedictus pontifex hoc ipsum brandeum allatis forbicibus incidit, et ex ipsa incisione sanguis effluxit', 'the aforementioned pope cut this cloth with scissors that had been brought, and from the cut, blood flowed' (quoted in Delehay, *Les origines du culte des martyrs*, p. 52).

19 Quoted in Castello, 'The Cult of Relics', p. 30. The question of the violation of tombs was also present in Roman law before Christianity, sometimes linked to the risk of necromancy involving the use of body parts or tombs (Lafferty, 'Ad sanctitatem mortuorum', pp. 249–252).

20 *Codex Iustinianus*, III.44.10 (p. 148).

21 *Codex Theodosianus*, IX.17.5 (p. 465); the same summarised in the *Codex Iustinianus*, IX.19.5 (p. 380).

22 *Codex Theodosianus*, IX.17.7 (p. 466); see also *Codex Iustinianus*, I.2.3 (p. 12).

23 Delehay, *Les origines du culte des martyrs*, pp. 55–57; Castello, 'The Cult of Relics', pp. 39–40.

24 Lafferty, 'Ad sanctitatem mortuorum', pp. 257, 259.

based on the decision of the Synod of Marseille in 533, the crime of violating tombs is mentioned, as well as in a letter to Caesarius of Arles (d. 542), and again in the fourth Synod of Toledo in 633, in relation to clerics who participated in the destruction of tombs.²⁵ In all these cases, the secular authority had to judge the crimes. Gregory of Tours (ca. 538–594) provides several fascinating examples of relic thefts that illustrate the theme of the desire for relics among people and how certain clergy incited the populace to take them from the saints' tombs.²⁶

Indeed, the juridical restrictions were frequently disobeyed and ignored, and the practice of transferring relics, which grew more widespread between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, facilitated the consideration of acceptable and understandable hagiographic stories about translations and thefts of holy remains.²⁷ Bishops, too, played a crucial role in enabling the relics to be transferred.²⁸ Additionally, not only were relics removed from their locations, but they were often sold. According to Augustine of Hippo (354–430), certain monks used to sell them,²⁹ foreshadowing this practice some centuries later, particularly in French and German monasteries. Among those who sold relics 'professionally', we recall the Deacon Deusdona,³⁰ the cleric Felix,³¹ and Electus³² who, according to several *translationes* composed beyond the Alps, stole numerous relics and bodies of saints, distributing them to monks in order to benefit their monasteries. Among the main texts that reference this activity are Einhard's *Translatio sanctorum Marcellini et Petri* and *Miracula sanctorum in Fuldensis ecclesias translatorum*, composed in the 840s. Many of these relics originated from the catacombs in Rome, where genuine or allegedly authentic remains were easily available. It was also possible that sacred remains were traded alongside ordinary items.³³ Moreover, many relics were stolen during the fifth and sixth centuries due to the arrivals of the German populations.³⁴

25 Lafferty, 'Ad sanctitatem mortuorum', p. 255.

26 Gregory of Tours, *Liber in gloria martyrum*, 61 (p. 80) and 71 (pp. 85–86); Gregory of Tours, *Liber de virtutibus sancti Iuliani*, 20 (p. 123); on these examples see also Lafferty, 'Ad sanctitatem mortuorum', pp. 266–268.

27 On the juridical aspects of relics see: Boiron, 'Définition et statut juridique'.

28 Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 21.

29 'Alii [sc. monks] membra martyrum, si tamen martyrum, venditant' ('Some [monks] sell the relics of martyrs, if indeed they are martyrs'), Augustine, *De opere monachorum*, 28 (col. 575).

30 On Deusdona, see Guiraud, 'Le commerce de reliques', p. 81; Geary, *Furta sacra*, pp. 45–49; Geary, *Living with the Dead*, pp. 212–213.

31 On Felix see: Geary, *Furta sacra*, pp. 48–49.

32 On Electus, who was active in England, see Geary, *Furta sacra*, pp. 49–50.

33 Geary, *Furta sacra*, p. 45.

34 Aigrain, *L'hagiographie*, pp. 188–189.

During the Early Middle Ages, some attempts to prevent the non-authorised translation of relics occurred,³⁵ including the Synod of Mainz's (813) decision – also mentioned in canon 62 of the fourth Council of the Lateran (1215),³⁶ a fact that emphasises how this problem was regarded as significant even in later centuries – that no holy bodies were to be moved from one location to another, or that this was permitted only with conciliar, episcopal or synodal consent.³⁷ At the same time, however, various resolutions made during the second Council of Nicaea (787), which were approved not only in the Synod of Mainz but also in Aachen in 801, actually contributed to the diffusion of relics. One such decision was that altars were required to house sacred relics.³⁸

In the dispositions of the Synod of Tours (1282), the fourth canon established that priests who stole relics or other liturgical objects could be excommunicated.³⁹ In 1140, near the end of the period under consideration, the Assizes of Ariano, the first set of norms emanated by Roger II (1095–1154) for the Norman *Regnum* of southern Italy, prohibited the practice of commerce in relics.⁴⁰ The fifth assize included in the version of the text contained in the Latin Vatican Codex 8782 specifically addresses the sale of relics ('De sanctarum reliquiarum venditione'),⁴¹ arguing that it was forbidden to purchase or sell martyrs' or saints' remains and stating that, in the event

35 *Capitula de causis cum episcopis et abbatibus tractandis*, 7 (p. 163).

36 Galdi, 'Strategie politiche e furta sacra'; Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 32; Claverie, 'Les acteurs du commerce des reliques', p. 590.

37 'Ne corpora sanctorum transferantur de loco ad locum. Deinceps vero corpora sanctorum de loco ad locum nullus transferre praesumat sine consilio principis vel episcoporum sanctaeque synodi licentia' ('Let the bodies of the saints not be moved from place to place. Henceforth, no one should presume to transfer the bodies of the saints from place to place without having consulted the prince or the bishops and with the permission of the holy synod'), *Concilium Moguntinense a. 831*, 51 (p. 272); see also Geary, *Furta sacra*, p. 40; Canetti, 'Culti, credenze, santità', p. 99. On these questions, see Veronese, 'Tra rispetto delle leggi e furti notturni', § 4 (consulted online).

38 Vocino, 'L'Agiografia dell'Italia centrale', p. 101.

39 'Illos qui se esse dixerint sacerdotes qui ecclesiarum calices, libros, aut cruces, reliquias, vel alia ecclesiastica ornamenta, furtive subtraxerint: statuimus praesentis auctoritate Concilii excommunicationis sententiae subiicere' ('We decree by the authority of the present Council that those who claim to be priests and have secretly stolen chalices, books, crosses, relics, or other ecclesiastical ornaments from churches shall be subject to the sentence of excommunication'), *Sacrosancta concilia*, XIV, p. 765.

40 Galdi, 'Strategie politiche e furta sacra'.

41 Zecchino (ed.), *Le assise di Ariano*, p. 28; according to the Codex Cassinese 468, the fourth assize only emphasises that it is forbidden to buy or sell relics: 'Sancimus nemini licere sanctorum reliquias vendere vel comparare' ('We decree that it is not lawful for anyone to sell or buy relics'), Zecchino (ed.), *Le assise di Ariano*, p. 72.

this had already occurred, the relics should be placed in an appropriate location ('ubi decuerit')⁴² based on the counsel of the priests.

The phenomenon of theft of relics can be better understood with the aid of cultural anthropology. The main beliefs to be considered are: (i) the relics are thought to embody the power of the saints; (ii) their dead bodies are regarded as living bodies; (iii) their churches and tombs are seen as their dwellings; (iv) the translation (and theft) of relics is viewed as a rite of passage; (v) saints are considered to be the fathers and the protectors of their cities; and (vi) relics are perceived as gifts, and devotion to the saints as an exchange between them and their devotees.

The first aspect to be considered is the belief in the real presence of the saints inside their remains, even if the body is not composed of all the bones or has lost its skin, or just the head has been preserved. In other words, there is a specific idea that the saints, after their death, could continue to stay among the people through their spiritual presence, interceding with God to grant miracles, and help them. In his famous work on the rise of the cult of saints, Peter Brown demonstrated how these 'friends of God' endured in their tombs, showing their presence (*praesentia*) and power (*potentia*).⁴³ The belief in the presence of the 'spirit' of the dead near their tombs was also attested in Rome.⁴⁴ These concepts are the basis of the intense devotion of people to saints and their relics through the centuries. As mentioned, it can be stressed that it is not important how many parts of the body had been preserved after their death. The fact that the hagiographers often used the word *corpus* (i.e., 'body') or *ossa* (i.e., bones) to define the whole body or just parts or fragments of it means that, irrespective of the quantity of body preserved, the saints could be considered present in all their majesty and virtue.⁴⁵ According to this perspective, the remains of saints could be regarded as living bodies.⁴⁶ Thomas Head, writing about St Benedict, emphasised that he

42 Zecchino (ed.), *Le assise di Ariano*, p. 28.

43 Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, pp. 85–105 and 106–127. On the cult of saints, see also Abou-El-Haj, *The Medieval Cult of Saints*.

44 Delehaye, *Les origines du culte des martyrs*, p. 29.

45 Delehaye, *Les origines du culte des martyrs*, pp. 62–63; Gagov, 'Usò e significato del termine "corpus"'; Canetti, 'Culti, credenze santità', p. 100. On the fragmentation of relics in Late Antiquity, see Wiśniewski, *The Beginnings of the Cult of Relics*, pp. 159–179.

46 Geary underlines: 'The relics were the saint; they had more than a mystical or spiritual connection with the eternity of God and his heavenly court' (Geary, *Furta sacra*, p. 34); 'relics were actually the saints themselves, continuing to live among men' (Geary, *Furta sacra*, p. 124); on the role and function of relics, see Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages*; Geary, *Living with the Dead*, p. 202; Rapp, 'Saints and holy man', pp. 557–560.

continued to live after the death of his physical body and his relics were intimately related to that continued existence. At the same time, the saint did not exist only through his relics. He was free to wander his territory and the world at large, aiding his servants and rebuking his enemies.⁴⁷

Starting from these considerations, it is possible to introduce another concept that is crucial for our analysis. If the relics are to be viewed as the expression of living bodies, the saints – like living people – are not simply enshrined inside crypts or churches, but actually live in these places, which could be considered their houses. According to Edina Bozóky, it is possible to define the areas in which the remains of saints are kept as if they were their own homes. About the modalities through which saints could be transferred to another church that became their new dwelling, the French scholar wrote:

Introduced as a living being in the church, manifesting their presence in the church but also outside it, the saint is imagined, at the next stage, as dwelling in their church as in their house, having their occupations, habits, outings and even their worries.⁴⁸

Pilgrims who approached saints went to their tombs to visit them, as if they were going to see them in their homes. Moreover, the space of the church, where miracles were performed, was inhabited by the saints and required respect and reverence, and if these were lacking, the penalty was the occurrence of miracles of punishment.⁴⁹ The concept of the house of saints emerges clearly in many hagiographic tales and accounts of thefts, especially when the thieves go to the church and ask the saints for their authorisation to be translated.

Another important aspect that could be connected to this is the sacralisation of spaces. From the very beginning of the cult of saints, relics were able to influence the space around them. As already mentioned in relation to the cloths or objects that had come into contact with the holy bodies, some of their *virtus* could be transmitted to the spaces in which they were

47 Head, *Hagiography and the Cult of Saints*, p. 143

48 My own translation. 'Introduit comme un être vivant dans l'église, manifestant sa présence dans l'église mais aussi hors d'elle, le saint est imaginé, à l'étape suivante, comme demeurant dans son église comme dans sa maison, ayant ses occupations, habitudes, sorties et même ses soucis' (Bozóky, *Le Moyen Âge miraculeux*, p. 22).

49 On the punishment miracles, see Sigal, 'Un aspect du culte des saints'; Bozóky, 'Les miracles de châtement'; Klaniczay 'Miracoli di punizione e "maleficia"'. For comparison, see the 'negative' miracles sometimes portrayed on the tombs of Greek heroes (Brelich, *Gli eroi greci*, p. 229).

enshrined.⁵⁰ Based on this belief, the crypts were full of virtue, and even the fuel in the lamps burning above the tombs could be used as a vehicle for miracles.⁵¹ It is very common in hagiographies, in fact, to find miraculous healings that happened thanks to the olive oil used to feed them.⁵²

As a consequence of this specific perspective, it is possible to see the theft of relics not only as the transferring of inanimate objects but also as the kidnapping of a living person, the saint, which means that the stealing of holy remains emerges in the texts as the moving of saints from one house to another. This idea is based on considerable evidence from *topoi* included in the texts, such as the prayers at the tomb, the visions that happened before the transfer in which saints foretold their departures, the helping of the saints in their own translation, and so on.

Another crucial concept already proposed by Patrick Geary compares the translation of relics to rites of passage made by the thieves, whose subjects are the saints themselves. This concept was first used by the ethnographer Arnold Van Gennep (1873–1957) to describe the rites that characterised the passages from one phase of life to another; for instance, from youth to adulthood, from bachelor or spinsterhood to marriage, from the latter to widowhood, etc.⁵³ The change of house is a crucial moment in the cult of saints, underlined by the transfer to another city or monastery. Two conditions must be satisfied to make the rite possible: the saints' agreement, and the thieves' devotion. Moreover, Geary pointed out three different aspects of the saintly rite of passage: concrete, constituted by the movement from one place of devotion to another; symbolic, representing the transition from a bad condition of worship (i.e., a forgotten cult, the risk of destruction of relics, an abandoned tomb) to a better one; and geographical, with the passage from a marginal or liminal place and condition to a central one, and their proclamation as patron saints.⁵⁴

The result of the transfer of relics is their arrival in another place. This moment is crucial from an anthropological perspective because it represents at the same time a significant change both for the community deprived of

50 Orselli, 'Lo spazio dei santi'.

51 On medieval miracles, see also Sigal, *L'homme et le miracle dans la France médiévale*; Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind*; Robinson, de Beer and Harnden (eds), *Matter of faith*; although more focused on the late medieval centuries, see: Katajala-Peltomaa and Kuuliala, McCleery (eds), *A Companion to Medieval Miracle Collections*.

52 Canetti, "Olea sanctorum".

53 Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*; on this topic see also Bianchi, *Transition rites*; Owen Hughes, 'Riti di passaggio nell'Occidente medievale'.

54 Geary, *Furta sacra*, pp. 127–128.

their remains, and for that which acquires a new patron saint. The topic of patronage (*patrocinium*) is important in the analysis of *furta sacra* because, in all cases, the theft is the act that establishes a new patron/father (*pater*) for the village, city or monastery. Evidence of this is included in the last part of the tales, when the saints arrived at the city after a procession and had to be introduced to it. This moment was full of prayers, rites and celebrations to 'convince' them to take possession of their new house. After their approval, the remains could be enshrined in the church dedicated to them.⁵⁵ It is important to note that, from a lexical perspective, relics recognised for their specific protective value were defined *patrocinia*.⁵⁶

The phenomenon of theft of relics is deeply connected to the idea of gift – *pignus*, a term widely used as synonym for relic⁵⁷ – which has been very diffuse in all cultures in past and present times. It was at the base of the relations between devotees and saints: offering the latter gifts (wax candles, jewels, animals, food, artistic artefacts, etc.), people expected to receive in return what had been requested, such as healing, health, prosperity, good fortune, protection. Books of miracles of all epochs are full of these requests, based on a clear interchange (i.e., a 'contract' between two parties) negotiated through prayer. From this perspective, the arrival of a new patron saint and supernatural advocate would allow people to obtain favours and protection in exchange for honourable devotion and worship.⁵⁸

All these perspectives must be considered because they are part of the mentality of both hagiographers and devotees: saints were not merely objects to be moved from one place to another but 'living friends' to beg and pray to and take care of.

Besides these anthropological aspects strongly related to popular cult and devotion, there were also some pragmatic elements. The cult of saints was an essential part of medieval culture. The most important shrines, which often contained very famous relics such as holy bodies and remains linked to Our Lady or the Christ, were important pilgrimage destinations, with thousands of people visiting them to obtain physical, mental or spiritual healing. This significant quantity of people could represent a substantial source of income for religious sites and villages in general, both in terms

55 On this aspect, see Orselli, 'La città altomedievale e il suo santo patrono'; see also Geary, *Furta sacra*, pp. 127–128; Wiśniewski, *The Beginnings of the Cult of Relics*, pp. 48–69.

56 Gagov, 'Il culto delle reliquie nell'antichità', 485–498.

57 Gagov, 'Il culto delle reliquie nell'antichità', 498–501.

58 On gifts and their relationship with relics, see Mauss, *Essai sur le don*; Michalowski, 'Le don d'amitié dans la société carolingienne'; Canetti, "'Pignora salutis'"; Canetti, 'Christian Gift and Gift Exchange'.

of the many offerings made by the pilgrims (material ex-votos or money) but also their necessity to lodge and eat in these places. For this reason, possessing precious relics – the primary way to measure the importance of relics was their capacity to perform miracles – could be crucial for a good economy and the wealth of the whole village and its religious communities. Since many churches had no famous relics, sometimes they were stolen – or said to be stolen – from another place, and the subsequent elaboration of a hagiographic legend would not only prove the authenticity of the translated relics but also establish the ‘history’ of their arrival. For many churches, for instance, being on the main roads that from the last centuries of the Early Middle Ages led to the tomb of St James the apostle in the Iberian shrine of Santiago de Compostela, could represent a significant opportunity to improve their appeal as places of pilgrimage and consequently their earnings. This is the reason why, for example, in the ninth century the body of St Faith of Agen, in France, a late antique martyr who died during the persecution of Diocletian, was brought from the tomb where she rested to Conques, a small village in the south of the country.⁵⁹ This translation allowed the village to become one of the main pilgrimage sites on the southern roads to Compostela. Many miracles, narrated in the famous *Liber miraculorum sancte Fidis* by Bernard of Angers happened from that moment, and above all after the year 1000.⁶⁰ Frequently, following the narrative of a theft and the relocation of relics to a new city, texts feature a compilation of miracles. These accounts serve as evidence of the growing number of prodigies and, consequently, pilgrims flocking to the saint’s tomb to make offerings. These offerings often included candles or other items, either to seek a particular grace or to express gratitude for one received. This influx of pilgrims and their offerings contributed to the stimulation of the local economy.

The theft of relics was also linked to other motivations. Albeit the ownership of holy bodies could be a source of financial gain, it is necessary to underline the spiritual value of acquiring and collecting relics. As will become more evident during the reading of the book, and above all the first chapters, the people who stole relics were moved not only by the idea of their importance and prestige but also – and above all – by devotion. The acquisition of holy remains was perceived as needing to be authorised by the saints themselves: before the actual theft, the thieves prayed in front of the saints for their approval of the transfer. This aspect, which is part

59 On this translation see: Geary, *Furta sacra*, pp. 138–141.

60 Bernard of Angers, *Liber miraculorum sancte Fidis*.

of a *topos* used by hagiographers to show the thieves' piety, also embraces specific beliefs on the saints and their will.

It should be no surprise to find the presence of multiple perspectives underlying the theft of relics, including the desire to have a new patron saint, to improve the economic conditions of a church, city or monastery, to restore ancient patronage – as happened in the cases of St Januarius in Benevento and St Agatha in Catania – or to respond to their request for translation, as illustrated by many tales.

Relics were also used in public and military life, for example, to consecrate altars. In the Carolingian period, for instance, it was customary to exhume holy bodies in order to take relics for the consecration of altars, as requested by the *Item placuit* canon of the fifth Synod of Carthage in 401. The inclusion of relics in altars can be dated back to early Christianity and the age of the catacombs, when the tombs of martyrs were used to celebrate the holy Eucharist, or when an altar might be erected adjacent to their remains.⁶¹ From the last centuries of Late Antiquity, holy bodies started to be relocated below or inside altars, as in the case of the relics of Sts Nabor and Felix, which had been transferred by Ambrose of Milan (ca. 339–397). On the basis of this approach, altars that did not contain relics during the Carolingian period could be dismantled.⁶²

Relics were also used for the taking of oaths, with the same function as the gospels. The Merovingian kings used to swear on St Martin's cape and Charlemagne made this practice mandatory, adding that all pledges had to take place in a church or over a relic. The emperor's throne in Aachen included the remains of saints. It is worth remembering, too, the formula of the oath of Charles the Bald in 853 and Louis the Second in 860: 'May God and the saint whose relics lie here judge me.'⁶³ Holy remains were often used in sieges and military operations, as in the translation of those of St Mercurius, which, before being taken by Arechis II (duke of Benevento from 758 to 774, and then prince until 787), arrived in Italy with the Byzantine Emperor Constans II (630–668), who wanted protection for himself and his armies during sieges.⁶⁴ Another instance concerns the finger bone of the Persian martyr Sergius, enshrined in Bordeaux, which was believed to

61 Michaud, 'Cultes des reliques et épigraphie', p. 199.

62 Lebole and Di Gangi, 'La tanatometamòrfosi in età medievale', p. 120.

63 Geary, *Furta sacra*, p. 38; see also Canetti, 'Culti, credenze, santità', p. 104. On the relationship between relics and power in the Early Middle Ages, see Smith, 'Rulers and Relics c.750–c.950'.

64 Comparable cases of the use of the relics of Greek heroes are the bones of Orestes, which the Spartans took from the city of Tegea in order to conquer it, and the Athenians, who stole the bones of Rhesus so as to seize Amphipolis (Brellich, *Gli eroi greci*, p. 90).

have been used by an eastern king to help him win battles.⁶⁵ Sometimes relics were included in the hilts of swords or put beside the walls of cities to protect them from enemy assaults;⁶⁶ on some occasions, those which were enshrined in churches were carried out in procession to prevent or stop famines and natural catastrophes,⁶⁷ or used along boundaries to sacralise territories or reaffirm the property of saints and their monasteries. An Italian example of this practice is related to the relics of St Columbanus, on the occasion of the dispute between the coenobium of Bobbio and the bishops of Piacenza for the control of the properties of the latter, which at that time were directly under the authority of the papacy.⁶⁸

As already mentioned, the *topoi* included in hagiographic legends were perceived by many people as something that could happen. Receiving the vision of a saint asking for something was considered a possibility, just as the theft of relics could be the way through which God's will would transfer the remains of one of His saints from one place to another. The idea that God cared for the bodies of His saints, permitting their translation or preventing their destruction, sometimes emerges in hagiographic tales such as the *Passio sancti Hypolitii*, in which the hagiographer emphasises that God guarded the bones of His saints.⁶⁹

1.2. A historiography of *furta sacra*: some remarks

Although scholarly interest in the phenomenon of *furta sacra* began to emerge only in the late nineteenth century, the topic had already been recorded and discussed much earlier.

The period of the Protestant Reformation was significant for the reconsideration of relics, which were perceived as closely associated with the veneration of saints and what Protestant reformers saw as the idolatry practised by the Catholic Church. For example, in his work *Traitté des Reliques* ('Treatise on Relics'), John Calvin (1509–1564) not only presented arguments against the cult of relics based on biblical principles but also provided a catalogue of relics purported to belong to Jesus, Mary and various saints and

65 Salisbury, *The Blood of Martyrs*, p. 41; Gregory of Tours, *Historia Francorum*, VII.31 (pp. 350–351).

66 Canetti, 'Culti, credenze, santità', p. 104.

67 Klaniczay, 'Using Saints', pp. 217–220. On the processions of relics, see Lucherini (ed.), *Reliquie in processione*.

68 *Miracula sancti Columbani*.

69 'Sed Deus, qui custodit ossa Sanctorum suorum, ...', *Passio sancti Hypolitii*, 4 (p. 143).

angels, denying their authenticity.⁷⁰ The treatise begins with a reference to Augustine's famous statement about monks buying and selling relics. While there is no explicit and systematic discussion of theft in Calvin's treatise, it undoubtedly influenced later historiography by laying the groundwork for a critical examination of relics and their movements throughout history, particularly during the Middle Ages. His observations about the proliferation of relics all supposedly belonging to the same saint, or the numerous fragments of the cross – enough to assemble multiple crosses – received a great impulse from this work. In contrast, the theologian and Vicar of the Servants of Mary, Filippo Ferrari (1551–1626), offers a different perspective in his *Catalogus sanctorum Italiae* ('Catalogue of Italian Saints') published in 1613. He mentions the phenomenon of relic theft to explain why the body of the same saint might be referenced in different locations.⁷¹ Ferrari suggests that an unrecognised translation or theft by a community meant that the memory of the saint remained alive even in the place where the relics had been stolen, or that multiple places possessed only parts of the same body. In doing so, he defends the cult of relics against Protestant accusations of forgery and reproduction of the same body in different places.

The third volume of the treatise *Réflexions sur les règles et l'usage de la critique* ('Reflections on the Rules and the Use of Criticism') by the Discalced Carmelite historian and theologian Honoré de Sainte-Marie (1651–1729), whose secular name was Blaise Vauxelles, was published in 1720, a portion of which is dedicated to relics.⁷² Unlike Calvin's approach, Sainte-Marie upholds the authenticity of most of them, commenting on the issue of false relics, their sale and theft.⁷³ He alludes to cases where theft occurred for the purpose of selling remains, as well as others where it was deemed necessary to transfer them out of piety, necessity or obligation ('lorsque la pitié ou la nécessité ont obligé de le faire').⁷⁴ Examples cited included St Mark, St Vincent in the diocese of Tours and St Benedict. The author notes that the tombs of saints were guarded to prevent such acts, particularly by unscrupulous individuals. However, Sainte-Marie's position was one of justification, as he argued that relics were still worshipped elsewhere after being stolen, even if the community that had been robbed believed it still possessed them, as in the case of Alexandria and the body of St Mark.

70 Calvin, *Traité des Reliques*.

71 Ferrari, *Catalogus sanctorum Italiae*, chapter 'Quomodo accipiendum sit Corpora Sanctorum in diversis locis reperiri'.

72 de Sainte-Marie, *Réflexions sur les règles et sur l'usage de la critique*, pp. 382–451.

73 de Sainte-Marie, *Réflexions sur les règles et sur l'usage de la critique*, pp. 387–390.

74 de Sainte-Marie, *Réflexions sur les règles et sur l'usage de la critique*, p. 388.

This treatment of theft of relics is intertwined with the broader issue of their authenticity, which was questioned not only by Protestants but also by Enlightenment thinkers. Sainte-Marie's approach can be defined as historical-critical yet apologetic in nature.

Apostolic protonotary and archaeologist Marcantonio Boldetti (1663–1749) was the author of an extensive three-volume treatise on the catacombs of Rome, titled *Osservazioni sopra i cimiterj de' santi martiri* ('Observations on the Cemeteries of Holy Martyrs'), published in 1720. In his detailed treatment of sacred bodies, he devotes a chapter to theft, adopting a mainly legal perspective and condemning the practice as impious and sacrilegious, even if carried out for devotional purposes.⁷⁵ Similarly, in his view it was not acceptable to regain possession of one's own relics through theft or violence. This position, which mainly concerns his contemporaries, continued with a reflection on historical clandestine translations, which are instead justified on the grounds that they had been requested by God or by the saints themselves in a vision. Among the few examples, considerable space is given to those of Sts Marcellinus and Peter. The legitimacy of theft is also guaranteed in the case of theft from places invaded or dominated by 'infidels', as in the example of St Mark.

A notable example is found in the writings of Prospero Lambertini, Pope Benedict XIV (1740–1758), who mentions several cases of theft in the fourth book of *De servorum Dei beatificatione et beatorum canonizatione* ('On the Beatification of the Servants of God and the Canonization of the Blessed'), first published between 1734 and 1738. In the section dedicated to the translation of relics, specifically in the twenty-fifth chapter addressing the identity of holy bodies and relics, he discusses the case of St John of Matha (1154–1213), the founder of the Order of the Holy Trinity.⁷⁶ While reflecting on the authenticity of his relics, Benedict XIV recounts numerous instances of clandestine movements of relics or holy bodies, explicitly using the term *furtum*. He mentions thirteen examples, including St Ilarion, the Roman abbot St Romanus, the abbot St Bertulf, St Nicholas, St Mark, St Athanasius, St Rochus, the foreskin of Christ, an archbishop of Cagliari, St Louis of Toulouse, the arm of St Luke, and Sts Benedict and Scholastica.⁷⁷ These examples span the whole of Christianity and are not limited to the Italian peninsula. Of particular interest to the author

75 Boldetti, *Osservazioni sopra i cimiterj de' santi martiri*, 2–3, pp. 740–745. On Boldetti, see Parise, 'Boldetti, Marcantonio'.

76 On this case, see Harris, *The Stolen Bones of St. John of Matha*.

77 Lambertini, *De servorum Dei beatificatione*, IV.2, pp. 239–245.

is the authentication of holy bodies, which he asserts can be considered legitimate if their claims are supported by historical sources, local tradition or papal declarations.

If this was the approach until the eighteenth century, a more analytic interest in the phenomenon of *furta sacra* began in the nineteenth century, although some publications address the phenomenon by listing examples from hagiographic sources or expressing judgement about this practice.

The *Theological Dictionary*, compiled by the English independent clergyman and theologian Charles Buck (1771–1815) in 1802, includes a section on relics.⁷⁸ Influenced by his Reformed position, Buck condemns the veneration of relics and also mentions thefts, providing a few examples. This allows the author to condemn the Catholic Church and its endorsement of such practices, particularly during the medieval period. In contrast, in the *Dizionario di erudizione storico-ecclesiastica* ('Dictionary of Historical-Ecclesiastical Erudition') by Gaetano Moroni (1802–1883), published from 1840, a section in the fifty-seventh volume is dedicated to relics.⁷⁹ In this treatise, Moroni addresses the topic of thefts, providing numerous examples. He suggests that the phenomenon is characteristic of the devotion and desire to possess such relics, especially those brought from the Christian East. He also highlights the dimension of popular veneration and jubilation associated with their arrival, as well as the destructive acts sometimes carried out by Protestants.⁸⁰ Ultimately, the discussion returns to the legitimacy of the cult of relics.

In the *Dictionary of Christian Antiquities* edited by the linguist and lexicographer William Smith (1813–1893) and the archdeacon and professor of pastoral theology at King's College of London Samuel Cheetham (1827–1908), there is an entry on relics authored by William Edward Scudamore (1813–1881), a distinguished priest, historian and liturgist. The entry includes a section titled 'Acquisition of Relics', which examines the sale and theft of relics, primarily through a series of examples from ancient and late antique sources.⁸¹

In his *History of the Christian Church* published in 1893, the American theologian and historian George Park Fisher (1827–1909) devotes a little space to the cultural aspects of Christianity. In a chapter titled 'Some Aspects of Religion and Worship in the Middle Ages', he deals with devotions, miracles and apparitions, generally with a positivist approach. In this context, he

78 Buck, *A Theological Dictionary*, II, pp. 377–379.

79 Moroni, *Dizionario di erudizione storico-ecclesiastica*, 57, pp. 106–120.

80 Moroni, *Dizionario di erudizione storico-ecclesiastica*, 57, pp. 115–118.

81 Scudamore, 'Relics'.

briefly mentions the phenomenon of theft of relics, linking it to the wider issue of exaggerated devotion to saints and their remains.⁸²

A more balanced approach aimed at analytical investigation emerges in 1887 with the publication of an article by the French historian and archaeologist Edmond Frédéric Le Blant (1818–1897), titled *Le vol des reliques* ('The Theft of Relics')⁸³ and related to some thefts that occurred during the Middle Ages and the early modern period, in which he underlined the continuity of the phenomenon and the justificatory attitude of the hagiographers, since condemnation might arrive from God through miracles of punishment. In 1892 an article by Jean Guiraud (1866–1953), *Le commerce de reliques au commencement du IX^e siècle* ('The Trade of Relics at the Beginning of the Ninth Century'),⁸⁴ analysed, above all, the sale of relics in Rome, as in the account of the translation of Sts Marcellinus, Peter and Tiburtius composed by Einhard.

Pierre Saintyves (1870–1935), a bookseller and publisher specialising in folklore and religious studies, made an important contribution with his volume *En marge de la Légende dorée* ('On the Margins of the Golden Legend'), where he explored a variety of folkloric and hagiographic themes. In the chapter dedicated to relics, he draws parallels between their origin and the cult of heroes, adopting an accumulative approach derived from his interest as a folklorist.⁸⁵ Saintyves – whose real name was Émile Nourry – lists numerous cases from hagiography, including explicit thefts and instances of hidden relics, with many examples from the Frankish context. After presenting this extensive list, he concludes by cautioning against regarding accounts of theft as historically reliable, suggesting instead that they serve primarily to explain the presence of relics in local churches.⁸⁶ His approach can be characterised as historical-critical and positivist, albeit with limited openness to deeper cultural analysis. The actions of Deusdona and the translations carried out in secrecy, involving 'missions' to other monasteries, are discussed in another chapter, which emphasises the expeditionary aspect of acquiring the relics.⁸⁷

A further article that focuses on the connection between theft and the sale of relics is Hubert Silvestre's *Commerce et vol de reliques au Moyen Âge* ('Trade and Theft of Relics in the Middle Ages'), published in 1952,⁸⁸ in which

82 Park Fisher, *History of the Christian Church*, p. 230.

83 Le Blant, 'Le vol des reliques'.

84 Guiraud, 'Le commerce des reliques'.

85 Saintyves, *En marge de la Légende dorée*, pp. 449–460.

86 Saintyves, *En marge de la Légende dorée*, pp. 459–460.

87 Saintyves, *En marge de la Légende dorée*, pp. 460–493.

88 Silvestre, 'Commerce et vol de reliques'.

he points out the relation between different kinds of translations, focusing on the difficulties of the historical separation between these two actions and even coming to consider the *furta sacra* tales as merely a specific literary expedient to cover a sale, used to confirm the authenticity of the relics and/or deny the accusation of their being false. Some years later, in 1964, the Italian historian Eugenio Duprè Thesèider (1898–1975) published the article *La “Grande Rapina dei Corpi santi” dall’Italia al tempo di Ottone I* (“The “Great Robbery of Holy Bodies” from Italy at the Time of Otto I”),⁸⁹ in which he concentrated on thefts perpetrated under Otto I (962–973) and Bishop Theodor of Metz (d. 984), underlining the value of these texts for cultural history but, at the same time, often mixing different typologies of translations. Another essential contribution to the history of relics, translations and thefts was written by the French historian Nicole Herrmann-Mascard (1930–2014), *Les reliques des saints: Formation coutumière d’un droit* (“The Relics of Saints: Customary Formation of a Right”), which centres, in a specific section, on the *furta sacra* genre, with particular attention to the French context.⁹⁰ She, too, remarks on the possibility that a legend of theft could hide a sale of relics.

The most relevant work on our topic is that written by the American historian Patrick Geary, *Furta sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages*, first published in 1978 and then in a revised version in 1990. In his work, he traced the main features of the phenomenon, focusing on a corpus of legends related to the Central Middle Ages (ninth–eleventh centuries), analysed from the perspective of cultural history. He concentrated his attention on the thefts that occurred in monastic and urban contexts, taking into consideration for the Italian peninsula those of St Mark, St Nicholas and St Appianus. Thanks to his book, the topic of *furta sacra* acquired an important place in the historiography of religious history. Some years after that, François Dolbeau published the article *Un vol de reliques dans le diocèse de Reims au milieu du XI^e siècle* (“Theft of Relics in the Diocese of Reims in the Mid-Eleventh Century”),⁹¹ in which he focused on the theft of the relics of St Oriculus.

The past few decades have seen the publication of further research on this topic. The Italian philologist Paolo Chiesa analysed some accounts of robberies carried out in Venice in a chapter that appeared in 1998 titled *Santità d’importazione a Venezia tra reliquie e racconti* (“Imported Holiness in Venice between Relics and Stories”),⁹² centring on the literary aspects of the tales and

89 Duprè Thesèider, ‘La “Grande Rapina dei Corpi santi”’.

90 Herrmann-Mascard, *Les reliques des saints*, pp. 364–402.

91 Dolbeau, ‘Un vol de reliques’.

92 Chiesa, ‘Santità d’importazione a Venezia’.

on what he considered to be structural elements of these kinds of text. Recently, Luigi Canetti, in his article *Mnemostoria e archeologia rituale delle traslazioni di reliquie tra Antichità e Medioevo* ('Mnemohistory and Ritual Archaeology of Relic Translations between Antiquity and the Middle Ages'),⁹³ focused on certain aspects of the thefts such as collective action, the motive for the robbery (often linked to a moment of crisis), the thieves' authority, the performative dimension of the theft and the procession (*occurrus*), and the arrival at the town (*adventus*). The Italian historian also related the phenomenon of *furta sacra* with the ancient practice of *evocatio deorum*, in which Roman – or also Hittite – conquerors 'invoked' the gods of the conquered towns.⁹⁴

Other interesting contributions came from Pierre-Vincent Claverie, author of *Les acteurs du commerce des reliques à la fin des croisades* ('The Players in the Relic Trade at the End of the Crusades'),⁹⁵ who concentrated on the sale and theft of relics during the Crusades, and Enrico Morini, *Il levante della santità: I percorsi delle reliquie dall'Oriente all'Italia* ('The Levant of Sanctity: The Paths of Relics from the East to Italy'),⁹⁶ who described the movements of holy remains between Eastern and Western Europe. Among the latest works on the theft of relics is our *Translatio sanctitatis: I furti di reliquie nell'Italia medievale* ('Thefts of Relics in Medieval Italy'),⁹⁷ published in 2019, which focuses on the thefts that occurred on the Italian peninsula from the Early Middle Ages to the thirteenth century, with specific attention to their literary and historical aspects.

More recently, Francesco Veronese has focused on Carolingian translations of relics, taking the *furta sacra* genre into account.⁹⁸ His interest lies in the analysis of hagiographic texts, with a particular emphasis on their composition and relationship with political power. Einhard's *translatio* has been analysed in order to consider the connection between the development of a legend about stolen relics and political authority. A similar perspective has been followed by Giulia Zornetta, who focuses on the thefts that occurred in the south of Italy, especially in the Duchy/Principality of Benevento, which she discusses in light of historical Lombard dynamics.⁹⁹

93 Canetti, 'Mnemostoria e archeologia rituale'.

94 On this aspect, see § 7.2.

95 Claverie, 'Les acteurs du commerce des reliques'.

96 Morini, 'Il levante della santità', pp. 915–922. He defined the acquisition of relics by theft 'percorso dell'appropriazione indebita' ('misappropriation pathway').

97 Papisidero, *Translatio sanctitatis*.

98 Veronese, 'Tra rispetto delle leggi e furti notturni'; Veronese, *Reliquie in movimento*.

99 Zornetta, *Italia meridionale*, pp. 185–197; Veronese, Zornetta, 'Holiness on the Move'; Zornetta, 'Alla ricerca del sacro?'

One of the latest works is a collection edited by Antón M. Pazos in 2020, including a section titled 'furta sacra'. The first contribution, authored by the French medievalist Edina Bozóky, probes and organises some of the issues raised by Geary.¹⁰⁰ Bozóky concentrates on the motivations behind the translations found in texts that aimed to justify theft. She discusses disputes over the possession of relics, worship of dubious honourability, and various methods of acquisition such as clandestine actions, the unauthorised removal of relics and the employment of violence. Finally, regarding legitimisation, she highlights the intervention of secular authority, the saint's or God's supernatural endorsement, and also measures for preventing and punishing theft. Throughout, she provides examples, primarily from the Frankish region. The contribution by the Italian medievalist Amalia Galdi centres on the theft of relics in southern Italy during the ninth to twelfth centuries.¹⁰¹ Her analysis of specific cases, also resulting from her prior works, predominantly emphasises the political intricacies and the contextual relevance of the texts. As well as scrutinising instances pertaining to the Duchy/Principality of Benevento, she examines the case of St Nicholas and the 'late' example of St Andrew of Amalfi.

This historiographical overview illustrates how the topic of relic theft has been approached over time. Initially, particularly in the early modern period, there was a tendency to express opinions on the validity and propriety of such acts, often condemning them as medieval behaviours of little interest or related to the topic of false relics. More systematic treatments, although often with apologetic or anti-Catholic undertones, emerged in later centuries, particularly in the nineteenth. Towards the end of that century, however, a different kind of attention began to emerge: one that did not simply judge relic theft but rather recognised it as a cultural phenomenon worthy of study for insights into the history of the medieval mentality.

1.3. The sources, the authors and the geography

The sources used in this study are, above all, hagiographies. The term 'hagiography' is used here to refer to a multifaceted body of sources pertaining to the saints, encompassing various types of documentation such as narratives of the saints' lives or martyrdoms, accounts of miracles and transfers of relics, and visual representations of the key episodes of their lives and afterlives.

100 Bozóky, 'The theft of relics in the Middle Ages'.

101 Galdi, 'Furta sacra in southern Italy'; see also Galdi, 'Principi, vescovi e santi'.

The word also encompasses the practices and beliefs that emerged and evolved around the cult of the saints over the centuries.¹⁰²

The tales analysed in the second chapter are *passiones*, which are texts composed to narrate the passions of martyrs. Those considered here are above all the so-called ‘epic passions’,¹⁰³ a useful definition from Hippolyte Delehaye that emphasises the fictitious nature of a large group of passions, particularly when compared to more ancient Greek ones. Important references to the late antique practice of stealing the relics of martyrs in order to bury them may be found in these narrations. We have considered certain Latin *passiones* written on the peninsula between the fourth and sixth centuries, as well as some later stories elaborated in the Early Middle Ages.¹⁰⁴

The tales most strictly related to *furta sacra* constitute a specific genre within the hagiographic tales, recounting the translation of relics from one place to another, with specific attention to the furtive dimension. The *translationes* – which is the name of the textual typology that deals with the transfer of relics – contain precise motivations for the translations:¹⁰⁵ sometimes they were the result of theft, but in other cases of a gift (*donum*),¹⁰⁶ a sale or a miraculous finding of relics (*inventio*).¹⁰⁷

The sale and purchase of relics is an especially significant factor in the examination of relic theft. According to many scholars, such as Silvestre, Herrmann-Mascard and Canetti, an account of theft might at times conceal a sale. Selling relics was a very diffuse phenomenon during the Middle Ages, and we have to suppose that many of the remains sold were not authentic. Based on this premise, the composition of a tale about their miraculous arrival in a

102 In this respect, the works of Sofia Boesch Gajano are very relevant: Boesch Gajano (ed.), *AgioGRAFIA altomedievale*; Boesch Gajano, *La santità*; Boesch Gajano, *Un'agiografia per la storia*. In addition to the works cited elsewhere in the volume, see also Leonardi, ‘I modelli dell’agiografia latina’; Philippart, ‘Hagiographes et hagiographie, hagiologues et hagiologie’; Lifshitz, ‘Beyond Positivism and Genre’; Barr and Zimbalist (eds), *Writing Holiness*. For an extensive and cross-cultural reading of the concept of hagiography, see Rondolino, ‘Some Foundational Considerations on Taxonomy’; Rondolino, ‘Introduction: Comparative Hagiology’.

103 Delehaye, *Les passions des martyrs*, p. 236.

104 On this subject, see also Lanzoni, *Genesi, svolgimento e tramonto delle leggende storiche*.

105 Caroli, *Le traslazioni reliquiali*.

106 Geary, *Living with the Dead*, pp. 208–210.

107 On the *translationes*, see Aigrain, *L’hagiographie*, pp. 186–192; Heinzelmann, *Translationsberichte und andere Quellen des Reliquienkultes*, pp. 34–101; Caroli, ‘Bringing Saints to Cities and Monasteries’; Caroli, ‘“Translationes” e culto delle reliquie in Italia’; Vocino, ‘Le traslazioni di reliquie in età carolingia’. On the *inventiones*, see Helvétius, ‘Les inventions de reliques’; Cronnier, *Les inventions de reliques*; Wiśniewski, *The Beginnings of the Cult of Relics*, pp. 101–121. This study would not have been possible without Martina Caroli’s valuable work: Caroli, *Le traslazioni reliquiali*. See also Caroli: ‘Culto e commercio delle reliquie a Ravenna nell’Alto medioevo’.

city, especially if they were said to have been taken directly from the sepulchre, could reassure the population about their authenticity. Nicole Herrmann-Mascard relates that the abbot of St Michael of Verdun on a pilgrimage to Rome in 1025 was invited to buy the relics of Pope Stephen and Deacon Nemesius. He replied that he knew many other people who had been tricked¹⁰⁸ and for this reason wanted first to see the intact tomb and the holy body contained in it.¹⁰⁹ Later, the abbot approached the custodian of a Christian cemetery for holy bodies, acquiring that of St Callistus and bringing it to Verdun. The episode illustrates the doubts that medieval people might harbour about acquiring relics and how the description of the translation directly from the saint's tomb could be a guarantee of authenticity to the public eye.

The theft/gift/sale tripartition has been proposed by Hubert Silvestre and, in our opinion, *inventio* could be considered the fourth modality for the acquisition of relics. In fact, as pointed out by Martina Caroli, '*inventio*, *elevatio*, and *translatio* can be considered as three forms of the same liturgical action: bringing the saint's relic from secret to public, from hidden to revealed, from darkness to light'.¹¹⁰ These are thus four different possibilities for explaining through legend how the remains of a saint may have arrived in the place where they were revered. The recourse to *inventio* increases significantly in the fourth century, when the actions of bishops who miraculously found relics of saints could be seen as an attempt to 'orient popular devotion towards more authentic cults than those it spontaneously adopted'.¹¹¹ Hagiographers might be considered some of the main actors in the elaboration of these texts, not because they fabricated them as fictional works, but because they could build the official legend, which was the result of many elements, such as oral traditions, hagiographic legends that had flourished over time, *topoi*, literary themes, and historical data. To select our corpus of sources, we had to delimit the boundaries of these different typologies of translations, identifying the hagiographic themes which were specific to the *furta sacra* genre. The following aspects have been considered as critical elements of this typology: the use of violence or force; secrecy during the opening of the tomb (which often happened at night); the presence of trickery in the thieves' behaviour; the locals' reaction; and the report by the hagiographers that the translation was perceived as something illicit.

108 'audivi multos nostrorum simili errore delusos' (quoted in Herrmann-Mascard, *Les reliques des saints*, p. 365).

109 'Nisi enim video sepulchrum hactenus intactum et cuius membra intus iaceant' (quoted in Herrmann-Mascard, *Les reliques des saints*, p. 365).

110 Caroli, 'Bringing Saints to Cities and Monasteries', p. 262.

111 Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 16.

One or more of these traits could be studied in relation to a specific lexicon employed by the hagiographer that often revealed, through the resort to specific expressions, the furtive aim of the characters.¹¹² The composition of a legend of translation had a clear ritualistic and memorial role, establishing the date of the arrival of the relics in the community, which subsequently often included that day among the city's main festivities, as well as the *dies natalis*, the day of the saint's death.¹¹³ The habit of remembering this special day dates back to the commemoration of martyrs' deaths by their families and Christian communities, which was later refined and recorded in the martyrologies of the first centuries of Christianity.¹¹⁴

From this perspective, the hagiographers, through writing new legends, play a crucial role in the elaboration of sanctity. According to Sofia Boesch Gajano, in fact, their activity was 'a conscious construction (or perpetuation and confirmation over time) of the historic memory of a reality'.¹¹⁵ Hagiographic tales are also considered myths by Jean-Claude Schmitt. In his opinion they contribute, together with apocryphal stories and folkloric legends, to amplifying the original cornerstone of Christianity.¹¹⁶

All the typologies of translations already mentioned may be considered different modalities for the elaboration of a story that can explain the arrival of the relics. More than one of them could be present in the same text; for example, the miraculous finding of relics (*inventiones*) soon after their being stolen, as in the case of St John of Spoleto, whose remains had been taken by the Abbess Gunderada;¹¹⁷ or instances in which the theft also occurred thanks to the payment of an amount of money to a bishop or custodian to facilitate the operation, without the inhabitants noticing, such as the bribing of the custodian of St Himerius' tomb by the bishop of Cremona, Liutprand;¹¹⁸ or even the donation of some relics of St Gregory I by Pope John XV to Bishop Gebhard of Constance in 989, eliciting a negative reaction from the locals, who were under the impression that their relics were being stolen.¹¹⁹ Instances of thefts strongly connected to the sale

112 See § 5.3.

113 Geary, *Furta sacra*, p. 13; Granier, 'Conflitti, compromessi e trasferimenti di reliquie'.

114 Delehaye, *Les origines du culte des martyrs*, pp. 34–35.

115 Boesch Gajano, 'L'agiografia', pp. 800–801; the translation is mine.

116 Schmitt, *Religione, folklore e società*, p. 50.

117 See § 4.3.

118 See § 4.2.

119 'Romani enim cognoscentes se tanto pignore privatos, se quasi orbatos gementes', 'the inhabitants of Rome, realizing that they had been deprived of such a great relic, lamented as though they had been bereaved', *Vita Gebhardi episcopi Costantiensis*, 53–54 (p. 587).

of relics are those attributable to Deusdona and Felix, two 'professional' merchants of relics; the former used to steal remains from the catacombs and then sell them to French monasteries.

Since this work aims to analyse the phenomenon's evolution through the centuries, the period taken into consideration goes from Late Antiquity (a. 300) to the Central Middle Ages (1150). Although the theft of relics is deeply related to the second part of this period – above all from the eighth to the eleventh century, with a very important phase during the Crusades, especially the Fourth (1204) – the first sees the birth of the interest in the bodies of saints and their care. We have decided to define this period as the 'archaeology of thefts of relics'. With this expression, which will be better analysed in the next chapter, we mean the age of martyrs and their burial, already characterised by the crucial elements that we can find in the *furta sacra* tales. In this initial phase the bodies of saints were recovered to assure them an honourable burial and a place for worship, while in the following centuries the need to transfer their relics – still perceived as complete and intact bodies – was connected to the desire to acquire them or sometimes to preserve them from destruction or oblivion. For the first part of this research we have considered, above all, the Passions (*passiones*),¹²⁰ a corpus of legends sometimes composed very soon after their deaths, and other times after centuries, which talk about the lives of martyrs, subsequently focusing on their martyrdom. In studying the phenomenon of the removal of relics, the most important section of these tales is constituted by the final part, when the martyrs are already dead, and the hagiographer narrates the attempts of friends and followers to take their bodies in order to prevent their being devoured by birds or other savage animals and guarantee them an appropriate burial.

The geographical area considered in this work is the Italian peninsula. Although this territory has a very complex history, above all from a political perspective due to the presence of many different dominations and political entities during the centuries, it has at the same time a certain cultural coherence, which is also reinforced by the natural boundaries of the Alps. In the past, too, the peninsula was characterised by a linguistic and cultural affinity even though it was not a distinct political unit. An important aspect that is key to clarify is that of the choice of the thefts examined. Since the theft of relics is, above all, a phenomenon related to rhetoric and cultural elaboration, we opted to consider only the legends elaborated within the geographical area of the peninsula. For this reason, thefts that were thought

120 Scorza Barcellona, 'Le origini', pp. 59–60.

to have occurred in Italy but whose legends were recorded beyond the Alps – such as that of St Benedict in Montecassino, that of St Helena, or Sts Marcellinus, Peter and Tiburtius in Rome – and that were therefore an expression of a different political and cultural context, have been mentioned only in passing. The idea is that one particular historical context gave rise to the sources, using *topoi* and hagiographical themes and including cultural elements expressing a specific area. In the selection process of the sources, generic references to the advent of relics in a specific place have not been considered, for example, just some lines included in annals (*annales*) or mentioned in hagiographic sources.

For the part related strictly to the *furta sacra* we are dealing with thirty-two stolen saints – including attempted thefts – and about thirty-three texts. The number of *passiones* considered – bearing in mind that this is not an exhaustive survey – is thirty-nine. Regarding the authorship, most of the *passiones* are anonymous, also because sometimes they were composed in Late Antiquity or the first part of the Early Middle Ages, between the fifth and ninth centuries. Regarding the *translationes*, although we have many texts without clear authorship, the writers' identity is a little better known in half of the cases. One can refer to the individual chapters and paragraphs to read more about the various authors, but here it is sufficient to say that they come primarily from ecclesiastical contexts, sometimes monasteries, and this information is derived indirectly from the good level of education that the texts reveal. Even if sometimes the hagiographies were requested by secular authorities, the composition of the legends had to relate to ecclesiastical expertise. In many cases, the hagiographers are creators of their texts; at other times they elaborate on previous traditions and legends, in some instances already set down in a more ancient text. The need to rewrite the legends of saints and the translation of their relics could be explained by the necessity to include new elements connected to an 'updating' of the cult, including episodes not previously present in the text. In this way, the hagiographers carried out an activity of elaboration and re-elaboration of tales and memories, an aspect that gave them a leading role in building and spreading the devotion to saints.¹²¹ In our corpus, a similar case is represented by the legend of the theft of Sts Primianus, Firmianus and Pardus, which is available in two different versions: the first composed by an anonymous author, and the second by a deacon who re-elaborated the original.

As already indicated, *furta sacra* have to be considered a specific hagiographic genre. Hagiographers, hence, had a clear awareness of writing

121 Boesch Gajano, 'L'agiografia'.

within a particular narrative field, because of the use of syntagms and expressions related to the lexical area of theft. Their capacity to elaborate a hagiographic legend about a supposed theft of relics could be placed at the service of specific 'factions'. In other words, in most cases the authors belonged to the group that had stolen the relics, and their aim was to compose a story that could justify the theft, often accusing the previous owner of not guaranteeing righteous worship to the saintly remains. On the contrary, there are just a few cases – St Trofimenia and St Juvenal – in which the hagiographers belonged to the community that had been robbed. This aspect allows us to understand better the dynamics of writing and elaboration of memory, delineated above all by the communities that had taken over the ownership of the holy bodies.

Although the legends are related to thefts of relics that happened from Late Antiquity to 1150, a considerable number were written many years or even centuries after the event. In the corpus, most texts were composed between the eleventh and twelfth – or at the latest the thirteenth – centuries. According to Heinzelmann, the majority of tales narrating the translation of relics were composed between the eighth and the tenth centuries, a period that was also highly significant in the case of the peninsular thefts.¹²² The Central Middle Ages and the later periods are those in which the composition of legends of theft was particularly prolific, perhaps because of the necessity to record the 'history' of saints in a period that was seeing the birth of the first *comuni* (i.e., the medieval town councils), but also to better clarify a civic identity around a specific patron. It is also possible that in some cases, the need to prove the ownership and authenticity of the relics enshrined in a church emerged later, inspiring the composition of a hagiographic tale.

Therefore, in many instances the hagiographers, writing many years after the event, had to elaborate on previous traditions or include legends and popular memories about the theft in their texts. Certain thefts were related to tales composed some years after the translation. This is the case, for example, of St Metrone (theft: 960; legend: 962); St John of Spoleto (theft: between 973 and 983; legend: ca. tenth century); St Isidore of Chios (theft: 1125; legend: some years later); and St Agatha (theft: 1126; legend: ca. 1131). Other sources were composed far longer after the date of the robbery; for example, St Mark (theft: 828; legend: at least ca. middle of ninth century); St Januarius (theft: 831; legend: ca. first half of ninth century); St Nicholas in Venice (theft: 1100; legend: ca. 1116); St Stephen protomartyr (theft: ca. 1110; legend: ca. twelfth century); and St John the Baptist (theft: 1098 or 1099; legend: end

122 Heinzelmann, *Translationsberichte und andere Quellen des Reliquienkultes*.

of thirteenth century). The fact that many legends were elaborated many years after the event occurred does not mean that the authors did not use previous traditions or that older versions of the legend did not exist.

It is possible to make some observations about the geography of the thefts (Maps 1 and 2). The first remark is that the whole of the peninsula is well represented in the analysis. There are some focal points in which the translation of relics – especially the tales connected to them – was particularly common over time: they are Venice, with the thefts of St Mark, St Nicholas, St Stephen, St Isidore of Chios and, after 1150, those of St John the Merciful and St Barbara; and Benevento, with the translations of Sts Festus and Desiderius, the twelve martyr saints, St Januarius, St Trofimena and St Bartholomew. A quarter of our corpus of medieval thefts is related to these political and cultural areas. Many other places, too, are involved in this phenomenon: in addition to Benevento, also Bari, Brindisi, Catania, Gallipoli, Guglionesi, Larino, Lavello, Lesina, Lucera, Mount Massico, Minori and Trani in the South; Anagni, Atina, Montefiascone, Narni, Rome, Perugia, Spoleto and Veroli, in the Centre; and besides Venice, also Arona, Comacchio, Cremona, Genoa, Lucca and Verona in the North. The thefts involved prominent places, both as concerned the communities that had been robbed and those that had stolen the relics.

As will be discussed in more detail later, the dynamic between urban centres and rural areas, or more specifically between major cities and smaller towns, presents a relevant aspect. Many instances involve urban centres of significant political importance, and cities such as Bari, Genoa and Venice exemplify this trend. Conversely, smaller urban areas are frequently linked to their surrounding suburbs, where the relocated relics are often discovered. Additionally, it is worth noting that the transfer of relics typically occurred within relatively confined regions of the peninsula, often originating from localities not far from their final destination. With exceptions such as transfers involving relics enshrined in places outside the peninsula (e.g., in the cases of the *furta* of Bari, Catania and Venice), most transfers occurred between neighbouring towns. Consequently, Benevento acquired relics from other areas within the duchy – later the principality – or from adjacent territories, while Spoleto obtained relics from its suburbs. Thus, aside from the motivation to acquire precious and esteemed relics from distant regions, it was commonplace to obtain bodies interred in the same geographic territory as the community perpetrating the theft. Lastly, although not examined in detail because it is mentioned in legends from beyond the Alps, Rome was one of the most important centres of sanctity for the acquisition of holy bodies, thanks to the innumerable relics preserved in the catacombs.

2. Thefts of Relics in Late Antiquity (300–600)

Abstract: The second chapter examines a series of saints' Passions to trace references to the removal and preservation of martyrs' bodies after their martyrdom. These episodes, due to their phenomenological and narrative connection with the *furta sacra* narratives, can be considered an 'archaeology of relic theft'. A gender analysis is proposed, focusing on the respective roles of women and men in the recovery of martyrs' bodies. Finally, the chapter analyses the translation of Sts Festus and Desiderius, one of the earliest texts that bridges the narratives of martyrdom and relic theft.

Keywords: passions of martyrs; *passiones*; martyrs; late antique hagiography; burial of saint's bodies

2.1. The 'archaeology' of thefts of relics

Although the theft of relics was primarily a phenomenon of the Early and Central Middle Ages, its origins can be traced back – from literary and typological perspectives – to Late Antiquity, and especially to the periods associated with the rise and consolidation of the cult of saints.¹ The most significant phase that we shall consider is the age of the martyrs, which mostly covers the third century and early fourth century, even if the first (local) 'persecution' was that of Nero (54–68).² During this period, there were three major persecutions, carried out by Decius (249–251) – who, rather than persecution, started a lengthy period of *supplicatio* to the

1 On the complex relationship between Christianity and the Empire, see Rinaldi, *Pagani e cristiani*.

2 Salisbury, *The Blood of Martyrs*, pp. 7–8; on the early persecutions see Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, pp. lvii–lxii.

gods – Valerian and Gallienus (257–260), and Diocletian and Maximian (303–306).³ It has been asserted that Julian ‘the Apostate’ (361–363) persecuted Christians; however, this is not supported by historical evidence, as he never persecuted them in the same manner as his predecessors had done. Although the number of Christians who died during this period was notably high, the number of those killed was lower than what hagiographic sources claim; this was due in part to the risk of *calumnia* posed by denouncing Christians to the authorities without having any proof to substantiate one’s accusations. In general, when a person was accused of being a Christian to the Roman authorities (*delatio*), the magistrates were required to conduct a formal trial (*cognitio*). This was typically the case in the fictional tales of martyrs, where the accusation of *nomen Christianum* was added to others, including *maiestas* (lese majesty),⁴ *magicae artes* (magic)⁵ and *sacrilegium* (sacrilege).⁶ At the time, as demonstrated by the famous answer of Trajan (98–117) to the governor of Bithynia, Pliny the Younger (61–113), anonymous reports could not be considered.⁷ The edicts promulgated by the emperors concerned specific rules to be obeyed by all the inhabitants of Rome or the Roman Empire, such as showing reverence to the gods and making sacrifices in their honour, as required by the edict of Decius in 250; an additional attack against the Christian hierarchy, who were persecuted, killed and had their properties and deeds confiscated, was included in the two edicts issued by Valerian in 257 and 258; and ultimately, the four edicts proclaimed by Diocletian in 303 and 304 established that all Christian churches had to be closed and all copies of the scriptures consigned to the Roman authorities.⁸

To commemorate their accomplishments and deeds and to develop a cult for their holy remains, Christian communities and local ‘ecclesiastical’ authorities began to elaborate specific texts, known as passions (*passiones*), in which the lives and especially the last few weeks or days of the martyrs were recounted, portraying them – as Hippolyte Delehaye points out – as

3 Salisbury, *The Blood of Martyrs*, pp. 13–18; about the persecutions, see Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, pp. 389–535; also useful are the reflections and summary by Grig, *Making Martyrs*, pp. 8–26.

4 From a certain perspective, this crime must be considered the most relevant or the one to which all others must be traced (Denzey, *The Bone Gatherers*, p. 161).

5 Benko, *Pagan Rome*, pp. 103–139; Salisbury, *The Blood of Martyrs*, pp. 36–38.

6 Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, p. 13.

7 Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, pp. 7–8.

8 Baslez, *Les persécutions dans l'Antiquité*, pp. 312–314; Rinaldi, *Pagani e cristiani*, pp. 165–172, 367–371; Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, pp. 8–10.

heroes.⁹ When compiled in Late Antiquity, these were among the earliest examples of hagiographic texts in the history of Christianity.¹⁰ Generally, scholars divided them into two distinct categories: the *acta*, which were believed to be the oldest and closest to the historical facts – although with the passage of time and the development of research, a significant number of those at first believed to be fairly historically accurate have turned out to be prevalently fictional – and the *passiones*, which were more literary, fictitious and elaborated decades or centuries after the martyrdom.¹¹ Simultaneously, we can notice a tendency to return to the common wording of ‘passiones’, with decreasing use of the other term.¹² Even though a few examples of the former, such as the *Acta Eupli*, will be taken into account, we will focus primarily on the latter. The analysis of these writings helps us to better comprehend the phenomenon of theft of relics. In fact, at the end of the narrative of the martyrs’ tortures – which could depend on the social conditions of the victim – there is a brief explanation of how their bodies were recovered. Even though these tortures frequently disfigured or altered the martyrs’ bodies, supernatural interventions such as the assistance of angels or miracles preserved their wholeness and beauty, allowing them to be buried and attain everlasting rest. This feature derives from Jewish literature and has also been influenced by ‘heroic’ tales from the Hellenistic period.¹³

In any case, these passions – which were generally written by anonymous clerics – are frequently fictional works containing inaccurate historical information, especially when composed after the end of the age of persecutions.¹⁴ The description of the martyrs’ tortures and pains and the stereotypical narrative structure constitute a specific hagiographic genre, whose prototype can be found in the martyrdom of seven brothers and their mother described in the biblical book of Maccabees.¹⁵ Their composition may be connected with the importance of pilgrimages to early churches or basilicas built on the tombs of martyrs, especially in Rome, starting

9 Delehaye, *Les passions des martyrs*, pp. 236–239; on the cult of saints during these centuries, see Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, pp. 13–21.

10 Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, pp. 18–19.

11 On this distinction, see Grig, *Making Martyrs*, p. 24; Rebillard, *The Early Martyr Narratives*, pp. 2–3.

12 Scorza Barcellona, ‘Agli inizi dell’agiografia occidentale’, pp. 32–33.

13 Baslez, *Les persécutions dans l’Antiquité*, pp. 159–162.

14 On this topic, see Ronchey, ‘Gli atti dei martiri tra politica e letteratura’, pp. 815–818; Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, pp. 24–39; Barnes, *Early Christian Hagiography*, p. 151–155.

15 2Macc 7; Baslez, *Les persécutions dans l’Antiquité*, pp. 152–157; Ziadé, *Les martyrs Maccabées*; Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, *Christian Memories of the Maccabean Martyrs*.

from the late fourth century,¹⁶ as well as with the correct presentation of Christian doctrine, the condemnation of 'pagan' practices, the promotion of values such as virginity, etc. They are important sources for illuminating the cultural attitude towards martyrs' bodies in Late Antiquity and the beginning of the Early Middle Ages.

A reading of the passions of martyrs reveals an emphasis on the significance of the body and its care. The hagiographer almost never fails to explain how the corpses were retrieved and given a proper burial.¹⁷ This could be explained by the need to memorialise the modalities through which the holy bodies were preserved from destruction at the time of their martyrdom, lending greater credibility to the authenticity of the relics enshrined in a church at the time of the hagiographers' writing. According to Eusebius,¹⁸ the Roman authorities often attempted to destroy martyrs' bodies so that the Christians could not worship them. Although Roman law stipulated that the bodies of criminals were to be given to those who requested them, they tried to stifle any religious expression by abandoning those of martyrs to the animals or denying them burial.¹⁹ Based on an ancient perspective, the lack of a proper sepulchre was a serious condition, causing the 'soul' of the deceased to be cursed to wander.²⁰ In this situation, as will also be the case in the next chapters with the analysis of the accounts of translations, we are dealing with extremely complex historical sources that allow us to reflect on the cultural outlook linked to the desire to honour the memory of martyrs.²¹

According to the tales, most martyrs were beheaded. Occasionally, the head was then placed separately from the body. After their execution, they were left at the site of their martyrdom, such as a forest, a location near a city, a river or the sea. At the conclusion of the text, the hagiographer typically provided a brief description of how the body was subsequently retrieved and buried. To accomplish this, he exploited hagiographical *topoi* such as the miraculous discovery of the relics (*inventio*), which was sometimes aided by the martyr's appearing in a pious person's dream.²² In other instances,

16 Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, pp. V and 3.

17 Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, pp. 29–34.

18 Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical history*, VIII.6.7 (pp. 266–269); see also the question of St Polycarp's body (IV.15.43, pp. 356–357); see also Lactantius, *Divinarum institutionum libri septem*, 3, V.11 (pp. 475–479).

19 Wortley, 'The Origins of Christian Veneration of Body-parts', p. 12.

20 Cronnier, *Les inventions de reliques*, p. 181.

21 On the complex topic of elaboration of memory and martyrdom see Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*.

22 See Cronnier, *Les inventions de reliques*, pp. 211–237.

the tales included a description of a furtive removal that was rapidly carried out during the night, when devout matrons, religious leaders or ordinary Christians went to take the bodies and wrap them in linen sheets. In the Roman context, the burial of the deceased generally occurred at night.²³ The idea of the recovery of martyrial relics also emerges in the sermons of Gaudentius of Brescia (d. 410), according to whom, when persecutors wanted to burn and throw the martyrs' ashes (*cineres*) into a river, some 'religious hands' were willing to steal (*furto*) or sell (*pretio*) them and so the remains were recovered.²⁴

The Christians interred the martyrs' corpses in specific locations, such as private fields or small farms, but only after they had been perfumed and anointed. The importance of rescuing the dead bodies was tied to the Christian concept – influenced by Jewish and Greek perspectives – of the resurrection of the flesh, which required that they be preserved in order to be resurrected at the end of time, when the second coming of Jesus was taking place.²⁵ This approach to the burial of the dead was also linked to the cult of holy bodies – and, later, to the relics retrieved from them or objects that had touched them.

There are many passions in which the theme of the stolen corpse is well presented. We will explore only a few cases, to demonstrate how they may be related to the medieval phenomenon that we label more appropriately as *furta sacra*. From a geographical perspective, the martyrdoms examined in this chapter occurred in numerous locations around the peninsula. Sts Agatha and Euplus, for instance, were both martyred in Catania, while other martyrs died in important cities in northern Italy, such as Milan, Aquileia and Turin, or central Italy, such as Spoleto. Rome and its suburbs, where hundreds of historical – or sometimes fictional – martyrs were executed, are the main places where martyrdoms happened and *passiones* were written.²⁶ The fact that only a small portion of the Latin *passiones* can be dated back to the end of the fourth century and the beginning of the fifth century confirms that they had to be regarded as 'epic' *passiones*.²⁷ These texts also attempt to imitate the *acta martyrum*'s distinctive literary

23 Delehay, *Les origines du culte des martyrs*, p. 27.

24 Gaudentius of Brescia, *Tractatus*, XVII.344 (col. 970); see also Castello, 'The Cult of Relics', pp. 33–34.

25 Salisbury, *The Blood of Martyrs*, pp. 20–32.

26 Delehay, *Les origines du culte des martyrs*, pp. 260–340. On the saints and martyrs of Rome and their medieval reception, see Vedriš, Klaniczay and Uhrin (eds), *The Saints of Rome*.

27 Lanéry, 'Hagiographie d'Italie', pp. 18–19.

structure, characterised by the purported transcript of the interrogation of the future martyr.²⁸

The *Acta Eupli* (BHL 2728), a tale probably written in Catania in the fourth century, is a Latin text that may contain evidence of original trial acts, especially in the shorter Greek version (BHG 629–630).²⁹ According to the passion, Euplus was martyred in Catania in 303 or 304 by the secretary (*secretarium*) of the governor Kalvisianos, probably not because he refused to offer sacrifices to the gods, but for his refusal to hand over the sacred texts.³⁰ His body was abandoned after having been tortured and beheaded, but the anonymous hagiographer emphasises that it was then stolen by Christians ('Sublatum est postea corpus eius a Christianis')³¹ and perfumed before being buried. This description is quite brief and contains few details, while the shorter Greek version does not include references to his sepulchre.³²

A further and more extensive example is that of St Agnes. According to the historical data, she was martyred around the middle of the third century at the age of twelve.³³ An epigram by Pope Damasus I (366–384) and some information in Ambrose's *De virginibus*, composed in 377, and other works are among the earliest references to her. The *Passio sanctae Agnetis* (BHL 156) is a Latin passion that was probably composed between 498 and 514, perhaps by a cleric of St Agnes' church.³⁴ Combining previous legends on the young saint, it narrates that, after being subjected to agonising tortures, she was beheaded in the *cavea* of the Stadium of Domitian, and her body was collected by her family ('Parentes [...] abstulerunt corpus eius'),³⁵ who exhibited no sign of sorrow. Then, her bones were deposited in a small estate (*praediolo*) owned by her family next to the Via Nomentana, where the *augusta* Costantina, daughter of Emperor Constantine I, created a large basilica between 337 and 351.³⁶ The

28 Lanéry, 'Hagiographie d'Italie', pp. 20–21.

29 See Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, p. xlv; Saxer, *Bible et hagiographie*, pp. 133–138; see also Scorza Barcellona, 'Agli inizi dell'agiografia occidentale', pp. 52–55; Rebillard, *The Early Martyr Narratives*, p. 25; CSLA (<http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk>) E00394, E00395. On the CSLA database and its purpose, see Ward-Perkins, 'The Relationship between Hagiography and Cult'.

30 On this saint, see Franchi de' Cavalieri, 'S. Euplo', pp. 28–46, 52–54; Amore, 'Euplio'; Lampadaridi, 'The Origins and Later Development of the First Italo-Greek Hagiographies', pp. 200–205.

31 *Acta Eupli*, 12–13 (p. 318).

32 Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, p. 312–313.

33 Josi and Aprile, 'Agnese'; see also Denzey, *The Bone Gatherers*, pp. 157–160.

34 Tomeo, 'Corpore quidem iuvenula sed animo cana'; Lanéry, 'Hagiographie d'Italie', pp. 192–203; Lanéry, 'La légende de sainte Agnès'; Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, pp. 348–353; CSLA E02475.

35 *Passio sanctae Agnetis*, 13 (p. 717).

36 Josi and Aprile, 'Agnese', col. 392 and 407.

detail of the little private farm could be a *topos*.³⁷ Agnes' tomb became a place of Christian worship, prompting the Roman authorities ('populum infidelium') to launch a punitive expedition, which forced everyone to flee the place.³⁸

The *passio* of St Agnes also mentions another stolen body, that of St Emerentiana who, according to the text, was present at Agnes' burial.³⁹ It is unclear whether she is a historical figure. In this case, too, Agnes' parents travelled during the night to recover Emerentiana's lifeless body ('abstulerunt corpus sanctae Virginis Emerentianae')⁴⁰ in order to bury it close to their daughter's.

The example of Pope St Cornelius is useful as well. According to the legend, he became bishop of Rome after Fabian and was one of the two protagonists of a schism that pitted him against Novatian, who was also elected pope and took a more uncompromising stance towards the *lapsi* (i.e., the 'fallen'), the religious people who had handed over the sacred books.⁴¹ The *Passio sancti Cornelii* (BHL 1958) was probably written in Rome around 450.⁴² On the basis of this text, during the night ('Eadem vero nocte')⁴³ after his martyrdom, which probably occurred under Decius, religious men and the pious woman Lucina went to retrieve his body and those of the other saints who had been martyred along with him in Civitavecchia.⁴⁴ The crypt of Pope Cornelius was located on the Via Appia near the cemetery of Callistus.⁴⁵ It is probable that the presence of Lucina in this text was influenced by the *Passio sancti Sebastiani*.

The *Passio sancti Eusebii* (BHL 2740), a text probably composed between 498 and 506,⁴⁶ described the way in which the body of St Eusebius, who was elected pope after Marcellus, was preserved after his martyrdom.⁴⁷ According to this tale, his body was taken by Gregory and Orosius, two priests who were part of his family.⁴⁸ Gregory's subsequent martyrdom is

37 Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, p. 360.

38 *Passio sanctae Agnetis*, 13 (p. 717); see also Lanéry, *La légende de sainte Agnès*, p. 21.

39 Cignitti and Arnoldi, 'Emerenziana'.

40 *Passio sanctae Agnetis*, 13 (p. 717).

41 Gordini and Aprile, 'Cornelio, papa'.

42 Lanéry, 'Hagiographie d'Italie', pp. 108–112; CSLA E02489.

43 *Passio sancti Cornelii*, 52 (p. 373).

44 'venerunt clerici et beata Lucina cum familia sua et rapuerunt corpora sanctorum martyrum', *Passio sancti Cornelii*, 52–53 (p. 373).

45 Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, pp. 195–197.

46 Lanéry, 'Hagiographie d'Italie', pp. 161–165; Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, pp. 297–302.

47 Daniele, 'Eusebio, papa'.

48 *Passio sancti Eusebii*, 6 (p. 167).

associated to this 'theft'; Orosius then seized Gregory's half-dead body to prevent its annihilation and placed it next to that of St Eusebius.

Another example is contained in a text composed in the middle of the fifth century, the *Passio* of St Eugenia and companions (BHL 2667),⁴⁹ where her body was recovered by some Christians ('sublatum corpus eius a Christianis')⁵⁰ and buried not far from Rome.

The body of Bishop Januarius of Benevento, whose relics were also stolen in the Early Middle Ages, was taken by some Christians after his martyrdom.⁵¹ According to the *passio* (BHL 4115–4119), his corpse and those of his companions were collected and transferred by Christians to their respective cities following their deaths. In the silence and secrecy of the night ('facta nocte [...] silentio noctis hora'),⁵² the saint appeared to them in a dream and admonished them to remember to take his finger together with the rest of his remains in order to recover the entire body.

Even if these tales include just some brief descriptions of the way in which the relics were preserved, they can be considered the 'archaeology of *furta sacra*' because they are characterised by numerous aspects that are also present in the more elaborate legends of medieval thefts. One of the most relevant differences between the two cases relates to the reasons for the removal of the bodies: in the late antique 'thefts', Christians or pious people took them to bury and preserve them from destruction, while those that occurred in the following centuries were perpetrated with the aim of obtaining the saints' remains and proving their authenticity by describing the way in which they were removed from their tombs. On the other hand, the lexicon is a constant element shared by both typologies of texts. As we will demonstrate later, the words employed by hagiographers from each period to describe the relocation of saints' bodies are extremely similar and reflect a clear perception, in both situations, that they had to be appropriated. Although there are significant differences between these tales – *passiones* and *translationes* – and it is impossible to connect them historically, it is not inconceivable that the medieval hagiographers were influenced in the composition of the *furta sacra* tales also by the final sections of the narrations that recount martyrs' passions.

49 Lanéry, 'Hagiographie d'Italie', pp. 126–138.

50 *Passio sanctorum Eugeniae, Prothi et Hiacinthi martyrum*, 44–45 (p. 397).

51 On this theft, see § 3.2.

52 *Passio sanctorum Ianuarii et sociorum*, 11 (p. 868).

2.2. Stealing and taking care of martyrs' bodies: Lucina and the other women

From a literary perspective, the examples discussed in the previous paragraph include the following characters: the saint or group of saints; the emperor or the person who embodies Roman authority; the executioner, etc. Among these, we might examine in greater depth the personage who recovers and inter the bodies of the martyred saints.⁵³ In contrast to medieval cases of the *furta sacra* genre, the transfer of relics of newly martyred saints frequently featured female figures; namely, Roman matrons – usually devout women belonging to Christian groups – who took care of the holy bodies.⁵⁴ Even if numerous linguistic elements allow us to regard the behaviour of these religious women as strongly tied to the concept of saving the corpses from destruction, not all the stories include robberies. We will now examine some examples of late antique or early medieval *passiones* that describe female figures that are pivotal in the recovery of the sacred bodies and their burial, emphasising the qualities of care attributed to them.

In the *Passio beatissimorum martyrum Adventoris, Octavii et Solutoris* (BHL 85), perhaps composed in the middle of sixth century⁵⁵ – another version (BHL 86), as argued by Paolo Tomea, was written at the beginning of the tenth century, possibly in the monastery of St Solutor⁵⁶ – a woman named Iuliana retrieved the bodies of the three martyrs who had been put to death in the third century.⁵⁷ According to the narrative, she used a quadriga to transport their bodies during the night⁵⁸ to a site not far from Turin, where a small chapel was constructed, later converted into a basilica by Bishop Vittore at the end of the fifth century.⁵⁹ In the *passio*, Sts Adventor, Solutor and Octavius were said to be members of the Theban legion, a hagiographical detail intended to provide knowledge about unknown martyrs. Adventor and Octavius were executed in Turin, and Solutor by the river Dora.⁶⁰

53 On this topic, see Denzey, *The Bone Gatherers*.

54 On Roman women, see Sawyer, *Women and Religion*, pp. 17–31.

55 Lanéry, 'Hagiographie d'Italie', pp. 274–277.

56 Lanéry, 'Hagiographie d'Italie', p. 275; Tomea, 'Lagiografia dell'Italia settentrionale', p. 106.

57 CSLA E01910. A matron named *Iulia* recovers the body of Saint Hyacinthus at night in the *passio* dedicated to him, *Passio sancti Iacynthi*, 49–54 (p. 108). The body of St Getulius was recovered by his wife Symphorosa, *Passio sancti Gethulii*, 167–171 (p. 146).

58 *Passio beatissimorum martyrum Adventoris, Octavii et Solutoris*, 42–43 (p. 30); see also AASS, *Februarii*, 2, pp. 657–658, no. 5.

59 Cignitti, 'Giuliana'.

60 Cignitti and Cardinali, 'Avventore, Ottavio e Solutore'.

While numerous women are mentioned, certain particular figures recur frequently. The *Passio sancti Cornelii* refers to the body of St Cornelius that was transported to the catacomb of St Callistus by a pious woman named Lucina, who assisted other religious individuals and her family in this endeavour.⁶¹ According to the *Passio sanctorum Processi et Martiniani* (BHL 6947), probably written in the first half of the sixth century,⁶² Processus and Martinianus were two soldiers who served as Peter and Paul's guards during their imprisonment in the Mamertine prison.⁶³ They were buried in the second mile of the Via Aurelia, where a church in their honour existed as early as the fifth century,⁶⁴ and remain unidentified today.⁶⁵ This text mentions Lucina as well, travelling with her family to bury them ('beatissima Lucina, cum familia sua')⁶⁶ along the Via Aurelia. Another mention of the same woman can be found in the *Passio sancti Sebastiani* (BHL 7543), a text written around 430 by Arnobius the Younger.⁶⁷ Historically, we know that this saint was honoured in the Constantinian basilica on the Via Appia, the *Basilica apostolorum*, which acquired the title of St Sebastian in the ninth century.⁶⁸ According to the tale, Sebastian was a soldier who converted to Christianity and was martyred in Rome under Diocletian.⁶⁹ In this instance, following the hagiographical *topos* of the saint who appears in a dream, the martyr himself asked Lucina to find and bury his body.⁷⁰ As soon as she awoke in the middle of the night ('medio noctis'), she went with her servants to the place indicated by Sebastian in order to retrieve his body.⁷¹ The text also mentions the Roman matron Irene, who went to recover his corpse and discovered he was still alive after being stabbed with arrows.

61 See the interpretation of Lucina given by Cooper, 'The Martyr, the Matrona and the Bishop', pp. 308–315.

62 Lanéry, 'Hagiographie d'Italie', pp. 216–223.

63 Verrando, 'Note sulle tradizioni agiografiche su Processo, Martiniano e Lucina', pp. 353–366; Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, pp. 382–384; CSLA E02505.

64 Amore, 'Processo e Martiniano'.

65 Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, p. 5.

66 *Passio sanctorum Processi et Martiniani*, 4 (p. 271).

67 Lanéry, 'Hagiographie d'Italie', pp. 68–80; see also Barnes, *Early Christian Hagiography*, pp. 393–396; Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, pp. 88–95; CSLA E02512.

68 Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, p. 4.

69 Gordini and Cannata, 'Sebastiano'.

70 Numerous *passiones* contain the *topos* of the abandoned and lost body that someone, generally a devout person, must discover and retrieve. On this aspect, see Cronnier, *Les inventions de reliques*, pp. 184–187.

71 *Passio sancti Sebastiani*, 44 (p. 476); see also Lanéry, 'La tradition manuscrite de la "Passio Sebastiani"'.

It is unclear if the presence of Lucina in so many tales – as pointed out by Nicola Denzey, no less fewer eleven ancient narrations⁷² – has a historical foundation or is only the result of the influence of several hagiographies on one another. It is also possible that her name originated from the *titulus Lucinae* in the Campus Martius.⁷³ In any case, she is again mentioned in the *Passio sancti Marcelli* (BHL 5235, 2056), which dates back to the first half of the sixth century, according to which St Marcellus stole the bodies of numerous saints, sometimes with the assistance of Lucina.⁷⁴ Included in these are St Cyriacus and twenty-one other Christians who were martyred alongside him, the burial of whose remains was personally overseen by Lucina and priest John.⁷⁵ The tomb of Pope Marcellus – whose historical existence as a pope is not confirmed⁷⁶ – was placed in the basilica of Pope Sylvester on the Via Salaria Nova.⁷⁷ Lucina is also mentioned in the *passio* of Sts Marcellinus and Peter (BHL 5230–5231), a text presumably composed in Rome in the seventh century, in relation to the nocturnal recovery of their bodies.⁷⁸ In this instance, her name is *Lucilla*, but it is probable that it denotes the same character.⁷⁹

Plautilla, who was inspired by a dream to recover the bodies of Sts Rufina and Seconda, was another devout woman who buried holy bodies. This information is contained in the *Passio sanctarum Rufinae et Secundae* (BHL 7359), a text written between 550 and 650, apparently composed by a cleric from the diocese of *Silva Candida*, to which the church of the saints belonged.⁸⁰ According to this text, the two women were regarded as sisters and were martyred in 260 during the persecution of Valerian and Gallienus. They were buried at the tenth mile on the Via Cornelia, but the precise location has not been identified.⁸¹ On their tomb, a basilica was probably constructed in the fourth century.⁸² Plautilla is also mentioned in

72 Denzey, *The Bone Gatherers*, p. xv.

73 Cooper, 'The Martyr, the Matrona and the Bishop', p. 313; see also: Verrando, 'Note sulle tradizioni agiografiche su Processo, Martiniano e Lucina', pp. 366–373.

74 Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, pp. 390–398; CSLA E02501.

75 *Passio sancti Marcelli*, 21 (p. 373).

76 Amore and Mocchegiani Carpano, 'Marcello I'.

77 Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, p. 5.

78 Lanéry, 'Hagiographie d'Italie', pp. 291–292; Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, p. 447; CSLA E02500.

79 Denzey, *The Bone Gatherers*, p. 15.

80 Lanéry, 'Hagiographie d'Italie', p. 300; Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, pp. 552–553; CSLA E02510.

81 Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, p. 6.

82 Cignitti, 'Rufina e Seconda'.

the Passion of Sts Nereus and Achilleus, as well as in that of St Paul, which is wrongly assigned to Pope Linus.⁸³

The *Passio sanctorum Naboris et Felicis* (BHL 6028–6029), a text composed during the first decades of the fifth century, describes a similar situation.⁸⁴ According to the tale, after their decapitation the bodies of Nabor and Felix were abandoned close to the river *Exelera*, where a devout woman named Savina discovered and secretly transported them ('furtim sublatos [sc. the bodies]')⁸⁵ to Milan for burial. The legendary figure of Savina was developed further in the High Middle Ages, particularly in the *Liber Notitiae sanctorum Mediolani*, composed in the thirteenth or fourteenth century.⁸⁶ This text narrates that she transported their holy bodies to Milan in a barrel, telling the two guardians that it contained honey. They sampled it after opening the barrel without noticing anything unusual.⁸⁷ The first reference to the saints, who were martyred in *Laus Pompeia* (Lodi Vecchio) under Diocletian, is a hymn composed by Ambrose and dedicated to them along with St Victor.⁸⁸

In the *Passio sanctorum Marii, Marthae et filiorum* (BHL 5543), a text composed around 550, or no later than the sixth century,⁸⁹ the ashes and remains of Sts Marius, Martha, Audifax and Abachum were recovered – that of Martha, which was whole, was extracted from a well – by a pious matron named Felicitas, who then buried them on her little farm ('Felicitas, rapuit corpora eorum [...] et in praedio suo sepelivit'),⁹⁰ a recurring element in this kind of tale. According to the text, the Persian Marius and his wife Martha had two sons, Audifax and Abachum. They travelled to Rome to visit the tombs of saints, where they participated in the burial of several martyrs. The three men were martyred on the Via Cornelia, while Martha was drowned in a well, allegedly during the persecution of Claudius II (268–270), a detail that should be considered fictitious as they are more likely to have died under Diocletian.⁹¹ In any case, the *passio* lacks historical

83 Amore, 'Plautilla'.

84 Lanéry, 'Hagiographie d'Italie', pp. 257–260; CSLA E01987.

85 *Passio sanctorum Naboris et Felicis*, 8 (p. 279).

86 *Liber Notitiae Sanctorum Mediolani*, ed. by Magistetti and Monneret de Villard; Mazzi, 'Sul Liber Notitiae Sanctorum Mediolani'.

87 Caretta, 'Savina'.

88 Caretta and Raggi, 'Nabore e Felice'.

89 Lanéry, 'Hagiographie d'Italie', pp. 250–257; Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, pp. 420–426; CSLA E02093.

90 *Passio sanctorum Marii, Marthae et filiorum*, 19 (p. 583). For the critical text see: Vangone, 'La passione di Mario e Marta'.

91 Gordini, 'Mario, Marta, Audiface e Abaco'.

credibility, beginning with a generic mention of the emperor's name, which is Claudius.⁹²

The *Passio sanctae Susannae* (BHL 7937) is a Latin text composed by an anonymous hagiographer between the second half of the fifth century and the beginning of the sixth.⁹³ According to the text, Susanna was the daughter of the priest Gabinus, a cousin of Diocletian's, and was killed because she refused to marry the Emperor Maximian.⁹⁴ The story is probably an attempt to provide a hagiography for the *titulus*-church that includes the name of this martyr.⁹⁵ The source narrates that the body of Susanna was taken and buried at night by the *augusta* Serena, Diocletian's wife.⁹⁶

Another matron mentioned in the ancient *passiones* is Octavilla,⁹⁷ who recovered the martyred body of St Pancratius at night so that she might bury it.⁹⁸ This information comes from the *Passio sancti Pancratii* (BHL 6420–6427), a tale composed around the sixth century.⁹⁹ The *Passio sanctorum Calogeri et Parthenii* (BHL 1534), written in the sixth or seventh century,¹⁰⁰ relates how the bodies of the two martyrs Calogerus and Parthenius were taken by Anatolia and her servants ('sanctorum corpora rapuerant').¹⁰¹ The martyrs were two Armenian eunuch brothers, recruited by the Roman senator Aemilianus and delivered to his daughter Anatolia Calista. Their martyrdom occurred in 250 under Decius.¹⁰²

In later Passions, too, the motif of the pious woman who steals the relics of saints persists. This persistence is evidently rooted in the practice of medieval hagiographers, who, when composing the *passiones* of saints, relied on the oldest and allegedly most authentic accounts, thus reproducing their essential characteristics. Simultaneously, it is probable that they integrated themes and elements from local or oral traditions, influenced by older

92 According to Einhard's *translatio*, the relics of Marius, Martha, Audifax and Abachum were stolen together with those of Sts Marcellinus and Peter. The thieves discovered their identities only during the journey; Einhard, *Translatio sanctorum Marcellini et Petri*, III, 12 (p. 106).

93 Lanéry, 'Hagiographie d'Italie', pp. 148–154; CSLA E02515.

94 Amore, 'Susanna'.

95 Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, pp. 270–272. A *titulus*-church was a building provided by a wealthy donor to be used as a martyr's tomb and a place of worship.

96 'Serena Augusta cum gaudio noctu veniens collegit corpus sanctae Susannae martyris', *Passio sanctae Susannae*, 6 (p. 632).

97 Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, p. 475.

98 Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, pp. 469–473.

99 CSLA E02502.

100 Lanéry, 'Hagiographie d'Italie', pp. 303–305; Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, pp. 574–576; CSLA E02486.

101 *Passio sanctorum Calogeri et Parthenii*, 6 (p. 303).

102 Amore, 'Calogero e Partenio'.

passions. In the *Passio sancti Alexandri* (BHL 275–277), probably composed in the eighth or ninth century,¹⁰³ the body of the martyr of Bergamo was taken by a matron named Grata.¹⁰⁴ In this instance, she relied on the assistance of her servants to transport and bury the body on her land ('ad praediolum detulit suum').¹⁰⁵ According to legend, she constructed three churches in honour of St Alexander.¹⁰⁶

Not all the *passiones* contain explicit references to the stealing of relics. The *Passio sanctae Anastasiae* (BHL 401), a text composed around 425 and related to the martyrdom of Sts Anastasia, Chrysogonus and companions, provides an example. The final part of the text claims that Apollonia, a Christian matron, obtained permission to remove Anastasia's body thanks to the authorisation of the officers of the prefect's wife.¹⁰⁷ Later, the remains were buried in the garden of her home. From an archaeological and historical perspective, the location of this basilica or *titulus*-church is unclear.¹⁰⁸ A similar case is narrated in the *Passio sanctorum Alexandri, Eventii et Teoduli* (BHL 266), composed in Rome in the sixth or seventh century.¹⁰⁹ Severina, the wife of Aurelian, obtained the bodies of the three martyrs and buried them at the seventh mile of the Via Nomentana.¹¹⁰ According to the *passio*, Alexander was a pope, while Eventius and Theodulus were priests. However, there is no historical evidence to support these claims.¹¹¹

It is important to note that the examples considered are probably rhetorical stories employed by the hagiographers to demonstrate that saints' relics had been preserved. Despite the use of numerous hagiographical *topoi*, the presence of many women caring for the bodies of saints must be seen as an indication of the female role in the first Christian communities in Italy and the tangible efforts of women to preserve and expand devotion to these saints. On the basis of the fictional nature of the passions under consideration, it is extremely difficult to determine whether Lucina and the other women were real or not; they

103 Lanéry, 'Hagiographie d'Italie', pp. 322–323; CSLA E01915.

104 'quaedam matrona veniens, meritis castissima, et nome Grata, beatum corpus inveniens' ('There came a certain matron, most chaste in her virtues and named Grata, and found the blessed body'), *Passio sancti Alexandri*, 9 (p. 805).

105 *Passio sancti Alexandri*, 9 (p. 805).

106 Bertocchi, 'Grata di Bergamo'.

107 Lanéry, 'Hagiographie d'Italie', p. 51; Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, p. 87.

108 Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, p. 87.

109 Lanéry, 'Hagiographie d'Italie', pp. 301–303; CSLA E02481.

110 Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, pp. 557–562.

111 Amore, 'Alessandro, Evenzio e Teodulo'.

are more likely a symbol of female devotion to martyrs, as noted by Michael Lapidge.¹¹² The hagiographers frequently emphasised women's involvement in preserving the martyrs' remains, suggesting their maternal and female responsibilities in caring for and burying corpses. Even if it became a *topos*, the presence of such a significant number of women who were said to have recovered holy bodies probably reflects the actual roles played by them in the development of early Christianity in Rome and Italy, although, as argued by Nicola Denzey, their historical roles were obliterated by a more 'male Church', in which the space of pious women was merely symbolic and mythologised.¹¹³

The social status of these women, frequently referred to as *matronae*, confirms the significance of lay participation in the preservation and care of relics, worship and collective memory, and the names we have mentioned are only a portion of those involved.¹¹⁴ Additionally, as female protectors (*patronae*), they played a crucial role in funding the construction of churches, cemeteries and places of worship where the remains of martyrs could be enshrined.¹¹⁵

Furthermore, according to the *passiones*, in many cases abandoned remains were stolen and recovered by women, who were sometimes very close to the martyrs and occasionally appealed to by the saints themselves. It is worth noting that in the texts composed on the peninsula and, more generally, in Latin Europe, the revelation of lost bodies through dreams involved mostly women. In the Eastern Roman area, hagiographic tales mentioned mostly monks, hermits and priests, despite including laypeople and women too.¹¹⁶ It is plausible that during Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages the language of dreams was deemed particularly feminine. Undoubtedly, dreams serve as one of the primary instruments of revelation, strongly linked to the idea of *seeing*, a characteristic not limited to hagiographic conventions but deeply ingrained in Christian belief. Christianity has long employed dreams as a means of divine communication across various contexts. Women, in particular, enjoy a privileged status in this regard, evidenced by parallels with the evangelical accounts where women were the first to see Jesus' resurrection, along with those of them who went to anoint his body,¹¹⁷ or Mary Magdalene, who is depicted as the initial

112 Caraffa, 'Lucina'; Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, p. 34.

113 Denzey, *The Bone Gatherers*, pp. 202–203.

114 Denzey, *The Bone Gatherers*, p. xii.

115 Moore, *Women in Christian Traditions*, p. 59.

116 Cronnier, *Les inventions de reliques*, p. 193–198.

117 Mk 16:1–8; Mt 28:1–10; Lk 24:1–11.

witness of the risen Christ.¹¹⁸ This underscores how early Christian tradition portrayed women as the foremost witnesses of Christ's resurrection, and it is plausible that this sensitivity was also reflected on the hagiographical level in the narratives of martyrs' passions, which, in their structure and purpose, mirrored the model of Jesus' sacrifice.

2.3. The role of men in 'stealing' martyrs' relics

Even if the role of women in burying saints' bodies was significant, the tales also contain numerous references to the actions of men – mainly popes, priests and deacons – in preserving and caring for them. In contrast to the female figures considered in the previous paragraph, who are typically baptised women who do not live as virgins, men who recover holy bodies are depicted exclusively as members of the clergy. This characteristic, as will become evident in the examples provided, stems from the intentions of the hagiographers, who sought to express male authority in matters of holiness almost exclusively through clerical figures.

In the *Passio sanctae Caeciliae* (BHL 1495), a text composed around 440–450 by Arnobius the Younger, a monk from the monastery of St Sebastiano,¹¹⁹ the saint's body was retrieved by St Urban, who went to bury it at night with his deacons.¹²⁰ Caecilia was worshipped in a *titulus*-church in Trastevere and a crypt in the cemetery of Callistus on the Via Appia, and perhaps was merely the funder of the *titulus* and not a martyr.¹²¹ Despite a lack of historical information about her figure, in the hagiographies she is described as a *virgo clarissima* who was martyred under Alexander Severus.¹²²

According to the *Passio sancti Callisti* (BHL 1523), a tale written before the eighth century,¹²³ probably between 480 and 500,¹²⁴ Pope Callistus recovered the body of St Calepodius from the river. Moreover, his own body was

118 Mk 16:9; Jh 20:11–18.

119 Lanéry, 'Hagiographie d'Italie', pp. 80–88; Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, pp. 138–144; CSLA E02519.

120 'Tunc sanctus Urbanus corpus eius auferens: cum diaconibus nocte sepelivit eam', *Passio sanctae Caeciliae*, 16–17 (p. 341).

121 Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, p. 4; Lanéry, 'Hagiographie d'Italie', p. 80.

122 Franchi de' Cavalieri, *Note agiografiche*, 4, pp. 3–40; Josi and Celletti, 'Cecilia di Roma'; on her cult, especially related to the ninth century *inventio*, see Denzey, *The Bone Gatherers*, pp. 148–155.

123 CSLA E02485.

124 Lanéry, 'Hagiographie d'Italie', pp. 154–160; Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, pp. 287–290.

taken at night by a priest named Asterius and his clergy.¹²⁵ According to the archaeological evidence, a church dedicated to St Callistus existed in the cemetery of St Calepodius on the Via Aurelia.¹²⁶ The claim that Callistus, who was pope from 217 to 222, was martyred under Alexander Severus (222–235) has no historical substantiation.¹²⁷

The *Passio sancti Marcelli* is one of the most intriguing cases among the texts composed in Late Antiquity. In the majority of the martyrdoms mentioned in the text, the bodies were found by a priest named John ('Ioannes presbyter'), who reclaimed the bodies of many saints, including Saturninus and Sisinnius,¹²⁸ Papias and Maurus,¹²⁹ St Crescentianus,¹³⁰ St Cyriacus and twenty-one other martyrs.¹³¹ In the end, he retrieved the body of St Marcellus together with Lucina.¹³² The text allows us to reflect on the role of priests during the persecutions, especially in preserving the remembrance of the martyrs. The priest John is also referenced in the *passio* of Sts Marius, Martha and their sons. Before their martyrdoms, the foursome retrieved holy bodies with him,¹³³ other family members and the priest Pastor.¹³⁴ All their actions were conducted covertly and at night ('occulte hoc faciebant').¹³⁵ Similarly to the case of Lucina, it is probable that his figure – if indeed he existed historically – was utilised in various martyrdom narratives.

The *Passio sanctorum Nerei et Achillei* (BHL 6058–6066), written around the second half of the fifth century and the beginning of the sixth,¹³⁶ mentions a large number of priests who collected martyrs' bodies during the persecutions of Domitian (81–96), Nerva and Trajan. For instance, the body of St Felicola,¹³⁷ St Petronilla's foster-sister, was recovered by Nicomedes ('sanctus autem Nicomedes presbyter [...] occulte levavit corpus'),¹³⁸ a priest who then buried it at the seventh mile on the Via Ardeatina, while those

125 *Passio sancti Callisti papae*, 40–43 (p. 270), 9–12 (p. 271).

126 Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, p. 4.

127 Ferretto and Casanova, 'Callisto I'.

128 *Passio sancti Marcelli*, 8 (p. 371).

129 *Passio sancti Marcelli*, 9 (p. 371).

130 *Passio sancti Marcelli*, 19 (p. 372).

131 *Passio sancti Marcelli*, 20 (p. 372).

132 'Cuius corpus rapuit Ioannes presbyter noctu cum beata Lucina', *Passio sancti Marcelli*, 22 (p. 373).

133 *Passio sanctorum Marii, Marthae et filiorum*, 3 (p. 580).

134 *Passio sanctorum Marii, Marthae et filiorum*, 4 (p. 580).

135 *Passio sanctorum Marii, Marthae et filiorum*, 4 (p. 580).

136 Lanéry, 'Hagiographie d'Italie', pp. 113–125; Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, pp. 201–210; CSLA E02033.

137 Amore, 'Felicola'; Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, pp. 207–208.

138 *Passio sanctorum Nerei et Achillei*, 17 (p. 11).

of the two eunuch saints – from a historical perspective, most probably soldiers – were removed (*rapuit*) by their disciple Auspicius and put in a place next to the ‘hypogeum of the Flavians’, the catacomb of Domitilla.¹³⁹

According to the *Passio sancti Stephani papae* (BHL 7845), a text written in the first half of the seventh century and influenced by prior hagiographies,¹⁴⁰ the pope and some clerics took the bodies of four martyrs at night while singing hymns (‘Eademque nocte adveniens sanctus Stephanus Episcopus cum clericis [...], eorum corpora abstulerunt’).¹⁴¹ The tomb of Pope Stephen I was in the ‘Papal Crypt’ in the Callistus cemetery on the Via Appia.¹⁴² The *passio* describes how he was martyred under Valerian, even though the information about his martyrdom lacks historical corroboration.¹⁴³ In another case, narrated in the *Passio* of Sts Hippolytus, Eusebius and companions – also known as the Greek martyrs (BHL 3970) – composed between the eighth and the ninth centuries, their bodies were recovered by a deacon named Hippolytus.¹⁴⁴ Similar conditions are reported in relation to the body of Pope Felix (BHL 2857), which was seized (‘raptum est’) by some priests and other clerics (‘a praesbyteris et clericis’).¹⁴⁵ In the *Passio sancti Sixti* (BHL 7801; see also BHL 7802–7812), a text written between the early sixth and early seventh centuries – but that includes material present in an ancient text elaborated around 430–450 dealing with the martyrdom of Sts Lawrence, Sixtus and Hippolytus (BHL 7811)¹⁴⁶ – a similar occurrence is described regarding the taking of St Sixtus’ body. After his martyrdom, along with those of Sts Felicissimus and Agapitus, his remains were removed by clerics, priests, deacons and Christians.¹⁴⁷ According to

139 *Passio sanctorum Nerei et Achillei*, 18 (p. 11).

140 Lanéry, ‘Hagiographie d’Italie’, pp. 292–293; Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, pp. 478–482; CSLA E02514.

141 *Passio sancti Stephani papae*, 13 (p. 142).

142 Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, p. 5.

143 Amore, ‘Stefano I’.

144 Lanéry, ‘Hagiographie d’Italie’, pp. 293–295; Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, pp. 515–516.

145 *Passio sancti Felicis pontificis et martyris*, 5 (p. 551); Lanéry, ‘Hagiographie d’Italie’, pp. 165–170.

146 Lanéry, ‘Hagiographie d’Italie’, pp. 97–108; Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, pp. 316–325; particularly 321. The history of the transmission and reconstruction of this text – or set of texts – is quite complex. For the various *passiones* of the different saints, with particular attention to the passages concerning the removal of the bodies, see Verrando, “Passio SS. Xysti Laurentii et Yppoliti”, esp. pp. 209, 75–76 (‘Tunc christiani rapuerunt corpus eius’); p. 214, 23–24 (‘Rapuerunt autem christiani corpus eius’); p. 216, 58 (‘rapuit corpus eius Yppolitus’); p. 219, 23 (‘quae corpora a christianis nocte sublata sunt’); p. 220, 25 (‘Tunc christiani rapuerunt corpus eius’).

147 ‘Noctu postea venerunt clerici et presbyteri et diaconi et maxima per christianorum, et collegerunt corpora sanctorum’, *Passio sanctorum Xisti episcopi Felicissimi et Agapiti martyrum*, 6–7 (p. 651).

the sources, he was elected pope after Stephen I and was martyred in 258 under Valerian.¹⁴⁸

An example countering this overexposure of clerics recovering holy bodies can be found in the *Passio sanctorum martyrum Protasii et Gervasii* (BHL 3514), a text composed in Rome between 415 and 450, in which the bodies of the two saints were retrieved secretly at night ('furtim nocte') and taken home by a devout man named Philip and his son.¹⁴⁹

While a substantial number of accounts depicts clergy members recovering and interring the bodies of saints, many tales just generically mention Christian people doing so in order to protect them from destruction. The *Passio sanctae Agathae* (BHL 133), a text composed before 450 of which there is also a Greek version (BHG 36–37),¹⁵⁰ describes the martyr of Catania's tortures and death. According to the text and other sources, she was thought to have been martyred on 5 February 251, during the persecution of Decius.¹⁵¹ The tale narrates that, as the word of her death reached the population, the most devout among them ('pii populi') rushed to the site of her martyrdom to retrieve her body ('auferentes corpus eius') and place it in a tomb.¹⁵² According to the already mentioned *Passio* of St Euplus, his body was likewise carried off by a group of Christians ('Sublatum est postea corpus eius a Christianis').¹⁵³

The *Passio sancti Anthimi et sociorum* (BHL 561), composed around the eighth or ninth century in the Farfa abbey, contains a generic reference to people who were converted by the saints.¹⁵⁴ On the basis of this text, which has little historical value, St Anthimus of Rome was martyred and buried at the thirtieth mile on the Via Salaria.¹⁵⁵ According to the legend, after his death,

148 Carletti and Mocchegiani Carpano, 'Sisto II', p. 1256.

149 'ego servus Christi Philippus abstuli cum filio meo furtim nocte corpora sancta ista et in domo mea [...] sepelivi' ('I, Philip, a servant of Christ, secretly took these holy bodies by night with my son and buried them in my house'), *Passio sanctorum martyrum Protasii et Gervasii*, 23 (p. 684); Lanéry, 'Hagiographie d'Italie', pp. 61–68. See also a later version (BHL 3516), in which the sacred and precious bodies were transferred by St Cyrasius ('furati sunt sancta et pretiosa corpora'). On this text, see Zanetti, 'Les Passions des SS. Nazaire, Gervais, Protas et Celse'; Lanéry, 'Le dossier des saints Nazaire, Celse, Gervais et Protasii'.

150 Lanéry, 'Hagiographie d'Italie', pp. 278–287; CSLA E01916. On Agatha and her passion(s), see Lampadaridi, 'The Origins and Later Development of the First Italo-Greek Hagiographies', pp. 182–194.

151 Gordini, Aprile and Rigoli, 'Agata', col. 320.

152 *Passio sanctae Agathae*, 13 (p. 623).

153 *Acta Eupli*, 12–13 (p. 318).

154 Lanéry, 'Hagiographie d'Italie', pp. 315–316; Vocino, 'L'Agiografia dell'Italia centrale', pp. 215–218; CSLA E02483.

155 Daniele, 'Antimo et alii'.

local folk who had converted to Christianity as a result of his preaching went to retrieve and bury his body.¹⁵⁶ The body of St Maximus, a colleague of St Anthimus, was stolen by Christians after he had been beheaded ('a Christianis ereptum corpus').¹⁵⁷

The cases of Sts Felix and Adauctus confirm that the *topos* of Christians taking martyrs' bodies was still in practice during the Middle Ages. According to the *Passio sanctorum Felicis et Adauctis* (BHL 2878 and 2880), which was written no later than the ninth century, perhaps at the beginning of the seventh,¹⁵⁸ Felix was a priest who was killed with Adauctus – whose name means 'added' – and who confessed with him his Christian faith. It is believed that these events occurred during the persecution of Diocletian.¹⁵⁹ Their tombs were at the cemetery of Commodilla near the Via Ostiense,¹⁶⁰ and the *passio* narrates that their remains were stolen by Christians who arrived at the place of their martyrdom during the night ('Christiani itaque noctu venientes').¹⁶¹ A similar scene is described in the *Passio sanctorum Gordiani et Epimachi* (BHL 3612), a text composed probably during the first half of the seventh century,¹⁶² in which the saints' bodies were carried off by one of their relatives and several other Christians. As in the previous instance, the episode occurred during the quiet of the night ('nocturno silentio').¹⁶³ According to historical data, they were buried in a church located on the Via Latina. The *passio* records that Gordianus was the *vicarius* of Emperor Julian who converted to Christianity and was later martyred and buried close to the body of St Epimachus.¹⁶⁴

A comparable example is that of Sts Primus and Felicianus. In their *passio* (BHL 6922), composed in the fifth century,¹⁶⁵ their bodies were retrieved by certain Christians ('Nocte vero a Christianis fidelibus rapta sunt corpora')¹⁶⁶ in order to be interred at the fourteenth mile of the Via Nomentana – although the *Martyrologium Hieronymianum* mentions the

156 'Cuius corpus tulerunt populi, qui per eum conversi fuerant', *Passio sancti Anthimi et sociorum*, 322–323 (p. 76).

157 *Passio sancti Anthimi et sociorum*, 352–353 (p. 78).

158 Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, pp. 594–596. CSLA E02496.

159 Franchi de' Cavalieri, *Note agiografiche*, 4, pp. 41–56; Amore and Celletti, 'Felice e Adauto'.

160 Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, p. 6.

161 *Passio sanctorum Felicis et Adauctis*, 6 (p. 546).

162 Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, pp. 494–495; CSLA E04567.

163 *Passio sanctorum Gordiani et Epimachi*, 5 (p. 552).

164 Amore and Raggi, 'Gordiano ed Epimaco'.

165 Lanéry, 'Hagiographie d'Italie', pp. 246–250; CSLA E02094.

166 *Passio sanctorum Primi et Feliciani*, 7 (p. 152).

fifteenth mile¹⁶⁷ – in a cemetery that has not yet been identified.¹⁶⁸ According to the *passio*, Primus and Felicianus were two Roman citizens who were executed under Diocletian and Maximian.

A reference to Christians stealing a saint's body is also included in the *Passio sancti Pontiani* (BHL 6891), a text composed no later than the ninth century relating to the passion of St Pontianus in Spoleto.¹⁶⁹ It depicts Pontianus as a layman from Spoleto who was martyred under the Emperor Antoninus Pius – or possibly Marcus Aurelius or Caracalla – and buried in a field named *Lucianus*.¹⁷⁰ The text states that some Christians arrived at night to remove (*abstulerunt*) and bury his body after his martyrdom.¹⁷¹ The *Passio sancti Secundi* (BHL 7568),¹⁷² a text composed between the tenth and ninth centuries, reports a similar case in northern Italy, in which the body of the saint martyred in *Victimulae*, not far from Vercelli, was stolen by Christians ('a Christiani sublatum').¹⁷³

The extensive list of examples provided confirms the recurring theme of the recovery/theft of saints' bodies following their martyrdom and demonstrates its presence in numerous *passiones*. In the oldest narratives, it serves as a means to validate the fact that the relics had been rescued from destruction; in medieval texts, it testifies to the antiquity of the relics, which had endured until the time of the hagiographer.

These examples provide numerous insights into gender issues within the ancient passions. For instance, the women mentioned were mostly 'laypeople' with a profound devotion to the saints, whereas the men were generally members of the clergy. In the examples mentioned, there is very little information regarding laymen who were interested in taking care of martyrs' bodies, and there are no data concerning men from the higher social strata. As with Lucina and the other women, the male characters who recovered bodies should be deemed more fictional than historical. The most representative example is priest John, who allegedly retrieved numerous bodies of saints.¹⁷⁴ The lack of male characters could be a stereotypical aspect that confirmed the idea – probably linked more to early Christianity

167 Amore and Mocchegiani Carpano, 'Primo e Feliciano', col. 1104.

168 Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, pp. 411–413.

169 Lanéry, 'Hagiographie d'Italie', p. 315; D'Angelo, 'Bibliotheca Hagiographica Umbriae', p. 284; CSLA E03231.

170 Lucchesi, 'Ponziano'.

171 *Passio sancti Pontiani*, 7 (p. 216).

172 Lanéry, 'Hagiographie d'Italie', pp. 323–324; CSLA E03249.

173 *Passio sancti Secundi martyris*, 10 (p. 797).

174 Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, p. 34.

than to the centuries when the later *passiones* were composed – that only the female members of upper-class Roman families had a role in caring for saints' bodies and in defending Christian worship and memories. This could have been a method of emphasising the role of women in that period – a role immortalised in literary figures in later centuries – by assigning women the significant responsibility of taking care of the glorious bodies of the martyrs.

Another prominent theme that arises is that of devotion. It is a trait ascribed to all those who retrieve the bodies of saints, particularly women. In fact, they stand out from others in society precisely because they exhibit a sense of piety and devotion deemed characteristic of Christianity.

As previously indicated, the accounts given in the final section of the *passiones* might be regarded as a first example of theft of relics. At the time, the interest in holy bodies centred in ensuring that they were preserved from disturbance and could receive proper worship and care, especially according to the theological notion of the resurrection of the body. In addition, the people who took them did not remove anything that could be perceived to be someone else's property, but merely corpses that had been abandoned. The connection with thefts of relics emerges specifically from the analysis of the tales, which reveal various aspects that are also present in the *furta sacra* genre. Because of the lack of clear references to the *passiones*, it is difficult to determine whether medieval translations composed to prove that relics had been stolen from a church or a tomb were influenced by the martyrial tales. At the same time, there is a clear phenomenological connection between the two hagiographic genres that describe the transfer of relics as a theft – or at least a stealthy nocturnal removal – through the use, in both cases, of certain *topoi* that sometimes maintain the notion of the supernatural coordination of the entire operation.

Only a few accounts of *furta sacra* mention the *passiones* explicitly. The most notable example is that of the twelve martyr saints, whose relics were transferred to Benevento in the eighth century by Arechis II from various locations of the duchy. The hagiographer writes at the beginning of the text that their relics were enshrined in different cities and that this information can be found in their *passio* ('sicut in eorum legitur passione').¹⁷⁵ This short reference is helpful because it allows us to reflect on the textual and cultural relationship between *furta sacra* legends and *passiones*, as well as the fact that these two distinct phases of the 'history of the relics' were elaborated in order to make them perceivable as a homogeneous tale.

¹⁷⁵ *Translatio Beneventum duodecim fratrum*, 1 (p. 142).

2.4. Towards the theft of relics: the example of Sts Festus and Desiderius

The cases examined before are very brief examples included in longer passions, where the description of the ‘theft’ is limited to demonstrating that the saints’ bodies had not been destroyed and indicating the place where they had been interred. Before shifting our focus to a potentially late case where the burial of martyred saints is succeeded by an actual clandestine translation, it is worth noting two examples that, perhaps more than others, exemplify the mechanism of subtraction and contention inherent in the *furta sacra* genre.

The *Passio sanctarum Anatholiae et Victoriae* (BHL 418), a text written before the seventh century,¹⁷⁶ emphasises that the body of St Anatolia was stolen by the citizens of Tora (‘Cives autem Turense rapuerunt corpus sanctae virginis’),¹⁷⁷ where she had been martyred. In this instance, there is no reference to bands of Christians but rather to the residents of a town (*cives*), an aspect that must be linked to the endeavour to develop the cult from a civic perspective. The *passio* was influenced by other hagiographical texts, such as the *Passio sanctorum Nerei et Achillei*. According to the *Passio sanctarum Anatholiae et Victoriae*, Anatolia and Vittoria were executed under Decius, and Audax was a soldier who was tasked with murdering Anatolia despite his conversion to Christianity.¹⁷⁸ The role of the inhabitants of a town also emerges in the *Passio sanctorum Felicis et Fortunati* (BHL 2860), composed in the first half of the fifth century,¹⁷⁹ which describes how religious men from Aquileia secretly retrieved the bodies of the two martyrs during the night (‘Nocte autem venerunt viri religiosi civitatis [...] et condierunt corpora eorum occulte’).¹⁸⁰ This first *translatio* is followed by a dispute between Aquileia and Vicenza on the right to own their bodies. In fact, as the inhabitants of Aquileia were removing the remains, some *provinciales* from Vicenza arrived to request the martyrs’ bodies, so that they could be transferred to their city (‘volentes corpora eorum ad suam patriam perducere’).¹⁸¹ The Aquileians refused to deliver up the bodies¹⁸² and, later, it is said that they were divided between the two cities. Some

¹⁷⁶ CSLA E02486.

¹⁷⁷ *Passio sanctarum Anatholiae et Victoriae*, 190 (p. 200).

¹⁷⁸ Cignitti, ‘Anatolia, Audace e Vittoria’.

¹⁷⁹ Lanéry, ‘Hagiographie d’Italie’, pp. 272–274; CSLA E02091.

¹⁸⁰ *Passio sanctorum Felicis et Fortunati*, 6 (p. 457). For the critical text see: Mattaloni, ‘Passio Felicis et Fortunati’.

¹⁸¹ *Passio sanctorum Felicis et Fortunati*, 6 (p. 457).

¹⁸² *Passio sanctorum Felicis et Fortunati*, 6 (p. 457).

information concerning the two saints is provided in the *Life* of St Martin written by Venantius Fortunatus.¹⁸³

These two examples originate from *passiones* penned between Late Antiquity and the onset of the Early Middle Ages. While they exhibit the dynamics of corpse recovery observed in the preceding sections, it is intriguing to note that they also highlight certain traits of theft narratives, such as the rivalry between different localities vying for relic possession, the involvement of urban communities, and the intervention of the authorities to impede the translations. These aspects can be seen as early indications from which certain themes intrinsic to relic theft emerge, eventually developing more fully in the subsequent centuries.

We would now like to discuss an example that could represent a highly relevant case. It is an interesting tale, composed towards the end of Late Antiquity or the beginning of the Early Middle Ages, which we may use as an illustration of the emergence of the phenomenon of the thefts of relics. Two versions are available: the *Translatio sanctorum Festi et Desiderii Beneventum* (BHL 4118) and the *Legenda beatorum Ianuarii et sociorum eius* (BHL 4123) – to both, it is difficult to assign dates. According to Niccolò Carminio Falcone, who published these narratives in his book about St Januarius, the first dates to the fifth century or later, while the second was written by John the Deacon and must be regarded as existing prior to the composition of the translation of St Januarius' relics from Naples to Benevento, which is not mentioned.¹⁸⁴ On the contrary, in Edoardo D'Angelo's opinion it was probably written in the ninth century, during the same time as the *translatio* of St Januarius,¹⁸⁵ although it is also possible that the author used an earlier hagiographic tradition about the arrival of the saints' relics in Benevento. Mario Iadanza believes the transfer of the relics may date back to the same period as the initial translation of the body of St Januarius, between 413 and 431. In his view, the text, which undoubtedly predates the translation of St Januarius to Benevento as it demonstrates awareness of the translation of Sts Festus and Desiderius, could possibly be dated to the late eighth or early ninth century.¹⁸⁶ In any case, accounts such as this could illustrate the narrative and mythopoeic connection between narratives of relic transfer found at the conclusion of the earliest *passiones* and the subsequent hagiographic tradition of *furta sacra*.

183 Paschini and Lorenzon, 'Felice di Vicenza e Fortunato di Aquileia', col. 588.

184 Falcone, *L'intera istoria della famiglia*, p. cxliv.

185 D'Angelo, 'Agiografia latina del Mezzogiorno', p. 55.

186 Iadanza, *Principi, vescovi e reliquie a Benevento*, p. 69, n. 242.

Tradition holds that Festus and Desiderius were two of St Januarius's companions, as described in the *Acta Bononiensia* (BHL 4132) and *Acta Vaticana* (BHL 4115–4118). These hagiographies indicate that Festus was a deacon and Desiderius a lector. During the persecution of Diocletian, Januarius went with them to Pozzuoli, where they encountered Deacon Sossius, who was later imprisoned. Januarius and his two collaborators decided to confess their Christianity. The trio of martyrs consisting of Januarius, Festus and Desiderius should, from a historical perspective, probably be considered as a group.¹⁸⁷

Before detailing the way in which the bodies of the two martyrs were stolen, the first paragraph of the *translatio* of Sts Festus and Desiderius briefly outlines the early translations that presumably involved holy bodies after their deaths. After dealing with the bodies of Januarius, Sossius, Proculus, Eutyches and Acutius, the hagiographer finally notes that those of Festus and Desiderius were seized by the inhabitants of Benevento.¹⁸⁸ This detail is part of the hagiographic strategy that we mentioned previously and that was used to emphasise how the inhabitants of a town obtained the holy remains of their saints.

According to the *translatio*, the wife of Cyphius, a 'pagan' senator of Benevento, was infertile. Her husband, on learning that the bodies of Sts Festus and Desiderius performed miracles, dispatched one of his men to steal and bring their bodies to him. He also gave him a wagon and everything that he needed to transport them, including some linen sheets in which to wrap the bodies, a detail indicating that the martyrs had not been dead for very long. The senator promised to convert to Christianity if the saints could be brought rapidly to Benevento and cure his wife's infertility. During his drive home, the man heard the voices of the two saints urging him to be careful because someone was searching for their bodies. To avoid discovery, he hid them in a sepulchre for a period – alternatively, according to the *Legenda beatorum Ianuarii et sociorum eius*, at the Caudine Forks – and meanwhile grazed the cattle. The man returned to Benevento after receiving a visit from an official courier on horseback (*veredarius*),¹⁸⁹ enquiring about someone who had stolen the bodies of the martyrs. Senator Cyphius, on receiving the corpses, hid them and, honouring his word, was baptised with his family.

¹⁸⁷ Ambrasi, 'Gennaro'.

¹⁸⁸ 'Sanctum autem Festum et sanctum Desiderium idem sui Beneventum tulerunt', *Translatio sanctorum Festi et Desiderii*, 1 (p. 86g).

¹⁸⁹ The word is linked to *veredus*, that is, a 'post horse' (Grégoire, 'Deux étymologies', pp. 268–269); see also Du Gange *et alii*, *veredi* (<http://ducange.enc.sorbonne.fr/VEREDI#VEREDI-3>).

He then constructed a basilica on one of his holdings and placed the relics within it, subsequently achieving the desired grace and fathering a child.¹⁹⁰

As we will see in the following chapter, this tale may be connected to the translation of St Januarius' relics by Sico, prince of Benevento, who had the opportunity to transport the relics of the Beneventan bishop from Naples to his city.

There are elements in the text that can be found in the *furta sacra* tales that we will analyse soon. When the official interrogates Cyphius' man, the saints' bodies are referred to with the expression 'illorum uccisorum corpora' ('the bodies of those who were killed').¹⁹¹ This is one of the most distinctive aspects of this story. The use of these words is clearly associated with martyrdom and does not represent a situation in which Christian faith is widely practised, but rather a period very close to the age of martyrs. By presenting this legend, the hagiographer intended to point to a time when Roman worship was the dominant belief. The *veredarius*' query indicates that he thought the two corpses to be those of individuals who had been murdered. He is not concerned with finding the thief in order to return the holy bodies to their place, but rather to prevent Christians from burying them. Additionally, it is important to note that the Romans considered the violation of tombs – both 'pagan' and Christian – a heinous crime, whose perpetrators were punished as murderers or necromancers.¹⁹² This perspective was revealed, for instance, in the warnings or curses engraved on the tombs.¹⁹³

Although it is difficult to date this hagiographic tradition, the text reveals a specific approach to saints and their bodies. The story does not mention bones, but entire bodies. They were translated again in order to reunite them with St Januarius, who was stolen from Naples in 831, as described in the paragraph about the thefts through which the princes of Benevento acquired numerous relics, primarily from the duchy and adjacent territories. The *Translatio sanctorum Ianuarii, Festi et Desiderii Beneventum*, which we will analyse in detail later, states that Bishop Orso of Benevento went with the town's populace to the location where Cyphius had enshrined the relics of Sts Festus and Desiderius, in order to translate them reverently.¹⁹⁴

190 Evidence of the cult of the two saints in Benevento comes from an eighth-century reliquary (Iadanza, *Principi, vescovi e reliquie a Benevento*, pp. 92–93).

191 *Translatio sanctorum Festi et Desiderii*, 3 (p. 869).

192 Denzey, *The Bone Gatherers*, p. 27; Wiśniewski, *The Beginnings of the Cult of Relics*, pp. 180–202.

193 Some examples are in Denzey, *The Bone Gatherers*, pp. 29–30.

194 *Translatio sanctorum Ianuarii, Festi et Desiderii Beneventum*, 8 (p. 148). Although the sources mention a bishop called *Guctus*, this is actually a transcription error. We thus accept Mario

Regarding the miraculous reputation of the holy bodies, the tale mentions Cyphius' prayer to the martyr saints to be granted the children he desired.¹⁹⁵ The man believed that deceased people might intercede on behalf of the living, a somewhat anachronistic aspect that may indicate a late drafting of the text. This belief, which became extraordinarily evident in the cult of saints, dates back to pre-Christian philosophies and religions, as indicated by several epitaphs from early Christianity, which combined previous and more current ideas.¹⁹⁶ In addition, the decision to steal the bodies of Festus and Desiderius demonstrates the belief in the healing power of relics that can be moved from one location to another. While the first martyrs were buried and revered at the site where they were recovered by other Christians following their martyrdom, here emerges the urge to relocate their graves in order to be closer to them. The proximity of holy bodies is another crucial aspect in devotion, as underlined by the phenomenon of people desiring to be interred near them (*ad sanctos*), which began in the early centuries of Christianity and developed in the following centuries, not only in Italy but also in other areas, such as *Francia* under the Merovingians and Carolingians.¹⁹⁷ Thus, while the earliest *passiones* typically do not reference a second transfer of relics after burial, later texts, composed during a period when this dynamic of transfer and acquisition was already prevalent, do depict such occurrences, trying to attribute the practice to Late Antiquity.

The miraculous reputation of the two bodies or the fame of their actions ('audita fama, quae de sanctorum corporibus gesta fuissent'),¹⁹⁸ are further factors that lead us to conclude that this text is not particularly old. It is unclear whether the hagiographer is referring to their martyrdom or to the marvels performed by the saints during their lifetimes or after their deaths. In any case, the absence of references to the reunification of St Januarius' relics with those of the two martyrs confirms that the text was written no later than the beginning of the ninth century.

Iadanza's reconstruction, according to which the bishop in question was instead Orso (Iadanza, *Principi, vescovi e reliquie a Benevento*, pp. 80–86).

195 'eorumque intercessionibus a Domino filios mereretur habere', *Translatio sanctorum Festi et Desiderii Beneventum*, 2 (p. 869).

196 Delehay, *Les origines du culte des martyrs*, pp. 101–106.

197 Augustine, *De cura pro mortuis gerenda*, 18 (cols 609–610). On this topic, see Gagov, 'Il culto delle reliquie nell'antichità', pp. 501–512; Duval, *Auprès des saints corps et âme*; Sigal, 'Le déroulement des translations de reliques', p. 217; Duval and Picard (eds), *L'inhumation privilégiée*; Wiśniewski, *The Beginnings of the Cult of Relics*, pp. 83–100.

198 *Translatio sanctorum Festi et Desiderii Beneventum*, 2 (p. 869).

Apart from the possibility of establishing the exact period of composition of this tale, it contains several aspects that have distinguished accounts of *furta sacra* throughout the centuries. The first is the character of Cyphius, who is described as the thief's mastermind. According to the tale, he was not a Christian, even though the search for a miracle was a valid reason for him to convert. The entire procedure was conducted in secret: the man who was tasked with removing the saints' bodies was dispatched covertly.¹⁹⁹ Later, when he was informed by the saints themselves of the danger of being identified, he buried the holy bodies in a sepulchre ('*absconsis eorum corporibus*')²⁰⁰ and told the official that he knew nothing about their remains. The location where the man hid them was a tomb, termed *arenarium*²⁰¹ in the text. This word alludes to a Christian cemetery or a location where bodies could be interred. Simultaneously with his arrival in Benevento, Cyphius placed them in a secret location.²⁰² Secrecy is a constant element that must be regarded as a means of concealing the worship of saints during a historical phase when it was still forbidden. He later commissioned the construction of a *basilica* dedicated to St Festus, almost certainly in the fifth century.²⁰³

The hagiographic content found in the *passiones* may have served as a distinct symbolic and narrative precursor that contributed to the hagiographic tradition of *furta sacra* and the oral histories surrounding these translations. Subsequent chapters will delve into the analysis of these narratives, but elucidating the ways in which the bodies of saints were said to be recovered after their martyrdoms – sometimes depicted as clandestine – undoubtedly aids in comprehending the cultural and mythopoeic bases on which *furta sacra* narratives flourished.

199 *Translatio sanctorum Festi et Desiderii Beneventum*, 2 (p. 869).

200 *Translatio sanctorum Festi et Desiderii Beneventum*, 3 (p. 869).

201 Du Cange *et al.*, *Glossarium*, vol. 1, col. 377b.

202 *Translatio sanctorum Festi et Desiderii Beneventum*, 4 (p. 869).

203 Iadanza, *Principi, vescovi e reliquie a Benevento*, pp. 86–94.

3. Thefts of Relics in the Early Middle Ages (600–950)

Abstract: The third chapter focuses on analysing tales of relic theft in the first half of the Middle Ages (600–950), offering a detailed study of various episodes and a diachronic reading to establish the development of the phenomenon over these centuries. It begins with an examination of the Duchy, later Principality, of Benevento and the numerous relics forcibly acquired there. The chapter then delves into the significant case of St Mark, whose relics were transferred to Venice in the ninth century. Other stories are also analysed, including that of Sts Primianus, Firmianus and Pardo, between Larino, Lesina and Lucera, which serves as an excellent example of ‘compensatory translation’.

Keywords: *furta sacra*; Benevento; St Mark; Sts Primianus and Firmianus

3.1. The Early Middle Ages and the theft of St Leucius

In the previous chapter we discussed the first translations of relics, which occurred covertly, as the background of a more significant phenomenon that emerged during the Early Middle Ages.¹ In fact, starting from the eighth century, it is possible to find numerous instances in which stealing relics was the way to acquire new saints’ bodies. The beginning of the *furta sacra* phenomenon and the associated hagiographic genre can be traced back to the period between the eighth and tenth centuries. In this perspective, historical data and hagiographic rhetoric are both components of the same cultural construction, in which the possession of saints’ relics was crucial for establishing the authority of a city and ensuring the security of its inhabitants. The relics were sometimes left to ruin during those centuries, which

¹ For an introduction to early medieval hagiography, see Boesch Gajano (ed.), *Agiografia altomedievale*; Palmer, *Early Medieval Hagiography*.

were also characterised by Saracen raids and profound political instability and mutability. Occasionally they were found in locations that had been destroyed during sieges and attacks or otherwise abandoned because of other circumstances. In these instances, the holy remains were taken by the assailants or by the inhabitants of neighbouring towns. This category, in which the hagiographic rhetoric cedes the stage to the historical context, is represented by the thefts of the relics of St Leucius as well as those of Sts Primianus and Firmianus, which are among the first examples examined in this chapter.

Additionally, the politics of the Duchy and, from 774, the Principality of Benevento reveal numerous thefts associated with specific sieges and wars, in which the three main thieves of relics – Arechis II, Sico and Sicard – acted with the intention of enhancing the symbolic authority of the city in light of the arrival of the relics of the twelve martyr saints – St Januarius, St Bartholomew and St Trofimena. The hagiographic tales in the context of Benevento involve theft as part of political missions intended to restore the duchy/principality's authority, to enshrine the patron saints or conquer cities and villages.²

The translation of St Mark's relics in 828 constitutes the beginning of a thriving tradition of the *furta sacra* genre, which defines certain hagiographical *topoi*, also influenced by that already present beyond the Alps, such as the secret opening of the tomb, the taking of the body, the miracles performed during the return journey, and so on. The other thefts, which were perpetrated on the peninsula, more closely resemble the pattern already seen in Benevento and the first cases. According to the sources, St Pardus was taken in 842 to make up for the loss of Sts Primianus and Firmianus; a few years later, Sts Juvenal, Cassius and Fausta's relics were brought to Lucca during the siege of Narni.

As becomes clear in this chapter, the theft of relics during the Early Middle Ages was something that happened during sieges and wars, and only occasionally in other contexts. Thefts almost always occurred accidentally rather than as a normal consequence of military campaigns and conquests. The only exception in this overview is St Mark's case, where the need for the Evangelist's remains emerges from the *Translatio sancti Marci*.

The first centuries of the Early Middle Ages – namely, the sixth and seventh – are characterised by few thefts of relics, frequently mentioned

2 For an introduction to this group of translations, see Bozóky, *L'imaginaire de la sainteté*, pp. 76–83. More generally, on the Campania context, see Oldfield, *Sanctity and Pilgrimage in Medieval Southern Italy*, pp. 22–30.

in passing in longer hagiographic texts. This situation can be explained by two main factors. First, the literary device of relic theft had not yet been fully established, becoming more prevalent from the eighth and ninth centuries onwards. Second, it is plausible to contemplate the potential loss of texts and narratives recounting ancient transfers of relics facilitated or narrated through theft.

The first case to be mentioned is that of St Leucius of Brindisi's translation.³ According to the sources, Leucius was an Alexandrian who travelled to southern Italy to convert 'pagan' populations. He was said to be the first bishop of Brindisi. Even though historians believe he was just a confessor, Gregory the Great described him as a martyr in a letter. According to the *Life*, he was buried in Apulia where he disembarked when he arrived in Italy from Alexandria.⁴

Based on the anonymous *Vita sancti Leucii* (BHL 4897),⁵ which was probably written in the eleventh century, some religious people ('religiosi viri') from Trani were walking around the territory of Brindisi in the seventh century. Thanks to divine inspiration, they discovered St Leucius' remains – which in all likelihood were not properly venerated at the time due to the poor state of the city – in a small church (*oratorium*) in the countryside near Brindisi. They returned with the relics to Trani and placed them in the church of Our Lady under the direction of the bishop of Canosa. According to Rosanna Alaggio,⁶ the text reveals the difficult circumstances in which the city found itself at that time: the failure to respond to the theft could be a primary indicator of a crisis in local identity.⁷ A small chapel in Trani was built in the seventh century, allegedly to house St Leucius' remains.⁸ This episode, which is only briefly described in the *vita*, allows us to consider the dynamics of identity at that time. Trani took the saint's relics when Brindisi was unable to preserve them, perhaps during a period when the city was forgetting its own historical identity and asking for its elevation to episcopal seat.⁹ Later in the Middle Ages, the remains of St Leucius were brought to

3 On the saint, see Jurlaro, 'Leucio'.

4 *Vita sancti Leucii*, p. 668; see also *Vita sancti Leucii*, 20 (p. 672); on this theft, see also Papisidero, *Translatio sanctitatis*, pp. 62–63.

5 *De translationibus sancti Leucii*, 1–3 (pp. 672–673). The text includes a prologue sent to the bishop of Trani John II 'Sincello' (ca. 1053–1059). For this motive, it dates back to the middle of the eleventh century, although it could contain more ancient parts.

6 Alaggio, *Brindisi*, p. 59.

7 Alaggio, *Brindisi*, pp. 58–62.

8 On the diffusion of the cult, see Falla Castelfranchi, 'Il culto di San Leucio in Puglia'; Fonseca, *Il Cristianesimo venne dal mare*.

9 Alaggio, *Brindisi*, p. 60.

Benevento by a local count, although a portion was removed and returned to Trani shortly after that.¹⁰ This case of theft is useful for understanding the contexts in which translations happened. We are confronted with a hagiographic tradition that tried to explain how relics arrived in a place. In this instance, the thieves were simply driven by the desire to take relics that had been abandoned and were not the subject of a specific worship.

3.2. Thefts of relics and political sacralisation in Benevento

In medieval Italy, one of the primary poles for thefts of relics was the Duchy of Benevento, where they were mainly linked to war and siege contexts. In fact, the cases we will examine do not involve monks or merchants who secretly steal relics, but holy bodies taken with the use of force or after conquering a city. The Duchy of Benevento, which was founded in 571 after the Lombard arrival in Italy that is generally dated to 568–569, was characterised by numerous translations of relics, especially in the ninth and tenth centuries.¹¹

The duchy was promoted to a principality in 774 by Arechis II, who had taken the title of *dux* in 758.¹² He immediately started a specific sacral policy, aimed at collecting saints' relics and bodies at the national shrine of St Sophia, endowing himself with political and sacral authority that effectively elevated him to the rank of a 'high priest'. While the Lombard kingdom of northern Italy was therefore subjected to Charlemagne, whose intervention had been solicited by Pope Hadrian I, and the Duchy of Spoleto swore allegiance to the new sovereign, the southern duchy also acquired a strategic role based on the cult of saints.¹³

The church of St Sophia was the location most closely associated with Arechis' political-sacral project. The building, which was started either by Gisulf II (742–751)¹⁴ or Arechis and was undoubtedly finished by the

10 *De translationibus sancti Leucii*, 5 (p. 673).

11 Gasparri, *I duchi longobardi*; on the thefts considered in this paragraph, see also Papisidero, *Translatio sanctitatis*, pp. 47–55. On the church of Benevento between the eighth and ninth centuries, see Iadanza, *Principi, vescovi e reliquie a Benevento*, pp. 1–35.

12 Hirsh and Schipa, *La Langobardia meridionale*; Gasparri, 'Il ducato e il principato di Benevento'; Indelli, 'Arechi II e i rapporti con il papato'; Indelli, *Arechi II*.

13 On the thefts mentioned in this paragraph, see also Ebanista, *La tomba di S. Felice*, p. 77; Zornetta, *Italia meridionale*, pp. 185–197. On Arechis' project, see Di Muro, 'Usò politico delle reliquie', pp. 377–382.

14 Bedina, 'Gisulfo'.

latter in 760¹⁵ or 768,¹⁶ played a central role in ducal policy as a symbol of his sacral power and the repository for the relics that he and his successors hoarded during that time.¹⁷ The church was annexed to a Benedictine monastery inhabited by nuns, headed from 774 by the Abbess Gariperga (ca. 760–?), Arechis' sister, and the building was placed under the jurisdiction of Montecassino.¹⁸ He used it as a symbol of his power, and as the *sancta sanctorum* of the entire Lombard kingdom, which, along with the Gargano sanctuary of St Michael, represented one of the peaks of Lombard sacrality.¹⁹ The recurring mention in the translations of St Sophia and Benevento as the locations where relics of saints were kept serves to reinforce this perspective.²⁰

The first theft – or forced delivery – is that of a group of twelve African martyrs, originally from Adrumeto (today Susa, Tunisia), who according to the texts were brothers.²¹ The Roman Martyrology commemorates them on 1 September in Benevento, evidently not in reference to the location of their martyrdom but rather the place of their translation. The grouping together of the martyrs is the result of a posthumous 'gathering'. The *passio* (BHL 2297) of the late eighth century²² identifies distinct groups of martyrs who died under Diocletian on different days and, above all, places: Potenza, Venosa, *Velinianum*²³ and *Sentianum*.²⁴

The story of their translation is contained in several hagiographic texts: the *Translatio duodecim martyrum* (BHL 2300),²⁵ the *Lectio II* of the *Sermo in vigiliis sanctorum duodecim fratrum* (BHL 2301),²⁶ and the *Translatio*

15 Rotili, *Benevento romana e longobarda*, p. 184.

16 Belting, 'Studien zum Beneventanischen Hof im 8. Jahrhundert', p. 180; Carella, 'Osservazioni su santa Sofia di Benevento'.

17 Pedroni, 'Santa Sofia e la ricerca di reliquie'; on Saint Sophia, see Iadanza, *Principi, vescovi e reliquie a Benevento*, pp. 26–29.

18 Indelli, *Arechi II*, pp. 176–183.

19 On this sanctuary, see Otranto, 'Il "Liber de apparitione"'; Otranto, 'Per una metodologia della ricerca storico-agiografica'; Aulisa, 'Note sulle fonti e la datazione'. On the cult of St Michael in Europe, see Otranto and Chierici (eds), *Der Erzengel Michael*.

20 *Translatio Beneventum duodecim fratrum*, 5 (p. 142).

21 Amore, 'Dodici fratelli, martiri'.

22 Amore, 'Dodici fratelli, martiri'.

23 *Velinianum* was a hamlet of Avellino that was already excluded from Aragonese maps by the fifteenth century (Capano, 'La provincia di Potenza').

24 *Sentianum* was likely between *Velinianum* and today Troia, the ancient Eca (Gaetano, *Della via Appia*, p. 505; AASS, *Septembris*, 1, p. 152).

25 On the *translatio*, see De Stefano, 'Il principe Arichi'; Vuolo, 'Agiografia beneventana'.

26 A part of the second *lectio* was also edited by the Bollandists: AASS, *Septembris*, 1, p. 137, no. 36.

Beneventum duodecim fratrum (BHL 2302), all of which are anonymous and composed as liturgical adaptations after the end of the eleventh century, as demonstrated by the fact that they contain some verses of a poem written by the bishop of Salerno, Alfano I (1015/1020–1085).²⁷ Moreover, the text BHL 2302 could have been composed some years after the translation.²⁸

According to these works, the theft occurred on 15 May 760, during the second year of Arechis' duchy. The legends claim that the prince was divinely inspired and decided to recover and collect the relics of these saints under a single altar. After preparing a delegation composed of *optimates* from the city, he proceeded to the locations where the relics were guarded and, stating as his reason the fact that these were not properly venerated, requested they be given up to him while threatening to use force. The locals attempted to oppose him, lamenting their impending loss and expressing sadness. After the conclusion of the operation, Arechis returned to Benevento with the relics, where he was greeted by a vast crowd and offered the city as a gift to the holy martyrs. This mission, described by the hagiographer as having messianic and sacral overtones, was in fact a political-military expedition, as evidenced by the theft of the relics and the way that this was presented to the population and religious authorities as an appropriation imposed by the circumstances. In reality, the narrative makes explicit mention of the payment of a ducal tribute ('tributum coepit exigere consuetum').²⁹

A late *passio*, at the conclusion of which the medieval theft is mentioned, contains a clear connection to the late antique tradition of stealthy translations of relics after the saints' martyrdom. After describing the deaths of Sts Donatus and Felix in *Sentianum*, the hagiographer mentions that Bishop Mark of the diocese of Aeca – named Troia from the eleventh century on³⁰ – along with other clerics, moved their bodies to his city during the night.³¹ The same information is included in the *translatio* when the hagiographer describes where the relics of the four distinct groups of martyrs were enshrined.³² These references to a previous translation staged at the start of

27 Alfano I served as a monk at St Sophia in Benevento and Montecassino, then as an abbot in Salerno and finally as the bishop of the diocese (Schipa, *Alfano I*; Lentini and Avagliano (eds), *I carmi di Alfano I*; Lentini, 'Alfano').

28 D'Angelo, 'Agiografia latina del Mezzogiorno', p. 50.

29 *Translatio Beneventum duodecim fratrum*, 3 (p. 143).

30 See De Santis, 'Marco vescovo di Aeca tra III e IV secolo'.

31 'venit nocte cum clericis suis, et rapuit corpora sanctorum, et in civitate sua cum omni gaudio sepelivit' ('He came by night with his clerics, took the bodies of the saints, and buried them in his city with great joy'), *Passio sanctorum duoecim fratrum*, 11 (p. 141).

32 *Translatio Beneventum duodecim fratrum*, 2 (p. 143).

the fourth century demonstrate how the various alleged translations were elaborated and connected to create a coherent account of events.

The sacral attitude of Arechis also emerges in the translation of the relics of St Mercurius, a holy warrior easily absorbed into the military framework of the Lombards.³³ According to the *translatio*, it occurred in 768 and was the consequence of an *inventio*, or the miraculous discovery of the body of a saint, rather than a theft.³⁴ Before entering Benevento, Arechis shed his princely attire, dressed in sackcloth and knelt in prayer before the two-wheeled wagon that had mysteriously become stranded at the city's entrance. Beyond the rhetorical construction, this narrative confirms his embodying the pinnacle of political and religious authority.

On the death of Arechis II in 787, after the government of his son, Grimoald III (787–806), and the conspiracy against Grimoald IV (806–817), the principality passed to Sico (817–832) and subsequently Sicard (832–839).³⁵ In 848/849, the Principality of Salerno was divided from Benevento (*Divisio ducatus*). Both Sico and Sicard carried on the policy of acquiring relics, effectuating various translations identifiable as thefts in the context of siege or conflict. The cathedral of St Maria, constructed in the sixth century and renovated by Arechis himself, gained prominence at the expense of the sanctuary of St Sophia.³⁶ The decision to no longer place the relics in the national shrine of St Sophia but in the cathedral was interpreted as a possible indication of the crisis in the relationship between principality and episcopacy in Benevento.³⁷

Even in the ninth century, the stealing of relics was essential for subduing conquered cities and transferring their sacredness to Benevento. According to tradition, in 831 Sico grabbed St Januarius' relics by force, almost as if they were war booty. As Amalia Galdi also states, the event cannot be dated with absolute certainty precisely because of the numerous military campaigns that Benevento waged against Naples in the first half of the ninth century.³⁸

The hagiographic dossier of St Januarius and his companions Festus, Desiderius, Sossius, Proculus, Eutyches and Acutius comprises several

33 Delehaye, *Les légendes grecque des saints militaires*, pp. 91–101; Paoli, 'Tradizioni agiografiche', pp. 299–300.

34 On this saint, see Giovardi, *Acta passionis et translationis sanctorum martyrum Mercurii ac XII fratrum*; Sauget, 'Mercurio'; Pedroni, 'Santa Sofia e la ricerca di reliquie', pp. 135–138.

35 Zornetta, 'Alla ricerca del sacro?.'

36 Indelli, *Arechi II*, pp. 183–184.

37 Paoli, 'Tradizioni agiografiche', p. 311.

38 Granier, 'Conflitti, compromessi e trasferimenti di reliquie', p. 34; Galdi, 'Quam si urbem illam suae subdiderit', p. 224, n. 2; pp. 227–228, n. 18.

sources.³⁹ The *Acta Bononiensia* (BHL 4132) and the *Acta Vaticana* (BHL 4115–4118) constitute the principal nucleus. According to them, Januarius was the bishop of Benevento. During the persecution of Diocletian, he visited Pozzuoli with the Deacon Festus and the lector Desiderius; Sossius, the deacon of Miseno, was also present. By Judge Dracontius' order, Sossius was imprisoned after being discovered. Januarius, Festus and Desiderius went to the judge and confessed their Christian faith, resulting in their imprisonment for refusing to provide sacrifices to the gods. Proculus, Eutyches and Acutius, who objected to their being tortured, were sentenced to the same punishment. As previously stated, their bodies were said to be collected by Christians after their martyrdom.⁴⁰ In addition, the text that describes the translation of Sts Festus and Desiderius mentions the previous recovery of St Januarius' body, which had initially been concealed in a place called 'Marcianus'.⁴¹

The theft is narrated in the *Translatio sanctorum Ianuarii, Festi et Desiderii* (BHL 4140),⁴² a text written by an anonymous eyewitness hagiographer from Benevento in the middle of the ninth century.⁴³ According to the legend, the Beneventans stole the relics of St Januarius during the siege of Naples.⁴⁴ These were forcibly carried to Benevento, giving rise to many miracles during the journey as proof of their authenticity. Their arrival, as underlined by Emore Paoli, took place in the form of a real military parade.⁴⁵ Once more, the event's political-institutional significance is reaffirmed, with the civilian governing class prevailing over the ecclesiastical-spiritual leaders. The theft of St Januarius' body must be explained, in this instance, not by a desire to steal the relics of just any saint, but by the decision to return to the city the saint who had served as bishop of Benevento. Therefore, it is a theft conducted to restore the 'original state'.

Under the principality of Sicard, who ascended to power following the death of his father Sico, there were two removals of relics of saints regarding whom a strong hagiographic tradition existed. The first is that of the

39 On the saint, see Franchi de' Cavalieri, 'San Gennaro vescovo e martire', pp. 79–101, 105–114; Ambrasi, 'Gennaro'; Vuolo, 'Rilettura del dossier agiografico'.

40 See § 2.1.

41 *Translatio sanctorum Festi et Desiderii*, 1 (p. 86).

42 On the compositional structure of the text, see Galdi, 'Quam si urbem illam suae subdidit', p. 223, n. 1; Iadanza, *Principi, vescovi e reliquie a Benevento*, pp. 35–61.

43 Iadanza, *Principi, vescovi e reliquie a Benevento*, pp. 64–65.

44 On some hypotheses related to the archaeological evidence of how St Januarius' tomb was broken into in Naples, see Ebanista, 'Testimonianze archeologiche', pp. 510–523. The information about the theft is confirmed by the *Chronicon Salernitanum*, 57 (pp. 57–58).

45 Paoli, 'Tradizioni agiografiche', p. 300.

renowned apostle St Bartholomew. According to the sources, he was one of Jesus' twelve apostles.⁴⁶ Later hagiographies detail his numerous travels, particularly in India and Armenia, where it is assumed that he was martyred by crucifixion or beheading after being flayed alive. In 410, his relics were brought to Martyropolis and Maiāfārqin by Bishop Mārūta, and in 507 to Darae in Mesopotamia. Later, they were identified in Phrygia. According to the legend, angels guided them to the island of Lipari in 580. At the time of the translation, the bones of St Bartholomew were in Lipari, which was frequently assaulted by the Saracens during that era. The *Translatio sancti Bartholomei* (BHL 1008), a text composed by the Beneventan monk Martin in the middle of the eleventh century, recounts numerous particulars.⁴⁷ Another hagiographical source is the *Sermo Theodori Studitae de sancto Bartholomeo apostolo* (BHL 1006), composed in Greek by Theodore the Studite (759–826) and translated into Latin by Anastasius Bibliothecarius, on the request of Bishop Aio (871–886).⁴⁸ A different version of the translation is the *Translatio corporis sancti Bartholomei apostoli Beneventum et miracula* (BHL 1010–1011), which concludes with a list of miracles that occurred after the relics were removed and deposited in Benevento.⁴⁹

According to the tales, the relics of the saint were enshrined in Lipari when the Saracens desecrated and scattered them during their sieges. Bartholomew appeared to the custodian monk Theodore, encouraging him to locate his remains, which would glow like torches in the dark. After collecting them Prince Sicard, by divine inspiration, decided to send his ships to bring them to Benevento, evading the Saracen ships with the help of a miraculous thick fog. After a brief stop in Salerno, the prince himself brought the remains to Benevento, where they were enshrined in a new church built adjacent to the cathedral and consecrated by Bishop Orso.

As stated by the sources and the *Annales Beneventani*,⁵⁰ the theft occurred in 838 – as did the arrival of the relics in Benevento in October – the same year in which the Saracens dispersed them. Other sources suggest the year

46 On the saint, see Romeo, Rathe and Toschi, 'Bartolomeo'; Spadafora, Casanova and Rigoli, 'Bartolomeo'.

47 Vuolo, 'Agiografia beneventana', p. 28; Granier, 'Saints fondateurs', p. 181; on the texts see D'Angelo, 'Agiografia latina del Mezzogiorno', p. 55.

48 Granier, 'Saints fondateurs', p. 180; Vocino, 'L'Agiografia dell'Italia centrale', pp. 201–202. On this text, see Anastasius Bibliothecarius, *Sermo Theodori Studitae de sancto Bartholomeo apostolo*, pp. 72–129; 149–198.

49 On this text(s), see Anastasius Bibliothecarius, *Sermo Theodori Studitae de sancto Bartholomeo apostolo*, pp. 49–52.

50 *Annales Beneventani*, p. 173.

839,⁵¹ which could be regarded as the date of the second transfer, from the temporary location in which they had been enshrined, St Laurence's church, to the new one, which was completed in that year.⁵² The relics were placed in the church of St Bartholomew, constructed for this very purpose and consecrated by Bishop Orso on 25 October 839.⁵³

The theft of St Bartholomew has to be connected to the policy of acquisition of relics developed by the Beneventans beginning with Arechis. It is possible that the translation took place during a maritime operation to rule the territory and repel Saracen sieges, with the aid of some *navigatores* from Amalfi.⁵⁴ The legends elaborated over time safeguarded the existence of the holy remains, ensuring their authenticity and contributing to a 'deposit of sacredness' in the principality's main city. The decision to take the relics of an apostle is not a trivial matter. Benevento would have been one of the few cities in Europe, and especially in southern Italy, to possess the sacred remains of an apostle. This condition would have guaranteed a significant increase in political and religious influence.⁵⁵ In addition, Sico came to power after Grimoald, despite not being a member of the Arechis dynasty, with the assistance of some members of Benevento's aristocracy.⁵⁶

As in other cases analysed, such as that of the twelve martyrs, the theft of St Bartholomew's relics cannot be viewed as the objective of the Beneventans' operation, but rather as its result. As in the example of St Januarius, when the prince found the saint's relics in the place he wished to conquer or subjugate, he seized them as a sign of dominance and to expand the power of Benevento through the acquisition of relics. The mission against the Saracens must be contextualised. During this time Andrea, consul of Naples, begged the Saracens for assistance against Prince Sico, who had already assaulted the city on the occasion of the theft of St Januarius' remains. At the same time the Aghlabids, starting with the 827 takeover of Sicily, also initiated a persistent policy of siege in the Aeolian Islands.⁵⁷ Due to the recent siege by the Saracens, in this instance, too, the theft occurred in a

51 *Translatio sancti Bartholomei*, p. 344; *Translatio corporis sancti Bartholomei Beneventum*, p. 43; AASS, *Augusti*, 5, p. 59.

52 *Translatio sancti Bartholomei*, p. 344.

53 Granier, 'Saints fondateurs', p. 180.

54 *Sermo sancti Theodori Studitae*, p. 736; *Translatio sancti Bartholomei*, p. 337; *Translatio corporis sancti Bartholomei Beneventum*, 16 (p. 43). On this theft, see Veronese and Zornetta, 'Holiness on the Move', pp. 56–57.

55 Cammarano, *Tradizioni pagane e culti cristiani nel Meridione longobardo*, p. 107.

56 Veronese and Zornetta, 'Holiness on the Move', p. 56.

57 Erchempertus, *Historia Langobardorum Beneventanorum*, 2 (p. 239).

place that lacked a site of worship. As in the theft of St Mark's relics – which will be analysed in the next paragraph – according to the version of the legend included in the *Translatio Liparim et Beneventum et inde in Gallias* (BHL 1009), a text probably composed by a cleric from Lyon in the second quarter of the ninth century,⁵⁸ the inhabitants of Benevento frequently visited ('*votiva frequenter visitatio*')⁵⁹ the church of Lipari where the relics were enshrined, also with the intention of viewing the body and praying to the saint in order to obtain authorisation to translate him to their city.⁶⁰ The alleged existence of a project to steal his relics could demonstrate the townspeople's devotion to St Bartholomew. His cult was later revived by Bishop Aio, son of Radelchis I (839–851), who attempted to relaunch the cult in collaboration with Anastasius Bibliothecarius, author of the *Sermo* about the saint.⁶¹

However, it is worth noting that the abundant references to the diverse groups of Saracens who frequently attacked and raided the coasts and islands of southern Italy can also be interpreted as narrative devices. Their presence and stereotypical inclination to desecrate the relics of saints can indeed be viewed as an expedient that rationalises the theft of the relics and their subsequent transfer to Benevento.

The last Beneventan theft, committed by Sicard in 839, was that of St Trofimena, and was connected to the feud between the principality and Naples. Very little is known about this saint, who can perhaps be identified as St Febronia of Nisibis or Patti.⁶² The text of the *translatio*, which is preceded by the history of her body's miraculous *inventio*, contains several details. She was probably born in Sicily, from where she fled the persecutions of Christians. She died during her travels, and her body was miraculously discovered by a woman washing clothes on the beach in Minori, not far from Amalfi.⁶³ Her relics were subsequently enshrined in the city, where a tomb was excavated for them. According to the *translatio*, in 839 Bishop Peter I (ca. 829–839/840) deemed it safer to transport the remains of Trofimena from

58 Vocino, 'L'Agiografia dell'Italia centrale', p. 202.

59 *Translatio corporis sancti Bartholomei apostoli in Gallias*, 8 (p. 6).

60 '*multisque precibus sive etiam muneribus expetierant, tam gloriosi pignoris patrocinium ad propriam urbem transferre*', *Translatio corporis sancti Bartholomei apostoli in Gallias*, 10–12 (p. 6).

61 Veronese and Zornetta, 'Holiness on the Move', p. 61.

62 On this saint, see Oldoni, 'Agiografia longobarda tra secolo IX e X', p. 587; Avallone, 'La "Historia s. Trophimena"; Grégoire (ed.), *Febronia e Trofimena*; Luongo, 'Agiografia fondana', pp. 208–209; Mammato (ed.), *La santa e la città*; Stelladoro, *Santa Febronia*.

63 Gordini, 'Trofima'.

the church of Minori to that of Amalfi out of concern for the military activity of Sicard against Naples and its territories. As soon as the tomb was opened and her body removed, it began to bleed, indicating that portentous events were afoot. In fact, after some time, Sicard conquered Amalfi, transporting the martyr's remains to Benevento and enshrining them near those of St Bartholomew.⁶⁴ Some years later, the inhabitants of Minori dispatched a delegation to the bishop of Benevento, Roffredo I (1076–1107), to request the body's return. Only half of it returned home. The practice of dividing and fragmenting saints' bodies began at the start of the Early Middle Ages, when the previous restriction – which had been balanced by the distribution of *brandea* and *palliola* that had touched their tombs – was abandoned.⁶⁵ In this context, it is interesting to highlight that the case of St Trofimenia is one of the rare instances where the return of a portion of the relics to the plundered community has been documented. Typically, narratives of relic translations were penned by those perpetrating the theft, but in this case, we witness a different scenario where the episode is recounted by the victims who ultimately succeeded in securing partial restitution.

All this information is contained in the *Historia inventionis ac translationis et miracula Sanctae Trophimenae* (BHL 8316–8318),⁶⁶ a text composed in the second half of the ninth century or at the latest in the tenth,⁶⁷ possibly by a priest from Minori or Amalfi; therefore, it was not written by those who stole the relics. It is divided into three sections: the miraculous discovery, the theft, and an appendix of miracles. Because of the lengthy chronological perspective, the purpose of the text must be tied to the development and propagation of the cult of St Trofimenia in Minori and beyond the town.

64 This detail is confirmed also by the *Chronicon Salernitanum*, 72 (p. 71): 'ex insula Liparitana Bartholomei beati apostoli corpus Beneventum cum magno tripudio deferri iussit' ('He ordered the body of the blessed apostle Bartholomew to be brought from the island of Lipari to Benevento with great celebration').

65 Delehaye, *Les origines du culte des martyrs*, p. 53.

66 On the composition of the text, see D'Angelo, 'Agiografia latina del Mezzogiorno', p. 88; Mammato (ed.), *La santa e la città*.

67 The debate about the dates of composition of the legend is very complex. According to Francesco Forcellini, it dates back to the middle of the ninth century. Massimo Oldoni thinks that the text was composed after 877, the date of the beginning of the prefecture of Pulcari at Amalfi, mentioned in the third part of the text, and before 974 or 978, the date of the composition of the *Chronicon Salernitanum* (Oldoni, 'Agiografia longobarda tra secolo IX e X', p. 601). Riccardo Avallone proposes that the prologue was composed after the other parts, hypothesising that the most ancient nucleus of the legend dates back to the end of the eleventh century or the first half of the twelfth (Avallone, 'La "Historia s. Trophimenae"'). The text would thus have been written by three different authors. See also Granier, 'Conflitti, compromessi e trasferimenti di reliquie', p. 40; Mammato (ed.), *La santa e la città*, pp. 40–41.

This theft, like in the vast majority of Beneventan cases, occurred against a background of siege and conflict, merely as a by-product of a political strategy, in which seizing the saints of the conquered towns was a method of demonstrating dominance by depriving the communities of the protection of a supernatural power. In contrast to prior occurrences, it was not Arab aggression but rather a siege imposed by a neighbouring force. The case of Trofimenia represents the last documented theft in Benevento during this period, marking the waning of this practice alongside the conclusion of the epoch of translations in this area.

3.3. The stabilisation of the *furta sacra* tradition: St Mark's relics

Although the tradition of *furta sacra*, considered a mythopoeic strategy to legitimise the possession of a saint's relics, presents some cases at the beginning of the Early Middle Ages, it is only with the example of St Mark that we are confronted with a theft of relics described in a detailed and organised manner, above all in terms of its rhetorical-narrative dimension.

According to tradition, St Mark was one of the four Evangelists and the author of the second canonical gospel.⁶⁸ Moreover, at the beginning of the third century, there are references to the fact that he founded the Church of Alexandria in Egypt. He was martyred by 'pagan' Alexandrians and then buried in the nearby village of Bucoli, where the stealthy translation was later to occur. Different versions of the *passio* are available. In one of them (BHL 5276), after his martyrdom, some 'pagans' attempted to bury his body, but a supernatural storm prevented them from doing so. Subsequently, some religious men ('religiosi viri')⁶⁹ took (*colligo*) his body and buried it in a sepulchre.

The *Translatio sancti Marci evangelistae Venetias* (BHL 5283–5284)⁷⁰ is a late hagiographic text that describes the furtive transfer of the saint's relics from Bucoli to Venice.⁷¹ Over time, numerous hypotheses have been developed. According to Nelson McCleary the text could date back to a

68 On the saint, see De Ambroggi, Wehr and Toschi, 'Marco evangelista'; Spadafora and Niero, 'Marco evangelista'; Niero, 'Questioni agiografiche su san Marco'; Tramontin, 'Realtà e leggenda nei racconti marciiani veneti'.

69 *Passio sancti Marci evangelistae et martyris*, 51 (p. 174).

70 Tomea, 'Lagiografia dell'Italia settentrionale', pp. 125–126.

71 On the political context related to the *translatio*, see Veronese and Zornetta, 'Holiness on the Move', pp. 61–67; on the theft see also Papasidero, *Translatio sanctitatis*, pp. 38–42.

period between 1050 and 1094.⁷² On the other hand, Patrick Geary, on the basis of a tenth-century manuscript published by the Bollandist Baudouin de Gaiffier reporting the text of the *translatio*, believes it is more plausible that it belongs to that century, thereby backdating McCleary's estimate.⁷³ Giorgio Cracco, who postulated the end of the tenth century under the duchy of Pietro IV Candiano,⁷⁴ concurs. Dennig-Zettler suggests dating the event as early as the middle of the ninth century, therefore extremely close to the events narrated.⁷⁵ Taking into account the time required for the legend to spread to other regions of the Italian peninsula, Silvio Tramontin proposes a date no later than the middle of the year 1000.⁷⁶ Lastly, Emanuela Colombi advances a dating no later than the tenth century, though she does not rule out the possibility of the existence of a shorter and older narrative nucleus, as McCleary also argues.⁷⁷

According to the narrative, some Venetian merchants, including the tribunes Bonus from Malamocco and Rusticus from Torcello, brought the relics of St Mark from Bucoli to Venice on 31 January 828.⁷⁸ After a lengthy prologue, the legend relates how, finding themselves in Alexandria for commercial reasons, they used to attend the church of the saint, devoting themselves to prayer and developing a daily rapport with two of the custodians, the monk Stauracius and the priest Theodore. The two merchants, bolstered by their closeness, decided to inform the clerics of their desire to transport the saint's relics from Bucoli, where they were now not venerated and were endangered by the Muslims, to Venice. The priest and monk were originally rather sceptical and confused, but after arguing and realising that they could also move to Venice and therefore avoid the wrath of the Alexandrians, they agreed. The two traders then uncovered the sarcophagus containing the saint's relics and exposed his body, wrapped in a silk shroud with authenticating seals. The bones were extracted from the robe and seals, and replaced by the body of Claudia, an adjacent saint, so as not to alert the locals should they visit the tomb. The holy body was hastily loaded onto one of the ships, concealed beneath pork meat so that it would not be detected by the Egyptian Muslims and possibly destroyed. Multiple miracles occurred

72 McCleary, 'Note storiche ed archeologiche', pp. 231–232.

73 Tramontin, 'Realtà e leggenda nei racconti marciiani veneti', p. 50; Geary, *Furta sacra*, p. 93.

74 Cracco, 'I testi agiografici'.

75 Dennig-Zettler and Zettler, 'La traslazione di san Marco a Venezia e a Reichenau', p. 699.

76 Tramontin, 'Realtà e leggenda nei racconti marciiani veneti', p. 50.

77 Colombi, *Storie di cronache e reliquie nella Venetia altomedievale*, pp. 77–93. On the dating of the text, see also Veronese, *Reliquie in movimento*, pp. 450–457.

78 *Translatio sancti Marci*, XVI.8 (p. 129).

during the lengthy sea voyage. When they finally arrived near Venice, the voyagers informed the doge of the importance of the goods they carried. They were subsequently welcomed and the holy body was first placed in the ducal palace and later in a new church constructed expressly for the relics on the model of the *Apostoleion* in Constantinople.⁷⁹ The tradition regarding the theft of St Mark's remains is also included in the *Legenda aurea*, with several details derived from the *translatio*.⁸⁰ A hagiographic legend called *Miracula sancti Marci*, written in the first half of the tenth century, tried to attribute the possession of the body of St Mark to Reichenau, where it was said to have arrived thanks to a Venetian.⁸¹

The story of this theft is based on a previous tradition that held the saint to have been the evangeliser of the Venetians, a controversial fact whose historical veracity is unfounded.⁸² This credence, on the other hand, belongs to the vast stream of late antique or, more frequently, early medieval beliefs that, in order to legitimise an episcopal see, traced its origin to an evangelist or apostle.⁸³ In any case, the theft of relics should be interpreted in the context of a past political-religious conflict between the patriarchate of Aquileia and the see of Grado, which began in the sixth century and persisted over the subsequent ones.⁸⁴

According to the legend, which is proposed for the first time in a document written between 783 and 786 by Paul the Deacon,⁸⁵ the Evangelist founded the Church of Venice before heading to Alexandria where he was martyred.⁸⁶

79 Demus, 'Frühmittelalterliche Reminiszenzen', p. 2.

80 Jacobus de Voragine mentions an incorrect year (467), a generic reference to merchants from Venice without naming them ('mercatores Veneti'), and two priests and guardians ('duos presbiteros custodes'). He writes that when the tomb was opened a holy fragrance spread from it. The hagiographer also includes the episode of an accusation regarding the authenticity of the body, which was thought to be a mummy, a reference to voyages to several islands, the arrival in Venice, and ultimately a punishment miracle involving a sceptical merchant Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda Aurea*, vol. 1, LVII.64–77 (pp. 403–404).

81 On this aspect, see Veronese, *Reliquie in movimento*, pp. 368–459.

82 On this issue, see McCleary, 'Note storiche ed archeologiche', pp. 235–238; Tramontin, 'Realtà e leggenda nei racconti marciani veneti'; Fedalto, *San Marco da Aquileia a Venezia*.

83 On the issue of the apostolical foundation of the diocese, see Morini, 'Richiami alle tradizioni di apostolicità', p. 63; Orselli, *L'immaginario religioso della città medievale*, pp. 309, 326, 429, 431; Fedalto, *San Marco da Aquileia a Venezia*, pp. 11–26, 65–77.

84 On this problem, see Cracco, 'I testi agiografici'; D'Antiga, 'Una fonte monastica trascurata', pp. 256–259; Morini, 'Il levante della santità', pp. 873–901; Fedalto, *San Marco da Aquileia a Venezia*, pp. 93–101, 113–154.

85 *Libellus de numero sive ordine episcoporum*, p. 261.

86 The question of the relationship between Aquileia and Grado is well summarised in Dale, 'Inventing a Sacred Past', pp. 55–59.

The origins of the political-ecclesiastical question can be traced back to the sixth century, with the *translatio sedis*, that is, the detachment – temporary according to the Aquileians, permanent for Grado – linked to the escape of the patriarch Paulinus I (558/561–569) from the see of Aquileia to Grado in order to escape the Lombard invasions and save the relics of the protomartyrs of the Aquileian Church, Sts Hermagoras and Fortunatus.⁸⁷ During the synod of Mantua in 827, convened specifically to resolve this question, it was determined that only the see of Aquileia deserved the patriarchal title, based in part on its alleged foundation by St Mark. However, the debate continued with the subsequent Roman synods of 1024 and 1053.⁸⁸

It was precisely in this context that the theft of St Mark's relics occurred, serving as a legitimising strategy for the politics of Rialto, which managed to indissolubly bind itself to the evangeliser of the Venetians.⁸⁹ The placement of the relics in the ducal palace⁹⁰ and only subsequently in the basilica, whose construction was begun by the doge Giustiniano Particiaco (d. 829)⁹¹ and completed by his brother Giovanni (d. ca. 836), is evidence of this intention. The purpose of the *translatio* is not solely to legitimise the Marcian tradition of Grado and, immediately thereafter, of Rialto-Venice by connecting the preaching of the Evangelist, the donation of the legendary chair of the saint, and his relics, but also to fix the image of the nascent ducal power in a symbol that is both political and religious.⁹²

The *translatio* mentions the 'relic' of St Mark's episcopal chair ('beatissimi Marci sedem')⁹³ that, according to legend, was donated by the Emperor of the East, Heraclius, to Elijah (571–ca. 586), patriarch of *Aquileia Nova*, the see of Grado founded in the sixth century after the escape from Aquileia. According to the text, the chair was among the numerous relics recovered by Helena, Constantine's mother, in Egypt and Palestine.⁹⁴ The indication

87 Paschini and Cannata, 'Ermagora, vescovo di Aquileia e Fortunato, diacono'.

88 Tramontin, 'Realtà e leggenda nei racconti marciani veneti', pp. 42–43; Veronese, *Reliquie in movimento*, pp. 386–401.

89 The importance of St Mark at the ducal level is also evidenced by the investiture rite of the doge, who withdrew the saint's *baculus* from the altar where the relic was placed (D'Antiga, 'Una fonte monastica trascurata', p. 259).

90 Carile, 'Venezia e Bisanzio', p. 653.

91 See Pozza, 'Agnello Particiaco'.

92 Fasoli, 'Nascita di un mito', pp. 451–452; Lebe, *Als Markus nach Venedig kam*; Cracco, 'I testi agiografici', pp. 201–202.

93 *Translatio sancti Marci*, VI.4 (p. 116).

94 'quam [sc. chair] Helena, Constantini mater, de Alexandria tulerat', *Translatio sancti Marci*, VI.4 (p. 116). Probably made in the East, the stone seat included a wooden relic from the supposed chair of St Mark (McCleary, 'Note sul testo della "Translatio S. Marci"', p. 230).

relating to the legend of the donation of St Mark's chair, also present in the *Cronica de singulis patriarchis Nove Aquileie*⁹⁵ and in the *Istoria Veneticorum* by John the Deacon,⁹⁶ is added to the presence of the chair that belonged to St Hermagoras,⁹⁷ the first semi-legendary bishop of Aquileia created directly by the Evangelist. The allusion to St Mark's chair is an important element that the Grado church and the embryonic patriarchate of Grado used to legitimate their authority.

The translation was undertaken by Venetian merchants, who would have been in violation of the edicts of Emperor Leo V the Armenian (813–820), to which Venice had adhered, prohibiting trade in the wake of the Muslim takeover. Egypt had been invaded by the Umayyad dynasty between 639 and 646, and Alexandria, the site of one of the earliest Christian patriarchates, had been seized by 'Amru ibn al-Āṣ (ca. 573–664) in 642,⁹⁸ becoming the ducal governor's seat. The explicit reference to Arab domination and purported animosity towards the bodies of saints appears to rationalise the alleged deceit employed by Venetian merchants to relocate the body of St Mark. However, it remains uncertain whether this is a historical event or simply a narrative device used to justify the necessity of transferring the relics to Venice. What is certain is that Egypt was one of the trading partners of the Italic peninsula in ancient times.

An interesting piece of information about St Mark's relics is included in the *Itinerarium Bernardi monachi franci*, a pilgrimage diary written by a Frankish monk named Bernard that describes his journey to Jerusalem around 865.⁹⁹ The monk left Italy and travelled to Alexandria, where he was unable to venerate the body of the Evangelist as it had been seized by the Venetians and taken to Venice.¹⁰⁰ Even if this story should turn out to be false or not a real pilgrimage diary,¹⁰¹ it could be a valuable source to

95 *Cronica de singulis patriarchis Nove Aquileie*, 3–14 (p. 11).

96 John the Deacon, *Istoria Veneticorum*, I.4, 10–13 (p. 52).

97 Carile, 'Venezia e Bisanzio', pp. 641–642.

98 On the conquest of Egypt and Alexandria by the Muslims, see Peev, 'La conquista araba dell'Egitto'.

99 Geary, *Furta sacra*, p. 92. According to Avril and Gaborit, its age ranges between 867 and 870 (Avril and Gaborit, *L'itinerarium Bernardi Monachi*, p. 274).

100 'Venientes vero Venetii navigio tulerunt furtim corpus a custode [or custodibus] eius et deportaverunt ad suam insulam' ('Then the Venetians secretly took the body from its guardian(s) by boat and carried it off to their island'), *Itinerarium Bernardi monachi Franci*, p. 311.

101 Despite the fact that this text has been considered a literary exercise (Tramontin, 'Realtà e leggenda nei racconti marciiani veneti', p. 52) or an altered text elaborated in the Venetian context (Niero, 'Questioni agiografiche su san Marco', p. 20), its authenticity has been reconsidered by Renato D'Antiga due to the references to the places visited, the characters of the time, and the

support the view that the relics had been stolen, at least in the eleventh century, when the first manuscript of the *Itinerarium* was written.

A reference to the sanctuary of St Mark in Alexandria is found in the *Life* of St Elias of Enna (822/823–903; BHG 580), written in Calabria between 930 and 940, according to Giuseppe Rossi Taibbi.¹⁰² The text mentions that the saint, on arriving in Alexandria during one of his journeys, went at night to pray in the shrines of the saints (ἐν τοῖς τῶν Ἀγίων μαρτυρίοις), including that of St Mark.¹⁰³ However, there is no mention of the presence or absence of the relics.

Another source provides some information about the translation of St Mark. According to the *Vita sancti Leucii* composed in the eleventh century, some Venetian merchants arrived in Alexandria and started to collect alms.¹⁰⁴ After a few days, they proceeded to St Mark's church and secretly stole more than half of his remains before escaping.¹⁰⁵ On discovering that the casket had been opened and the relics dispersed, the guardian monks began crying and grieving. When St Leucius – apparently, although it is an anachronism, the aforementioned saint whose relics were later stolen in Brindisi – learned what had occurred, he travelled to Alexandria and removed the relics that had been left by the Venetians, transporting them to another location. This text demonstrates both a desire to explain the story of St Mark's relics and the notoriety of their translation.

As with other cases of theft – such as those of St Nicholas, which we will discuss later – the arrival of his relics was also founded on a hagiographical elaboration claiming that his remains were destined for Venice. This aspect emerges in the cycle of mosaics called *praedestinatio* realised in the Zen Chapel and completed in 1270 – ergo, at a time when the Republic was developing its legend and, through it, its 'imperial' power and image – in which the saint is depicted in Venice during his legendary evangelisation of this territory, and Christ appears to him declaring that his body will return to that city in the future in order to be saved from the Muslims.¹⁰⁶ As we shall see, the recourse to a textual or visual tale of predestination

political situation around the Mediterranean Sea (D'Antiga, 'Una fonte monastica trascurata', p. 255).

102 Rossi Taibbi (ed.), *Vita di sant'Elia il Giovane*. On this saint, see von Falkenhausen, 'Elia il Giovane, santo'; Luongo, 'Itinerari dei santi italo-greci', p. 49; Spallino and Mormino (eds), *Elia il giovane*.

103 *Vita di sant'Elia il Giovane*, 21 (pp. 30–31).

104 *Vita sancti Leucii*, 13 (p. 671).

105 'occulte abstulerunt reliquias beati Marci plusquam medias', *Vita sancti Leucii*, 13 (p. 671).

106 On this aspect see Steadman, 'Imperialism, Economics and Sacred Experience', p. 60.

was sometimes used to corroborate the idea that the thefts were desired by God.

The narrative of this theft can be related to one of the most well-known texts in the hagiographic tradition of the *furta sacra*, the *Translatio et miracula sanctorum Marcellini et Petri*. This work, written by the renowned ‘biographer’ of Charlemagne, Einhard, is to be regarded as one of the earliest or most influential texts inside this tradition. It was composed in the first half of the ninth century and may have influenced the composition of the legend of St Mark, notwithstanding the evident differences between the two texts.

The case of St Mark can also be read in comparison with the Beneventan ones. Actually, a comprehensive study reveals how significantly the example of Benevento differs from that of Venice. While, in fact, the thefts in the cities of southern Italy were generally carried out by force, thus fitting a specific war reading of the phenomenon, Venice seems to have adhered to the strand beyond the Alps which, thanks in part to the *translatio* of Sts Marcellinus and Peter, had established the characteristics of a removal of relics based on secrecy and deception. Arechis II, Sico and Sicard did nothing but steal by force the relics they wished to convey to Benevento, indicating that both they and their hagiographers lacked a precise understanding of the *furta sacra* narrated beyond the Alps.

Venice, on the other hand, possessed this insight, which was likely acquired through interaction with the Carolingians, and as a result was able to elaborate a story of the establishment of the cult of St Mark. Moreover, Venice itself knew how to make full use of the hagiographic tale of theft, employing it in numerous translations that occurred in the centuries that followed, and to which we shall return, at least in part, in the following chapter.

3.4. Theft for compensation: the cases of Larino, Lesina and Lucera

After the cases of Benevento and the significant example of St Mark in Venice, the history of the theft of relics – which is also the history of the *furta sacra* genre – continues with two thefts that occurred in three towns named Larino, Lesina and Lucera, the first of which is today located in Molise and the others in Puglia. In these instances, the hagiographic traditions are more similar to those of Venice and the transalpine territories, despite the fact that the stories are set in southern Italy. Three local saints are the

protagonists of these removals. Sts Primianus and Firmianus were buried in the cathedral of Lesina alongside Sts Alexander and Tellurius,¹⁰⁷ but little else is known about them. A *passio* describing their existence was written in the eleventh or twelfth century, but it lacks historical significance.¹⁰⁸ As in the case of the twelve martyrs, the saints were only entombed in the same location, which led locals to believe that they were related. St Pardus is the third character involved in this removal.¹⁰⁹ According to Ughelli, he was the bishop of a town on the Peloponnesian peninsula, from which he fled to Italy. Here, he got permission from the pope to reside in a hermitage near Lucera, where he constructed two modest churches before his death. Other scholars have noted that he was the first bishop of the Larino diocese, although it is a claim that is difficult to believe.¹¹⁰ Following the first hypothesis, his *vitae* describe a Greek bishop who fled Arian persecution.

Two versions of the same legend concerning the life of St Pardus narrate the thefts.¹¹¹ The first *Vita* (BHL 6464)¹¹² is a possible tenth-century anonymous text retrieved from a sanctorale of the church in Larino.¹¹³ Another version, the *Vita sancti Pardi* (BHL 6465), which Edoardo D'Angelo suggests may have been written in the tenth century,¹¹⁴ could be a revised version of the first text composed by Deacon Radoynus of the same church, even if D'Angelo also points out that BHL 6464 is difficult to date.¹¹⁵ The second text was written on the request of the noblewoman Mirata and includes some episodes not present in the other.

According to the sources, after the arrival of Constans II's army in Apulia in 663 and the Saracen raids, numerous southern cities were destroyed or abandoned, and Lucera in particular was overrun.¹¹⁶ The bishop fled the

107 On the saint, see Lucchesi, 'Alessandro, Firmiano, Primiano e Tellurio'; Mammarella, *I santi martiri larinesi*.

108 Pollidori, *Vita et antiqua monimenta sancti Pardi episcopi*, pp. 52–61; Tria, *Memorie storiche*, pp. 623–631; Mammarella, *Larino sacra. II*.

109 On this saint, see Mongelli, 'Pardo'; Mammarella, *San Pardo*, pp. 21–34.

110 See Otranto, 'Pardo vescovo di Salpi'; Schiraldi, 'La Diocesi di Lucera', p. 265–266.

111 Papasidero, *Translatio sanctitatis*, pp. 105–109.

112 Tria, *Memorie storiche*, pp. 632–633.

113 Pollidori, *Vita et antiqua monimenta sancti Pardi episcopi*, p. 20.

114 D'Angelo, 'Agiografia latina del Mezzogiorno', p. 51.

115 D'Angelo, 'Agiografia latina del Mezzogiorno', p. 51; see also Pollidori, *Vita et antiqua monimenta sancti Pardi episcopi*, p. 21; Mammarella, *San Pardo*, p. 22. According to Lucchesi, it might date back to the eleventh century (Lucchesi, 'Alessandro, Firmiano, Primiano e Tellurio').

116 Regarding the problematic question of the abandonment of the episcopal see of Lucera, see Corsi, 'L'episcopato pugliese nel Medioevo', pp. 24–25. About the destruction of Lucera, see Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, V.7.11–12 (p. 147): 'Luceriam quoque, opulentam Apuliae civitatem, expugnatam fortius invadens diruit, ad solum usque prostravit' ('He also violently

vanquished city with other religious leaders, eventually reaching the site where the city of Lesina would be constructed.¹¹⁷ These preceding circumstances help explain the initial theft of relics. The inhabitants of the newly founded city of Lesina, while visiting the areas devastated by the Saracens, discovered the abandoned tomb of Sts Primianus and Firmianus in Larino and decided to transfer their relics to their new city ('furtim tulerunt duo corpora sanctorum Primiani et Firmiani').¹¹⁸ After some time, the locals, on going into the countryside surrounding the city, realised that the sacred remains had been stolen, and were reduced to weeping and despairing.¹¹⁹ Thanks to a miraculous revelation, they realised that the robbers were from the new city of Lesina and resolved to travel to Lucera – without going to Lesina instead – to demand the return of the stolen relics. On their arrival near the city wall, they discovered the tomb of St Pardus. Opening it, they found his body, intact but for one thumb ('repererunt sacrum corpus intactum, minus tantum uno pollice').¹²⁰ Using a linen sheet, they reverently removed the bones and returned to Larino in procession.

These thefts are especially interesting because they reveal a certain attitude towards saints' relics. The first case is linked to the previously discussed typology of theft in cases of inadequate worship; the sepulchre of Sts Primianus and Firmianus lay deserted – probably in a church, although the text is not explicit, that the Saracens had destroyed. For this reason, the inhabitants of Lesina might have taken their remains without meeting any opposition. The second theft is more significant than the first, because it allows us to reflect on the mechanism of 'compensation of sanctity' that was triggered: since the relics of the two patron saints had been stolen, the holy body of another saint – that of the city that had stolen the relics – could be the ideal compensation for their loss. Despite the fact that each city was associated with one or more patron saints whose remains were often stored there for many years or even centuries, a patron might be substituted by

attacked Luceria, a wealthy city of Apulia, and destroyed it, razing it to the ground'), and the *Life* of St Barbatius of Benevento: 'Pergensque opulentissimam urbem Luceriam gravissimis preliis cepit [...], ad solum usque prostravit' ('And continuing, he captured the very wealthy city of Luceria after severe battles [...], razing it to the ground'), *Vita Barbati episcopi Beneventani*, 4, 21–22 (p. 558). On the expedition of Constans II see Maisano, 'La spedizione italiana dell'imperatore Costante II'.

117 On this issue see, Corsi, *La spedizione italiana di Costante II*, pp. 65, 122–125; Schiraldi, 'La comunità cristiana di Lucera', pp. 55–56.

118 *Vita sancti Pardi*, p. 3.

119 According to local historian Pino Miscione, the site where the remains of St Pardus were enshrined was St Giusto (Miscione, 'Una rilettura della figura storica di San Pardo').

120 *Vita sancti Pardi*, p. 4.

another in order to maintain miraculous protection for the city and its population.

The two instances examined demonstrate the relationship between historical background and theft. Often, hagiographers have written legends in which the theft of sacred remains is merely a means of legitimising their ownership. However, there are cases in which the removal is a direct result of their abandoned condition. The examples of Sts Firmianus and Primianus conform to this typology and enable us to view the theft of relics as more than just a mythopoeic procedure. In addition, another hagiographical document provides evidence of the relocation of the cult of the two martyr saints from Larino to Lesina. The tale of the translation of St Adam's relics, which occurred in Guglionesi in 1102, provides an intriguing example of confirmation of a theft and the growth of a cult associated with a robbery. According to the story, there was in fact a mysterious holy man named Benedict who was entreated by an angel to transfer St Adam's remains. The anonymous hagiographer claims that Benedict attended the feast of Sts Primianus and Firmianus in Lesina since he was a pious person.¹²¹ The text alludes clearly to Primianus, replacing the name of the other saint with the word *fratrum* to emphasise the idea that the two martyrs were brothers. Moreover, the hagiographer mentions that Benedict had to journey to Lesina, the city where the two saints were taken after the theft. This information is important because it enables us to see how the cult was created after the translation. The significance of the feast of Sts Primianus and Firmianus, which Benedict reverently visited, is also a historical datum that demonstrates the success of the new cult in Lesina. After more than a century – the robbery occurred in 842, and Benedict's story takes place in 1102 – the devotion to the two saints was strong enough to attract pilgrims from various regions.

3.5. The body of St Juvenal in Narni and the legends regarding the theft of St Magnus

In the second half of the ninth century, a hagiographic source describes another theft that belonged to the siege of war type. It involves the removal of

121 'Accidit autem ut festum beatissimorum martyrum Primiani et fratrum eius [...] annuntiarent [...] atque honeste Lesinam et veneranter perrexit' ('However, the feast of the blessed martyrs Primianus and his brother [...] was announced and he [Benedict] went to Lesina honourably and with reverence'), *Historia translationis sancti Adami*, 1 (p. 329).

the remains of Sts Juvenal, Fausta and Cassius at the beginning of the tenth century. There is little available information regarding St Juvenal.¹²² According to his *Vita* (BHL 4614), a text composed in Narni during the Carolingian period on the basis of a previous early medieval text, he was African by birth, a *presbyter* and expert in medicine, as well as an evangeliser.¹²³ Along with him, the *translatio* mentions two other saints: Sts Cassius and Fausta. The first is cited in both the *Dialogi*¹²⁴ and the *Homiliae in Evangelium* (II, 37) of Gregory the Great. In 536, he is said to have become the bishop of Narni,¹²⁵ while St Fausta is supposed to have been his wife and was venerated with him.¹²⁶

The theft of the relics is narrated in the *Translatio Iuvenalis et Cassii episcoporum Narniensium Lucam* (BHL 4615–4615a),¹²⁷ composed by an anonymous hagiographer no later than the tenth century.¹²⁸ The text should be placed in relation to the already mentioned *Vita sancti Iuvenalis*, an additional text that was probably written to create an important hagiographic dossier of St Juvenal. According to the legend, the relics were taken when Margrave Adalbert of Tuscany sought to besiege and conquer Narni.¹²⁹ Initially, all his attempts failed – also due to the protection of the saints – but eventually he was able to enter the city by deception. Adalbert and his army arrived at the cathedral in Narni, where the holy bodies of the three saints were preserved. They removed them from their reliquaries and transported them by cart to the cathedral of St Fridianus in Lucca. Only after a period, and with the encouragement of supernatural signs, did a delegation from Narni attempt to request the return of St Juvenal's body to Narni.¹³⁰ The hagiographer also furnishes further details concerning the fate of the body subsequent to its transfer to Lucca. The impiety of the transfer is underscored by a series of supernatural occurrences, predominantly linked to atmospheric phenomena

122 On this saint, see Caraffa, 'Giovenale, vescovo di Narni'; Susi, 'Memoria e identità agiografica'; D'Angelo, *Narni e i suoi santi*, pp. 87–131.

123 Susi, 'Memoria e identità agiografica', pp. 222–223; D'Angelo, 'Bibliotheca Hagiographica Umbriae', pp. 316–317.

124 Gregory I, *Dialogi*, 2, III.6 (pp. 26–27); IV.58 (pp. 344–345).

125 See Caraffa, 'Cassio, vescovo di Narni'; Susi, 'Memoria e identità agiografica', pp. 203–238; D'Angelo, *Narni e i suoi santi*, pp. 131–139.

126 Gordini, 'Fausta di Narni'.

127 Text BHL 4615a is another version of the *Translatio*. It was written in Lucca, as evidenced by certain peculiarities at the beginning and end (D'Angelo, *Narni e i suoi santi*, p. 124).

128 Susi, 'Memoria e identità agiografica', p. 236; D'Angelo, 'Bibliotheca Hagiographica Umbriae', pp. 317–318.

129 On Adalbert I, see Fasoli, 'Adalberto di Toscana' 1.

130 On this theft, see Papisidero, *Translatio sanctitatis*, pp. 68–70.

(hailstorms and fiery rains) and repercussions on the livelihoods of the population (contaminated wells and the death of animals). All these signs are interpreted – by Narni’s hagiographer – as evidence that the saint’s body was meant to be returned to the city of Narni.

According to the most recent studies, the Margrave of Tuscany may be identified with Adalbert II the Rich (d. 915), who was Adalbert I’s son.¹³¹ On the basis of the *translatio*, Edoardo D’Angelo hypothesised that he was in Rome in 901, during Pope Benedict IV’s (d. 903) coronation of Louis the Blind (d. 928), and was given the position of imperial delegate. On this occasion he may have come into conflict with Demetrius, the delegate from Narni to the pope. According to this viewpoint, the siege of the city was probably the consequence of this opposition, perhaps during the pontificate of Pope Sergius III (904–911).¹³²

Regardless of the precise historical motivations that led to the siege of Narni, this example must be compared to the cases already examined in Benevento, in which different dukes-princes stole relics as a sign of conquest to demonstrate their superiority. The siege of Adalbert of Tuscany, too, must be viewed as an indication of his desire to subjugate Narni; the stealing of relics is merely a consequence of this and a means of proving his power. At the same time, the decision to retrieve the relics of saints stolen from one’s own city – in this case, Lucca – is an attempt to gain the protection of those saints by returning the relics to their original location.¹³³ In all contexts, relics of saints are regarded as valuable, among the most important riches of towns, not because of their monetary worth, but due to their status and the supernatural protection they could provide.¹³⁴

This episode, alongside the account of St Trofimenia, narrates the restitution of relics to the community from which they had been pilfered, rendering it a text of significant interest.¹³⁵ Moreover, in both instances, the saints had not consented to the transfer of their relics; in fact, there were numerous indications of resistance, such as the bleeding of the relics. The restitution of their bodies further affirms the belief that they were deemed capable of deciding where they should be venerated.

A distinct case, illustrating the endurance and coexistence of various types of *furta sacra* narrative throughout the early medieval centuries, is

131 On Adalbert II the Rich, see Fasoli, ‘Adalberto di Toscana’ 2; D’Angelo, ‘Bibliotheca Hagiographica Umbriae’, p. 318.

132 D’Angelo, *Narni e i suoi santi*, pp. 121–122; D’Angelo, ‘Bibliotheca Hagiographica Umbriae’, pp. 317–318.

133 See also Wüscher-Becchi, ‘Il sepolcro di San Giovenale’.

134 D’Angelo, *Narni e i suoi santi*, pp. 121–122.

135 See § 3.2.

that of St Magnus of Anagni or Trani's relics, whose theft dates back to the late ninth century.¹³⁶ In this case, like those of Sts Primianus and Firmianus, the remains are supposed to have been stolen without any obstruction, given the backdrop of an abandoned tomb. According to hagiographical sources, St Magnus was the successor of Bishop Redento of Trani.¹³⁷ In the third century, after preaching the gospel in Apulia, Campania and Latium, he was martyred in Fondi, in central Italy, during the persecution of Decius. The *passiones* (BHL 5168 and 5169) narrate that his body was recovered and buried by a religious man named Paternus after his martyrdom ('in eodem cubiculo corpus viri Dei humavit').¹³⁸ His cult is attested by the Martyrology of Jerome at *Fabrateria vetus*, present-day Ceccano, even though some scholars have pointed out that the site of his tomb has to be identified as *Fabrateria nova*.¹³⁹ During the Early Middle Ages, a chapel was dedicated to him there ('ecclesia sancti Magni iuxta viam Silicatom').¹⁴⁰ Although the city of Anagni was the centre of his cult, the relics were seized from Fondi, where they were said to be kept after his death, and taken to Veroli, where they remained until they were purchased by the inhabitants of Anagni.

The theft is narrated in two liturgical texts (BHL 5175) that were probably composed after the ninth century since they contain specific historical references.¹⁴¹ According to the tales, on the basis of divine inspiration a man named Plato, referred to in the text as a tribune (*tribunus*), decided to retrieve St Magnus' relics, which were sealed in a small tomb in Fondi, not far from Veroli, due to their state of abandonment ('in [loco] praenominato oblivione et negligentia iam diu positum esse cognosceret').¹⁴² A sign of their importance is the fact that the relics were enshrined in a marmoreal tomb ('in sarcophago marmoreo').¹⁴³ After taking them, he returned to his city, where the bishop – in the text published by the Bollandists named *Avitus*, but the list of bishops does not include this name,¹⁴⁴ so that Giuseppe Cappelletti

136 On this saint, see Fenicchia, 'Magno, vescovo di Trani'. On the saints of Fondi, see Luongo, 'Agiografia fondana', pp. 212–221; Simonetti, 'Addendum su san Magno di Trani e di Fondi', pp. 341–346; Fiocchi Nicolai, 'Il culto di San Magno a Fondi'.

137 Gams, *Series episcoporum*, p. 933.

138 *Acta sancti Magni episcopi Tranensis et martyris*, pp. 290–291; 'tulit corpus beati episcopi et martyris Magni, et sepelivit eum', *Passio sancti Magni*, 17 (p. 716).

139 Fiocchi Nicolai, 'Il culto di San Magno a Fondi', p. 23; Luongo, 'Agiografia fondana', p. 214.

140 Lanzoni, *Le diocesi d'Italia*, p. 158.

141 Papisidero, *Translatio sanctitatis*, pp. 109–111.

142 *Translatio Verulam inde Anagniam*, 35 (p. 708).

143 *Translatio Verulam inde Anagniam*, 35 (p. 708).

144 See also Cappelletti, *Le chiese d'Italia*, VI, p. 291; and Gams, *Series Episcoporum*, pp. 738–739.

subsequently removed it¹⁴⁵ – was waiting to place them, in common accord with the local inhabitants, in the crypt of St Andrew's church. After a time, the Saracens destroyed the city, and the relics, which were deemed useless, were discarded. The inhabitants of Anagni then decided to purchase them.¹⁴⁶

Based on the references in the texts, which refer to the Saracen destruction of Fondi ('monasterio sancti Martyris funditus a Saracenis devastato'),¹⁴⁷ this removal must have occurred in the ninth century, according to some scholars between 872 and 882 or between 844 and 847.¹⁴⁸ It was a way to acquire possession of St Magnus' remains in order to avert their total destruction, as in the majority of cases during the Early Middle Ages. At the time, the relics were not venerated, and the only option was to transfer them to another church, as the mysterious tribune did. The two liturgical texts incorporate information concerning the primary removal, from Fondi to Veroli, to explain the history of the arrival of St Magnus' relics. In reality, the texts were composed in Anagni, and the hagiographers' purpose was to explain how they got there. The presence of miracles in the narrative demonstrates that the more relevant translation for the author is the later one; indeed, the hagiographer describes supernatural occurrences mostly in relation to the second transfer from Veroli to Anagni.

In addition, the mention of a tribune – and a bishop – permits us to reflect on the author's choice of including different data in the same text. It appears that he recorded different stages of the story: the removal that probably occurred in Late Antiquity or the very beginning of the Early Middle Ages; the devotion in Veroli; the presence of the Saracens and their attempt to destroy the relics; and the sale to the inhabitants of Anagni.

Although this is the most prevalent legend regarding the relics of St Magnus, other hagiographic traditions assert that they were in other locations. A fascinating example is the connection with the church of Sts Michael and Magnus in Rome.¹⁴⁹ A text released by Ughelli and the Bollandists deriving from an epigraph enshrined in the Vatican narrates a different scenario. According to this source, possibly composed between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, at the time of Pope Leo IV (847–855), three soldiers and a nun from the Netherlands¹⁵⁰ were returning to their country when

145 *Acta sancti Magni episcopi tranensis et martyris*, p. 291.

146 Bozóky, 'Le rôle du petit peuple', p. 549.

147 *Translatio Verulam inde Anagniam*, 44 (p. 709).

148 See Volpi, *Vita di san Magno*, p. 91.

149 AASS, *Augusti*, 3, pp. 710–711.

150 'Ilderado de Groninga, et Leomot de Stavera, et Iaro, et Celdui ancilla Dei de Slinga', AASS, *Augusti*, 3, p. 711, no. 50.

they discovered and took the body of St Magnus in Fondi ('hi beati Magni corpus in loco, qui dicitur Fundi, invenerunt').¹⁵¹ During their journey with it to Sutri, they were visited by numerous supernatural signs and dreams that emphasised the importance of transporting the body to Rome, specifically to St Michael's church.¹⁵² This brief episode contains no explicit references to theft, but the desire to steal the body discovered in Fondi resembles the actions of the *tribunus* Plato, who knew where the relics were and travelled there with the intention of transporting them to Veroli. The episode is helpful in clarifying the complex conditions sometimes surrounding saints' relics, and the existence of various legends concerning the same holy body.

3.6. An attempt at theft: the case of St Appianus

The following case is not a theft, but rather a failed effort to steal the relics of a saint, a typology of translation well attested also beyond the Alps.¹⁵³ According to the sources, St Appianus was probably a monk from the monastery of St Peter at Ciel d'Oro, which was founded in the eighth century and first mentioned in Paul the Deacon's *Historia Langobardorum*, in Pavia.¹⁵⁴ On his abbot's request, he travelled to Comacchio, a small port or settlement on the Adriatic coast, to examine the monastery's stocks of salt, remaining there for pastoral purposes. After his death, which presumably took place in the ninth century, he was buried in a modest chapel dedicated to St Gervasius in the Lagosanto neighbourhood near the city,¹⁵⁵ after which a second church was constructed in his honour.¹⁵⁶ Some years later, certain inhabitants of Pavia went to Comacchio to purchase salt; recalling the presence there of St Appianus' body, they entered the little chapel at night ('nocturnis horis')¹⁵⁷

¹⁵¹ AASS, *Augusti*, 3, p. 711, no. 50.

¹⁵² See Hülsen, *Le Chiese di Roma*, p. 388. On this legend, see Torriggio, *Narratione dell'origine dell'antichissima chiesa*; Blok, 'Le antiche memorie dei Frisoni', pp. 56–60.

¹⁵³ That of St Arnolf of Soissons, around 1090, whose body was transferred by monks from the French monastery of Saint Médard, is an example of an attempted theft (Hariulfus, *Vita Arnulfi episcopi Suessionensis*, p. 900; see also Geary, *Furta sacra*, p. 149).

¹⁵⁴ Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, VI.58.28–29 (p. 185). During the Lombard period, the relics of St Augustine were purchased and arrived here from Cagliari. On this tradition, see Hallenbeck, *The Transferal of the Relics of St. Augustine of Hippo*. On this saint, see Zimmermann, 'Appiano di Comacchio, monaco'; Spinelli, 'Sant'Appiano di Comacchio'; Cantarella, 'Sant'Appiano'; Cantarella, 'Nota su Sant'Appiano di Comacchio'.

¹⁵⁵ *Vita sancti Apiani monachi*, 7 (p. 320).

¹⁵⁶ Spinelli, 'Sant'Appiano di Comacchio', pp. 57–58.

¹⁵⁷ *Vita sancti Apiani monachi*, 10 (p. 320).

and took the corpse with them to their ship on the river. However, when they boarded the vessel, it was unable to travel in the desired direction due to a strong headwind. Eventually, it sailed in the direction of the wind and arrived opposite Comacchio, where it was decided to leave the holy body in the church of St Maurus because of the difficulties of completing the translation against the saint's will.

This information comes from the *Vita sancti Apiani monachi* (BHL 619),¹⁵⁸ a text composed between the end of the eleventh century and the beginning of the twelfth,¹⁵⁹ possibly at the church of St Maurus¹⁶⁰ or at St Giacomo di Cella Volana,¹⁶¹ but, in any case, elaborated in a monastic context. The legend consists of multiple texts, including a sermon, a hymn, a life and a list of miracles. According to Glauco Maria Cantarella, this dossier might have been used to submit a formal request for the canonisation of St Appianus,¹⁶² while Giovanni Spinelli thinks that it has a purely liturgical character.¹⁶³ Based on the construction date of the church and on the phrase that starts the episode, pointing out that a long time had passed ('Transacto itaque multo tempore'),¹⁶⁴ the attempted theft could be dated to the ninth or tenth century.¹⁶⁵

Perhaps the attempt at translation occurred around 932, when Comacchio was partially abandoned as a result of Venetian raids.¹⁶⁶ This episode is highly significant for the study of the history of theft of relics because it demonstrates and emphasises a very crucial dynamic in these legends, namely the saints' will: only if they agreed to the removal could it occur. Simultaneously, an episode like that, if included in a larger hagiographic dossier with miracles performed by the saint, could further underline his constant protection (*patrocinium*) of the city and his desire to remain there. Also for this reason, this attempt at translation is part of a specific hagiographic strategy designed to consolidate the cult during the period of the *comuni*, when finding a powerful patron saint was crucial.¹⁶⁷ This argument may also be supported by the fact that the dossier of St Appianus

158 *Vita sancti Apiani monachi*, 10 (p. 320); see also: Tomea, 'L'agiografia dell'Italia settentrionale', p. 139.

159 Geary, *Furta sacra*, p. 149.

160 Ropa, 'Le scuole ecclesiastiche', p. 77.

161 Spinelli, 'Sant'Appiano di Comacchio', pp. 65–66.

162 Cantarella, 'Sant'Appiano', p. 154.

163 Spinelli, 'Sant'Appiano di Comacchio', pp. 49–50.

164 *Vita sancti Apiani monachi*, 10 (p. 320).

165 Geary, *Furta sacra*, p. 106; Spinelli, 'Sant'Appiano di Comacchio', pp. 55–56; Papasidero, *Translatio sanctitatis*, pp. 124–126.

166 Spinelli, 'Sant'Appiano di Comacchio', p. 56.

167 Geary, *Furta sacra*, p. 106; Spinelli, 'Sant'Appiano di Comacchio', p. 47.

is contained in a legendary composed between the end of the ninth century and the beginning of the twelfth, during the period of the birth of the medieval town councils in northern Italy.¹⁶⁸

According to one hypothesis, since there was a saint with the same name in Pavia, most likely a local bishop, it is possible that the narration of the attempted theft was used as evidence to corroborate the presence of St Appianus' relics in Comacchio, and not in Pavia.¹⁶⁹ Alternatively, it could have been an endeavour to conceal the theft by claiming that the inhabitants of Pavia were unable to exhume the remains due to the intervention of supernatural forces.¹⁷⁰ The attempted theft reveals an additional significant element, previously evident in St Mark's case and essential, too, in that of St Nicholas: the commercial world and its dynamics.

This case offers intriguing insights into the interplay between trade routes and the transportation of relics. While it is plausible that the saint arrived in Comacchio during his lifetime and the attempted theft is motivated by the desire to return him to his homeland, these events occur against the backdrop of the salt trade from the Comacchio salt flats. Similar to the successful translations of St Mark and St Nicholas tied explicitly to the actions of merchants, this instance reinforces the notion that the trading of products by sea or across land was a highly important mechanism allowing cults, relics and beliefs to travel from one place to another.

3.7. Two female saints: Sts Margaret and Euprepia

In 908 a theft of relics involving Sts Margaret of Antioch¹⁷¹ and Euprepia¹⁷² is said to have occurred. According to the tradition, the first was the daughter of a heathen priest. After her mother's death, she was raised in the Christian faith, and then martyred after refusing to marry the governor of the province. Her Greek name as set down in the *passio* was Marine, but in the Latin tradition (BHL 5303) it was changed to Margaret. The second saint mentioned in the hagiography is St Euprepia, who was the handmaid of St Ilaria. She died alongside Degna and Eumenia and her owner, following the burial of the remains of St Afra, Ilaria's daughter.

168 Spinelli, 'Sant'Appiano di Comacchio', p. 50.

169 Amore, 'Appiano di Pavia'; Spinelli, 'Sant'Appiano di Comacchio', pp. 66–70.

170 Spinelli, 'Sant'Appiano di Comacchio', p. 54.

171 On this saint, see Sauguet and Celletti, 'Marina (Margherita)'; Ciammaruconi, 'Il Monastero di S. Margherita a Cori', pp. 72–76.

172 On this saint, see Egger, 'Afra, Ilaria, Degna, Eumenia e Euprepia'.

According to the previously mentioned version of the *passio* by Pseudus-Theotimus, St Margaret's body was recovered by the author of the text after her death, placed in a container (*scrinium*) bearing an inscription, and then transferred to Antioch.¹⁷³

The theft of their relics is included in a hagiographic tale that is the result of the Bollandists' combination of multiple texts in their *Acta Sanctorum*, which we will refer to by the title *Translatio sanctae Margaritae in Tusciam* (BHL 5311).¹⁷⁴ According to the sources, in 908 Prince Andronicus – about whom we have no historical information – devastated Pisidia, and the church containing the relics of the two saints was also in danger. The prior, Augustin, decided to transfer their remains to Pavia, to keep them in the church of St Syrus, most likely the cathedral.¹⁷⁵ An elderly priest revealed to him the location of their remains. One night, along with two relatives, Luca and Robertus, he entered the church, dug up the tomb and discovered the relics enshrined in a precious porphyry recipient (*concham*)¹⁷⁶ that bore an inscription stating that it contained the holy martyr Margaret's remains:

*Margarita hic est ter quinis martyr in annis,
Virgineam coelo reddidit ipsa animam.*

*Here Margaret, a fifteen-year-old martyr,
returned her virgin soul to heaven.*¹⁷⁷

The prior then travelled to Brindisi, Rome, Sutri, and finally the monastery of St Peter in Valle Perlata, close to Montefiascone, where he died of an illness. After some time – in 1185 – the relics, which included St Margaret's bones and St Euprepia's head, were translated from the monastery to Montefiascone.

The *translatio* mentions historical characters such as Pope Sergius III, King Berengar I of Italy (888–924) and the Emperor of the Sacred Roman Empire (from 915), even if there is no lack of historical and chronological inaccuracies. We know nothing of Eusebius,¹⁷⁸ the patriarch of Antioch, or Prince Andronicus.

173 Pseudus-Theotimus, *Passio sanctae Margaritae*, 52–54 (p. 196).

174 AASS, *Iulii*, 5, p. 40, no. 5; on the theft, see Papisidero, *Translatio sanctitatis*, pp. 77–78.

175 AASS, *Iulii*, 5, p. 42, n. h.

176 Du Cange *et al.*, *Glossarium*, vol 2, col. 477a.

177 *Translatio sanctae Margaritae in Tusciam*, 3 (p. 41). As mentioned previously, the *passio* also describes the container and the inscription in which her body was said to be deposited.

178 AASS, *Iulii*, 5, p. 40, no. 1.

The cult of Margaret arrived in Montefiascone, and numerous miracles are listed at the conclusion of the hagiographic tale. They are evidence of the beginning of her cult and of how the alleged theft allowed the new church where the remains were placed to become an appropriate site of worship.¹⁷⁹ The hagiographer's goal was to trace the origin of the devotion to St Margaret – and only secondarily to St Euprepia – from the translation of their remains to Montefiascone to the elevation of the basilica dedicated to her to the status of a cathedral,¹⁸⁰ thanks to the Papal bull *Cum illius*, emanated by Urban V on 31 August 1369. It is therefore quite plausible that the legend was penned relatively late.

This case, which occurred around the beginning of the tenth century, is another instance of the desire to protect relics from destruction. At the same time, the extremely unclear narration and the historically unreliable data prompt us to consider it a late elaboration characterised by a number of *topoi* of the *furta sacra* genre, such as the night-time action and the need to steal the relics undetected.

The example of Sts Margaret and Euprepia enables us to demonstrate how relatively insignificant the transfer of female relics supported by hagiographic legends was in the Early Middle Ages. This could be explained by the importance placed on the acquisition of the bones of apostles, bishops and monks over those of female saints. The same held true during the Central Middle Ages – a period during which there was only one further female theft, that of St Agatha – after which the recognition of female sanctity began to increase. This trend is comparable to that appertaining to the thefts that occurred beyond the Alps. According to the list of cases provided by Patrick Geary in his volume, of the fifty-one thefts or attempted thefts that occurred in Europe between the ninth and eleventh centuries—a slightly different period than that covered in this chapter – only nine involved female saints: one apostle (Mary Magdalene), four martyrs and other holy virgins (Anastasia, Fausta, Foy/Faith, Lewinna, Speciosa, Ursula), one empress (Helena) and the daughter of a local count (Regiswind).¹⁸¹ As in our case, the majority of the stolen female saints are martyrs, confirming the significance of this typology of saints not only when considering relic theft in general, but especially when studying the female presence.

179 *Translatio sanctae Margaritae in Tusciam*, 7–11 (pp. 41–42). Pisa, Orvieto and Bagnoregio are among the cities where miracles took place and are mentioned in the translations.

180 'ipsa basilica in cathedralem ecclesiam est erecta sub vocabulo Margaritae virginis' ('this basilica was elevated to a cathedral church under the name of the virgin Margaret'), *Translatio sanctae Margaritae in Tusciam*, 21 (p. 44).

181 Geary, *Furta sacra*, pp. 149–156.

There is certainly no inherent bias against the efficacy of relics belonging to female saints. Rather, the issue stems from a simple statistical disparity, as the incidence of male saints (among them apostles, martyrs – including military saints, a compulsorily male category – confessors and bishops) far outweighs the number of female ones. Consequently, when female remains were transferred, they exhibited the same thaumaturgical effects as male ones and were similarly revered as patrons of monasteries. However, the discourse may vary in the context of cities, as evidenced by significant centres like Benevento, Venice and later Bari, which focused primarily on specific male saints distinguished by their authoritative roles (such as those of apostle or bishop) that were closely related to their gender.

The cases mentioned above represent some of the final entries in our corpus, probably occurring towards the conclusion of the Early Middle Ages. In this period, a new modality for explaining the thefts of relics emerged: they were no longer the result of sieges and conflicts – also due to a changed historical context – but rather the secret actions of individuals who tried to take and transport saints' remains. Secrecy became the most significant feature of the removals carried out in the subsequent centuries, as well as the main linguistic and historical indicator of the hagiographers' aim of constructing a specific story belonging to the *furta sacra* tradition. For these reasons, too, St Mark's legend remained the most influential model for many centuries.

4. Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages (950–1150)

Abstract: The fourth chapter examines stories of sacred theft during the Central Middle Ages (950–1150). It places particular emphasis on bishops who played important roles in the theft of relics, such as those of St Himerius in Amelia and Sts Gratinian and Felinus in Perugia. A section is devoted to the case of the relics of St Nicholas, which were transferred from Myra to Bari, arriving in Venice or, according to another text, in Benevento. This series of tales also inspired the translation of the relics of St John the Baptist from Myra to Genoa at the end of the eleventh century. The chapter explores other cases, including two further clandestine translations set in Venice, and one of the few narratives featuring a female protagonist, St Agatha.

Keywords: *furta sacra*; St Nicholas; St John the Baptist; St Agatha; St Isidore of Chios

4.1. Thefts in the Central Middle Ages and the case of St Metrone

The last period to consider spans from 950 to 1150. It is a crucial range because many of the prominent thefts occurred precisely in these two centuries. The first case is that of the relics of St Metrone, which were stolen from Verona because of the neglect of the locals. This example should be regarded as confirmation of a specific tendency in which saints' bodies that were not particularly well cared for were more exposed to the risk of theft or the composition of legends about their secret translation. The *topos* of the translation during the night is characterised by a high degree of consistency, as evidenced by the thefts of St Himerius (965), St John of Spoleto (between 973 and 983), and Sts Felinus and Gratian (963). These three examples show a common structure and include some references to the rituals performed at the moment of the opening of the tomb, such as

the prayers to St Himerius to let his body be moved elsewhere. This detail showed a clear consciousness that the theft had to be accompanied by a supplication, a ritual moment thanks to which the saints could be begged to transfer their home to another place. A crucial passage in the history of the theft of relics is represented by the translation of St Nicholas from Myra. This tradition, based on legends written in Bari (1087) and in Venice (ca. 1100), is one of the most famous cases of the *furta sacra* genre, which involve many elements of preceding hagiographic texts.

The theft of St Adam in Guglionesi (1102), too, includes several elements such as the stealing of the saint's body during the night, the performance of many miracles, and the use of force – which was not only a feature of siege conditions (as observed in Benevento and Narni), but also a coercive method employed by groups of merchants (Bari and Venice) or citizens (Guglionesi) to attain the desired remains. Unlike the first cases of the Early Middle Ages, which have already been linked to the fact that the relics had been abandoned, in the later ones the presence of armed men confirms how the remains were considered something to be obtained (or defended) with weapons.

The thefts of these centuries are marked by significant attention to the cooperation of the saints. For this reason, after the cases of St Himerius and St Nicholas, the instances of St Stephen protomartyr (1110) and St Isidore of Chios (1125), which both took place in Venice, also contain references to praying to the saints to let the thieves translate them (*evocatio*). The growing space dedicated in the legends to invocations to the saints confirms the rising role of the idea of the will of the saints, who in many cases show their specific intention to be translated to another place; that is, another dwelling. The increasing presence of the *topos* of the saint who wanted to be translated helped communities that had been robbed to consider the theft something authorised by God. The cases in which saints opposed the translations are very few. In this period, the growing attention to the theft of relics is also related to the necessity to demonstrate their authenticity. For this reason, specific hagiographic dossiers full of miracles were composed to address the question about the real presence of the body of the saints that had been stolen, as in the cases of St Nicolas and St Stephen. Among the last thefts analysed is that of St Agatha, transferred from Constantinople to Catania in 1126, which represents, again, the sole female instance identified.

We chose to commence this section with the theft of the body of St Metrone – who probably lived in the eighth century or at the beginning of the ninth – in 960. Bishop Ratherius (d. 974) indicates that Metrone, after a lifetime of penitence, decided to chain himself to a stone in front

of the church of St Vitalis in Verona to atone for his sins.¹ According to the hagiographic sources, he threw the key to the chain into the Adige River, asking God to let it be found only once his sins had been forgiven. Seven years later, a fisherman caught a fish with a key inside.²

During his third stay in Verona in 962, Bishop Raterius wrote a text entitled *De translatione sancti Metronis* (BHL 5942),³ in which he presents a long accusation against the inhabitants of Verona for not being able to preserve the remains of their local saint, buried in the church of St Vitalis. The text narrates how in that year, the body of St Metrone was stolen by the inhabitants of a nearby city. It is not a hagiographic source but a form of libel through which the bishop perhaps tried to distance himself from the accusations that he had been implicated in the theft.⁴

Differently from the other tales analysed so far, there is no clear account of the theft, just some generic references. The aim of Raterius was not to talk about the translation *per se* but to reprimand the inhabitants of Verona. According to the information he included in the denunciation, St Metrone's body had been enshrined in a suburban church and was stolen due to the negligence of the locals.⁵ Despite that, many pilgrims and sick people continued to go there to venerate the saint, underlining how the cult could survive after a theft, as in the aforementioned case of St Trofimenia, who was worshipped in her church in Minori even after the translation of her remains to Benevento by Sicard.

This theft shows us how one of the main motivations for thefts, also in the tenth century, could be the inadequate care that was being taken of saints' bodies. Those that were not well guarded and/or were not kept in the central church risked being seized by nearby cities. At the same time, Raterius' invective helps us reflect on the reality of the phenomenon of the theft of relics beyond the hagiographic rhetoric. The bishop's mention of specific references to the theft of a holy body – in a text which was not a hagiographic legend written to enlarge the cult of a saint – is a sign that something happened, or at the very least was thought to have happened.

1 On Raterius, see Monticelli, *Raterio vescovo di Verona*; Cavallari, *Raterio e Verona*; Cervato, *"Nasum semper tenet in libro"*; Rossi, 'Raterio vescovo'.

2 On the theme of the key inside a fish, see Papisidero, 'Simboli, modelli narrativi e miracoli sui pesci', p. 65. On the saint, see Tonolli, 'Metrone'; Benvenuto, 'Alla ricerca di un culto dimenticato', p. 33.

3 About the text, see also Tomea, 'Lagiografia dell'Italia settentrionale', p. 119; Valtorta, 'Raterio agiografo'; on the theft, see Papisidero, *Translatio sanctitatis*, pp. 71–72.

4 On this hypothesis, see Pellizzari, 'Dov'era finito S. Metrone'.

5 Raterius, *De translatione sancti Metronis*, 3.104–108 (p. 14).

Moreover, he wrote the text just a few years after the supposed translation, another crucial element confirming the authenticity of the event. Ratherius' words allow us to reflect on the mentality regarding the role of the will of God in the translation of relics. According to him, although deplorable, if a theft occurred it was because God wanted to permit it, perhaps to give relics to a church where there were none, and for this reason Ratherius uses the expression 'praiseworthy theft' ('furto laudabili').⁶ The absence of care on the part of the church towards the saintly remains is linked to the lack of priests who could guard the holy body,⁷ prompting the bishop to rhetorically ask why the inhabitants of Verona were so unfit to protect the relics: 'If you truly loved your martyr so much, why did you keep him so poorly?'⁸ The locals are the target of his invective, perhaps also to direct suspicion away from himself: by his account, the saints themselves chose to flee from their negligent custodians.⁹

There is no evidence concerning the city that stole the relics. Pimazzoni hypothesised that the thieves came from a church in the diocese of Mantua. There are also some later legends, according to which the body of the saint subsequently returned on a cart drawn by two oxen that, at the moment of deciding which road to take – whether to Brescia, Mantua or Verona – went towards Verona, arriving in the square of the church of St Vitalis.¹⁰ Aside from the possibility of restitution, the theme of oxen carrying relics or a statue is a hagiographic *topos* very diffuse in medieval and early modern hagiographies and folk legends about the foundation of a church, the beginning of a cult or the arrival of a miraculous image. Moreover, it is helpful to report Hubert Silvestre's opinion. He suggests that the body of St Metrone, despite the information included in Ratherius' invective, could have been bought by the inhabitants of a nearby city.¹¹ If this argument is accepted, the so-called theft of St Metrone may be regarded as a way to hide a sale.

It is worth noting that, in this instance, we encounter a text that does not detail the stages of the theft (such as the prayer to the saint, the opening of the tomb or miraculous assistance), but rather provides a straightforward 'denunciation' of the event. This text serves as a compelling introduction to

6 Ratherius, *De translatione sancti Metronis*, 3.107 (p. 14).

7 Ratherius, *De translatione sancti Metronis*, 3.117–118 (p. 14)

8 'Martyrem sane tuum si tantopere diligebas, ut quid tam male custodieras?', Ratherius, *De translatione sancti Metronis*, 4.155–156 (p. 15).

9 'sed convenientius diceres, quod sancti ita nos fugiunt nostri', Ratherius, *De translatione sancti Metronis*, 4.161–162 (p. 15).

10 Pimazzoni, *Vita di S. Metrone*, pp. 57–58, 60–61; Anti, 'Raterio, Verona e il furto'.

11 Silvestre, 'Commerce et vol de reliques', p. 735.

the prevailing sensitivity of the era regarding the theft of relics, which was frequently portrayed as a divine occurrence, even outside the hagiographic rhetoric.

4.2. The role of bishops in the thefts of St Himerius and Sts Felinus and Gratian

Certain narratives of relic theft place heightened emphasis on the role of the bishops, who were tasked not only with receiving the stolen remains but also with their actual translation. A useful example is that of St Himerius of Cremona.¹² According to the sources – written very late, at least in the twelfth century and in the sixteenth – he was an anchorite originally from *Brutium*, who later became bishop of Amelia. His relics were enshrined in the church of the city. The *Translatio sancti Himerii* (BHL 3957)¹³ is a text composed in the twelfth century and narrates the translation of his remains from Amelia to Cremona. Another source is a summary included in a copy of the Martyrology of Ado of Vienne composed in 1181, which is kept in the Capitular Archive in Cremona.¹⁴

The *translatio* relates how in 965 the bishop of Amelia – perhaps Ortodolfo¹⁵ – went to Liutprand, bishop of Cremona, asking him to intercede with Emperor Otto I on his behalf because at the time the emperor looked unfavourably upon him due to some slanderous affirmations that had been made in his regard.¹⁶ The bishop of Cremona took advantage of this request to ask in return for the relics of the saints kept in Amelia, such as those of St Firmina and St Olympiadis.¹⁷ The bishop of Amelia refused, offering the body of St Himerius instead. Based on this accord, they entered the church during the night, imploring the saint with many prayers and vows ('votis et precibus') to consent to the removal.¹⁸ A violent earthquake occurred and

12 On this saint see Caraffa, 'Imerio, vescovo di Amelia'; Susi, *Geografie della santità*, pp. 161–199.

13 D'Angelo and Lucci, *Amelia e i suoi santi*, pp. 264–268; on this theft, see Papisidero, *Translatio sanctitatis*, pp. 83–85.

14 *Descrizione del Martirologio di Adone*.

15 Cappelletti, *Le Chiese d'Italia*, V, pp. 197–198; Gams, *Series Episcoporum*, p. 662.

16 On Liutprand, see Arnaldi, 'L"Antapodosis" di Liutprando'; Arnaldi, 'Liutprando e l'idea di Roma nell'Alto Medioevo'; Arnaldi, 'Liutprando e la storiografia contemporanea nell'Italia centro-settentrionale'; Leyser, 'Liudprand of Cremona'; Sutherland, *Liudprand of Cremona*; Levine, 'Liudprand of Cremona'; Chiesa, 'Liutprando di Cremona'.

17 AASS, *Iunii*, 4, p. 305, n. d; Lanzoni, *Le diocesi d'Italia*, pp. 417–418. See also Capelli, 'La Passio di Firmina, martire di Amelia'.

18 *Translatio sancti Himerii*, 9 (p. 265).

they, albeit afraid, approached the tomb and began to shatter it to extract the body ('ceperunt arcam frangere'),¹⁹ paying the guardian friar to be silent. At the end of the secret operation, Liutprand returned to Cremona, where a happy multitude welcomed him. After the celebration of a Mass, the relics were finally deposited at the altar of Our Lady. Some references to the theft – defined as a generic translation – are included in the *Chronica universalis* written in 1213 by Bishop Sicard of Cremona (1155–1215).²⁰

This text contains information about where Liutprand took the relics after the theft; namely, a crypt built in 994 by Oldericus (973–1004),²¹ his successor.²² Since the work does not include any references to the next *inventio* of the relics in 1129 or the earthquake that occurred in 1117,²³ this must be considered the latest possible date for its composition. The hagiographer also adds another interesting detail linked to the cult of the saint in his new home. On some occasions subsequent to the arrival of the relics St Himerius, who had previously performed many miracles,²⁴ suddenly stopped doing so on account of the behaviour of the local population ('insorgente flagitio populi').²⁵ The saint's reluctance may be linked to the civil war in Cremona at the beginning of the eleventh century or the episodes of Holy Wednesday in 1068 when Bishop Arnolf of Velate was attacked and driven from the city because he had attempted to arrest a Patarine priest.²⁶

This introduces us to the series of translations that took place during the Central Middle Ages that were no longer just the theft of abandoned relics but an attempt to seize the remains of a saint who was in fact adequately venerated. In other words, while previously the *furta sacra* had been related to mainly holy bodies neglected by the locals so that someone else decided to take care of them, from this moment on that typology gives way to out-and-out thefts committed during the night after buying the silence of the guardians. It is also a sign of a change in perspective regarding the relics of saints: from being something precious that people could find in abandoned

19 *Translatio sancti Himerii*, 13 (p. 265).

20 'Huius maioris Ottonis temporibus Luizo Cremonae fuit episcopo, qui corpus beati Ymerii de oppido Sancti Flaviani sito in episcopatu Ymeliensi Cremonam transtulit' ('During the time of the Emperor Otto, Luizo, bishop of Cremona, transferred the body of St Himerius from the town of Saint Flavian, located in the diocese of Amelia, to Cremona') (*Sicardi Episcopi Cremonensis Chronica*, p. 158).

21 Gams, *Series episcoporum*, p. 789.

22 *Sicardi Episcopi Cremonensis Chronica*, p. 159.

23 Galli, 'I terremoti del gennaio 1117'.

24 A list of the miracles performed in Cremona is in AASS, *Iunii*, 4, pp. 302–303.

25 AASS, *Iunii*, 4, p. 305, no. 6.

26 Menant, 'Cremona in età precomunale', p. 106.

places – thanks also to the destruction and devastation of sites by the Saracens and others – there were now relics that were adequately cared for, often well enshrined in churches, to steal which it was necessary to use trickery and force and, above all, the assistance of the saints. Moreover, the example of St Himerius is the first, after that of St Mark, that includes a reference to someone who discovers the theft. Although it could be considered just a *topos*, it is a sign of increased attention to the relics of saints and the necessity to extract them secretly.

Another similar translation of relics is that of Sts Felinus and Gratian²⁷ – whose historical existence is not confirmed – which allegedly took place in Arona (now in Piedmont) in 963.²⁸ According to the *passio* (BHL 3633), they were converted by Florentinus and confirmed by Pope Sistus, and eventually martyred under Decius with 100 companions not far from Perugia, in a place called *Fanestri*. According to the text, their bodies were thrown into the Tiber by the executioners, but a wave pushed them back to the shore, where the local bishop Vincent – whose name is absent from the list of bishops, suggesting that he is fictitious – went with a priest called Timothy and other clergy to collect ('*corpora collegit*')²⁹ and bury their corpses with all the respect due to them.

The information about the medieval theft is included in the *Translatio sanctorum Gratiniani et Felini Aronam* (BHL 3634), contained in a manuscript perhaps penned in the last thirty years of the eleventh century.³⁰ However, according to Pierluigi Licciardello, both the *passio* and the *translatio* could date back to late tenth or eleventh century.³¹ Based on this legend, count Amitto – or Amizo or Adamo³² – a captain of Otto I's, had set fire to the entrance of the basilica of St Paul in Rome and, as divine punishment for this action, his right arm and hand had been paralysed. Later, under Otto II (973–983), he needed to obtain absolution; meanwhile, the bishop of Perugia, who had lost the favour of the emperor – as in the case of St Himerius – asked Amitto to help him. The latter requested for the holy bodies of Sts Felinus

27 On the saints, see Burchi, 'Felino e Gratiniano'; Frigerio (ed.), *Arona porta da entrare in Lombardia*; Paoli, 'Agiografia e culto dei santi a Perugia', pp. 46–47, 49–50; Licciardello, 'Agiografia latina dell'Italia centrale', pp. 669–670.

28 D'Angelo, 'Bibliotheca Hagiographica Umbrae', p. 276.

29 *Passio sanctorum Gratiniani et Felini*, 25 (p. 30).

30 Tomea, 'L'agiografia dell'Italia settentrionale', p. 108; Paoli, 'Agiografia e culto dei santi a Perugia', p. 54; see also Zaccaria, *De' santi martiri*, p. 61; Giulini, *Memorie spettanti alla storia*, I, p. 624.

31 Licciardello, 'Agiografia latina dell'Italia centrale', pp. 669–670.

32 See AASS, *Junii* 1, p. 23, no. 3; Zaccaria, *De' santi martiri*, p. 86; Giulini, *Memorie spettanti alla storia*, p. 627.

and Gratian in return. During the night, Amitto's soldiers took the remains, probably from the church of St Mary *a fenestrillis*,³³ without any of Perugia's inhabitants noticing. After the removal of the holy remains, the locals argued that thanks to a formal – or supernatural – announcement,³⁴ they had tried to stop the thieves, but God intervened, temporarily blinding them so that, sad and confused, they were compelled to go back home. The relics eventually arrived in Arona, where a Benedictine monastery was built in 979, but subsequently destroyed in the fourteenth century and secularised in 1427 by Pope Martin V.³⁵

The theft is linked to two different elements: on the one hand, the necessity for Amitto to expiate his sins and, on the other, the desire to sacralise the new foundation of the monastery of Arona by bestowing on it the relics of two important martyrs.³⁶ Amitto is also quoted in an inscription from the monastery – today no longer in existence – in which there was a reference to the translation of the relics.³⁷ This inscription was perhaps part of the urn in which the relics were enshrined.³⁸ There is also a document dating back to 999 that deals with the donation of some territories from the archbishop of Milan, Arnolf II (998–1018), to the abbot of the Arona monastery, Lanfredo (999–1015), in which the saints are mentioned.³⁹

This translation must be connected with others of this period. From a hagiographic perspective, the legend shows the elements that characterise the genre, such as the execution of the action during the night and without the knowledge of the people ('ignorante populo').⁴⁰ These serve to situate the episode inside the long tradition of *furta sacra*, simultaneously underlining a clear relation with the translations of St Himerius and St John of Spoleto. This theft should be considered a way through which the count obtained the relics that he needed; but, at the same time, the question of the property of the relics emerges. Even if the bishop of Perugia

33 Zaccaria, *De' santi martiri*, p. 61.

34 'Sed ea nocte [...], nuntiatum est urbi, tantum thesaurus auferri ab eis' ('But that night [...], it was reported to the city that such a treasure was being carried away by them'), *Translatio sanctorum Gratianiani et Felini Aronam*, 5 (p. 24).

35 Zaccaria, *De' santi martiri*, p. 111; Giulini, *Memorie spettanti alla storia*, p. 624; on the theft, see also Papisidero, *Translatio sanctitatis*, pp. 75–76.

36 Zaccaria, *De' santi martiri*, p. 93.

37 'Hos Perusina Sanctos adduxit ab urbe et statuit templum hoc in honore Dei' ('He brought these saints from the city of Perugia and established this temple in honour of God'), AASS, *Iunii*, 1, p. 23, no. 1.

38 Varetti, 'Corpus Inscriptionum Medii Aevi Novariae', p. 215.

39 Zaccaria, *De' santi martiri*, p. 89.

40 *Translatio sanctorum Gratianiani et Felini Aronam*, 5 (p. 24).

had consented to the translation, the text emphasises that the locals were unaware. However, this last detail, and the reaction of the townsfolk to the event, could be a *topos* used to highlight the preciousness and power of the holy remains. These two cases demonstrate the expanding importance of the role of bishops in the Central Middle Ages, following the relevance they had gained between the fifth and the eighth centuries, when they had frequently become crucial figures in Western cities.⁴¹ Their role appears here more consolidated not only because of their involvement in thievery, but also on account of the possibility of their maintaining a positive political relationship with Otto I and Otto II. In this light, saints' relics must be regarded as 'trade goods' that were also used politically. In addition, as also argued by Francesco Veronese, bishops – and sometimes popes – played a crucial role in numerous translations in the Carolingian context, especially in the ninth century, when their approval was necessary to transfer relics legally.⁴²

4.3. St John of Spoleto's and St Martin of Mount Massico's relics: *furta* and attempts at theft

Another case in which the element of secrecy is well defined is that of St John, bishop of Spoleto.⁴³ According to the sources, he lived between the fifth and sixth centuries and was the city's archbishop between 492/496 and 546/547, during the town's devastation by Totila's Goths. The *passio*, written at the end of the tenth century by John, a monk from Montecassino, narrates that he was martyred in an ambush on account of his religious commitment, and his body, pierced by lances and decapitated, was buried in the place of his martyrdom.⁴⁴ The text also details that the inhabitants of Spoleto tearfully placed his corpse in a very ancient container ('antiquissimo calathus'). It is unclear why the hagiographer chose the term *calathus*, which does not imply a tomb but rather a basket or a receptacle.⁴⁵ The same word

41 Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 17.

42 Veronese, 'Tra rispetto delle leggi e furti notturni', § 6 (consulted online).

43 On this saint, see Amore, 'Giovanni, vescovo di Spoleto'; Fausti, *Del sepolcro di S. Giovanni*; some references are included in the *Vita sancti Ioannis Penariensis* (BHL 4420), p. 32.

44 Amore, 'Giovanni, vescovo di Spoleto', col. 909.

45 The Bollandists emphasise that this word refers to a tomb in this context (John of Montecassino, *Translatio corporis et miracula sancti Ioannis episcopi Spoletini*, p. 31, n. g). This meaning is recognised in du Change, *Glossarium mediae et infimae latinitatis*, t. 2, col. 021a (<http://ducange.enc.sorbonne.fr/CALATHUS>).

appears in the translation of St Isidore of Chios's relics, where it refers to a food basket.⁴⁶

The *passio* written by the monk also contains information about the theft of relics that occurred at the end of the tenth century, probably in 980 or, according to other scholars, in 975.⁴⁷ The *Translatio corporis et miracula sancti Ioannis episcopi Spoletini* (BHL 4437)⁴⁸ is, at the same time, an account of translation and *inventio*; Gunderada, the abbess of the monastery of St Euphemia in Spoleto, discovered the saint's body and brought it into the building.⁴⁹ According to the sources, it was buried in a suburban sepulchre where many supernatural signs occurred: a heavenly light, a pleasing song, and a column of fire,⁵⁰ all of which were considered miraculous, but at the same time scared people who did not dare to walk along that road at night. Abbess Gunderada, knowing where the body was enshrined, went there one night with two or three other nuns ('duabus vel tribus virginibus') and a priest.⁵¹ After opening the tomb, she quickly took the body, wrapped it in some sheets and returned with it to the monastery, where she deposited the relics under an altar. The process through which the abbess looked for St John's relics coincides completely with the narrative structure of their miraculous discovery. Her decoding of various signals is part of a lengthy hagiographic typology of *inventiones*.⁵²

The theft should be placed in relation to the monastery's foundation, at the head of which was Gunderada herself.⁵³ The building dates to the tenth century, and the translation was probably part of the strategy of its sacralisation. As emerges from the prologue by John of Montecassino, the monastery was originally directed by Gunderada, and subsequently her successor, Berta, gave him the task of writing the *vita* and *translatio* of

46 Cerbano Cerbani, *Translatio mirifici martyris Isidori*, IX (p. 329).

47 Jacobilli, *Vite de' santi e beati dell'Umbria*, p. 2.

48 On this text, see De Gaiffier, 'Les légendiers de Spolète'; Grégoire, 'L'agiografia spoletina antica', p. 340; Licciardello, 'Agiografia latina dell'Italia centrale', pp. 680–682; on the theft see Papasidero, *Translatio sanctitatis*, pp. 73–75.

49 A similar name is mentioned in the miracles of Our Lady of Soissons (Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind*, p. 210).

50 Gregory of Tours narrates that the tomb of the martyr Amaranthus was in Albi and for a long time was hidden by thorns; when the crypt was discovered a great light shone (Bozóky, *Le Moyen Âge miraculeux*, pp. 102–104).

51 *Translatio corporis et miracula sancti Ioannis episcopi Spoletini*, 5 (p. 18).

52 Cronnier, *Les inventions de reliques*, pp. 214–222.

53 On the monastery, see Sordini, *Di un diploma e di un affresco*; Sordini, 'Di un sunto inedito di storia spoletana', pp. 364–365; Fausti, *Del sepolcro di S. Giovanni*, pp. 43–45; Salmi, 'Sant'Eufemia di Spoleto'; Sydow, 'Sul problema di Sant'Eufemia'; Sensi, *Movimento eremitico femminile nel Monteluco*, pp. 271–272.

the saint.⁵⁴ The monastery was named after Archbishop St John, starting from the eleventh century. The purpose of the theft is linked strictly to the monastery, but also to the idea of placing the new foundation under the protection of the historical bishop of Spoleto. Gunderada's relationship with the monastery is not particularly clear: perhaps, according to Sydow, she was part of the ducal family, and the monastery was founded in the ducal palace. However, in that period, there was no margrave for Spoleto, and from 967 this function was fulfilled by Pandolf I Ironhead (d. 981).⁵⁵ Moreover, in the text, there are no references to the bishop – in that period Lupus, mentioned in 967⁵⁶ – an element that could be identified as the connection between the ducal authority and the translation.

From the point of view of the symbolic meaning connected to the theft, it is very relevant to reflect on the identity of the saint stolen by Gunderada. St John was Spoleto's historical archbishop, and his tomb's exact position had been lost over the centuries. In the hagiographic rhetoric, the abbess was the only one who could decipher the supernatural signs and find his tomb. His figure had a key role from an identity perspective because it allowed the abbess and the recent monastery to recover a historical figure lost over time. The text contains a *topos* already considered in other legends of the Early Middle Ages: the city's destruction by the Saracens, which is supposed to have occurred at the end of the eleventh century. This event did not happen and is incorrect information or a hagiographic *topos*.⁵⁷

A helpful piece of information included in the *translatio* is related to other attempts at theft that occurred during those times. According to the hagiographer, other people tried to take the saint's relics, but it proved impossible for them to do so.⁵⁸ These details, whose aim in the hagiographical rhetoric is to legitimise Gunderada's action, allow us to consider the probable frequency of thefts in that period, above all in the cases of bodies that had

54 *Translatio corporis et miracula sancti Ioannis episcopi Spoletini*, 1 (p. 30).

55 Her name probably had a German origin (Geary, *The Myth of Nations*, p. 125) and could indicate a person belonging to a noble family. The name was common in Burgundy, from where some margraves of Spoleto originated (Sydow, 'Sul problema di Sant'Eufemia', p. 9).

56 Gams, *Series Episcoporum*, p. 728.

57 For some indications on the presence of the Saracens in the territories of Spoleto, see Erchempertus, *Historia Langobardorum Beneventanorum*, 44 (p. 251). The hagiographer projected the events that occurred under king Totila in the sixth century, into the tenth. The authors of the saint's martyrdom, therefore, were not the Saracens, but the Goths (Fausti, *Del sepolcro di S. Giovanni*, p. 23).

58 'conati sunt aliquanti tam pretiosissimum pignus clancule rapere' ('Some attempted to steal this very precious relics'), *Translatio corporis et miracula sancti Ioannis episcopi Spoletini*, 5 (p. 31).

been abandoned or left unguarded. The will of God to preserve the body of St John for the monastery of St Euphemia and the city of Spoleto is the explanation given by John of Montecassino for the impossibility of moving the relics elsewhere.⁵⁹

As written in the *translatio*, the theft took place during the night ('in hora noctis silentii'),⁶⁰ and the abbess tried to take the relics hurriedly ('tanta celeritate')⁶¹ and secretly (*clancule*). This example is similar to those analysed in the previous chapter but with an interesting difference: the stealthy approach. While, in fact, in those cases the thefts were committed without fear of being discovered, thanks in part to the remains being in a condition of abandonment, in this case the intention of seizing the forgotten relics is surrounded by certain *topoi* that serve to describe a specific attitude that was already attested in the translations of the deceased martyrs in Late Antiquity. After the references in the *passiones* mentioned in the second chapter, the 'secrecy of the action' re-emerges as a crucial aspect of the translation of relics. Although it could be linked partially to the *furta sacra* genre, it is at the same time possible to find in the account the signs of a gradual change, already observed in the example of St Himerius. This text, perhaps more than others, vividly highlights the significance of the nighttime theft; the intricate and almost fantastical backdrop against which the events unfold lends the story a mythical ambience. The pronounced utilisation of aforementioned *topoi*, such as the song and the pillar of fire, constitutes a repetitiveness characteristic of folklore, where the fusion of fairy tale, biblical elements and fictional characters becomes most apparent.

We have observed how the *passio* of St John of Spoleto mentions several unsuccessful attempts to pilfer his body. Another failed theft, strikingly similar to the preceding case of St Appianus, originates from the same era and is the attempt to steal the relics of St Martin of Mount Massico, in Campania.⁶² The primary biographical data about this saint come from Gregory I,⁶³ according to whom Martin was a hermit who lived in a small

59 'Sed noluit omnipotens Deus [...] frustrare coenobium' ('But almighty God did not wish to frustrate the monastery'), *Translatio corporis et miracula sancti Ioannis episcopi Spoletini*, 5 (p. 31).

60 *Translatio corporis et miracula sancti Ioannis episcopi Spoletini*, 5 (p. 31).

61 *Translatio corporis et miracula sancti Ioannis episcopi Spoletini*, 5 (p. 31).

62 On this saint, see Ambrasi, 'Martino di Monte Massico'; Cielo, 'Cattedrali e reliquie nella Campania normanna'; Acconci and Piccirillo, 'L'oratorio rupestre di San Martino'; Caiazza, 'Eremiti e cenobiti nell'Alta Terra di Lavoro'.

63 Gregory I, *Dialogi*, 2, III.16 (pp. 73–81).

cave on Mount Massico. Many people went to him to receive advice and miracles, some of which are listed in a brief tale in the book.

The account of this attempted theft is included in the *Vita, translatio et miracula sancti Martini abbatis* (BHL 5604),⁶⁴ a text composed by Peter the Deacon from Cassino (1107/1110–1159). Another attempt at theft, made by Arechis II, is included in a brief legend composed at the end of the eleventh century.⁶⁵ All these texts mention the Deacon Severus, author of the ancient legend to which the other writers referred in the composition of their works. According to the brief episode in the text by Peter the Deacon, Hilarius, abbot of the monastery of St Vincent in Volturno, had placed a guardian monk at St Martin's tomb. One night the latter entered the tomb to steal the relics,⁶⁶ but there was a violent earthquake that seemed to devastate the entire mountain.⁶⁷ The abbot, informed by the saint through a vision, hurried to the church to verify what had happened, and the custodian monk told him everything.

It is not easy to date this attempt, which happened before the relics' translation to Carinola in 1094. At that time, the abbot of the monastery of St Vincent was probably Hilarius of Matera, mentioned in the *Chronicon Vulturense*, who headed the monastery from 1011 and 1045. The legend itself was composed after the arrival of the holy remains in Carinola, with the aim of writing a complete hagiography with all the details related to St Martin.

As pointed out in the early medieval case of St Appianus, which had happened not many decades before, the attempt to steal St Martin's relics is very useful in understanding many dynamics of the *furta sacra* cultural phenomenon. This example shows us the crucial role of the saint's will and that of the custodian who attempts to steal the relics. A miraculous perspective is applied, not only in terms of St Martin's reaction to the attempt, but also with regard to the abbot's vision, considered the instrument of communication between two different 'places'.

The attempt at theft is devoid of historical references. For this reason, the episode could be considered a generic link to a historical event that

64 *Vita, translatio et miracula sancti Martini abbatis*, 9 (p. 838); see also Papisidero, *Translatio sanctitatis*, pp. 126–127.

65 Moretus, 'Un opuscolo du diacre Adalbert'; on the attempt at theft, see also Galdi, *Santi, territori, poteri e uomini*, pp. 248–250; Pedroni, 'Santa Sofia e la ricerca di reliquie', pp. 139–140.

66 'noctu ad tumulum tangendum temerarius accessisset', *Vita, translatio et miracula sancti Martini abbatis*, 9 (p. 838).

67 'subito tantus factus est terrae motus, ut montis ruina instare videtur', *Vita, translatio et miracula sancti Martini abbatis*, 9 (p. 838).

was included in the tale, together with Arechis II's desire to underline the impossibility of stealing the relics of St Martin. Only the last translation, which happened in 1094, was to be considered the one authorised by the saint himself. This episode demonstrates the continued persistence of the *topos* of attempted theft, which was already attested during the Early Middle Ages.

It is worth mentioning an episode in the *Translatio sancti Marci episcopi Atinensis* (BHL 5299), possibly written around 1057, concerning the relics of St Mark, Bishop of Atina in central Italy. According to legend, he was the first bishop of Latium and was martyred in 96.⁶⁸ In the story, which is supposed to have taken place under the episcopate of Leo II, bishop from 1044, there was a small attempt at theft before the official translation.⁶⁹ Contrary to the *furta sacra* analysed so far, this case concerns the attempted theft of a part of the bones by a nun ('quaedam sanctimonialis') who happened to be passing by the saint's tomb when his remains were being exhumed for removal to a temporary site. Leaning over the body to venerate it, she caught sight of a piece of the relic ('particulam reliquiarum') and secretly took it away with her ('furtim levavit'). Shortly afterwards, however, a miracle of punishment occurred: when the woman reached the river, she was so overcome by fear ('tantus timor invasit eam') that she could not move. Thinking of the relic that she had stolen, she returned it to the holy body and regained her former health, as though she had been freed from her chains. This brief episode, together with those mentioned above, confirms the phenomenon of the *furta sacra* even at a popular level, as an expression of a simple desire to possess sacred bodies – or fragments of them – for protection or financial gain.

4.4. From Myra to Italy: the relics of St Nicholas and St John the Baptist

In the landscape of *furta sacra*, certain locations hold a distinct significance. One such place is Myra, an ancient Hellenic city situated in the historical region of Lycia in Asia Minor, now located near Demre in southern Turkey. St Nicholas served as bishop of this city, which is not only associated with the theft of his relics but also with that of the purported ashes of St John the Baptist.

68 On his figure, see Fenicchia, 'Marco, vescovo di Atina'.

69 *Translatio sancti Marci episcopi Atinensis*, 8 (p. 564).

One of the most representative thefts in our corpus of *furta sacra* is that of St Nicholas,⁷⁰ at that time one of the principal saints in the medieval tradition. The most ancient sources about his life date back to the ninth century, although there are also some mentions in the so-called *Praxis de Stratelete*, written in the sixth century or earlier.⁷¹ The sources tell us that he was born in Patara, Lycia, in Asia Minor, around 270. One of his most famous miracles concerns three young sisters to whom he gave money – in the text gold – so that they might get married and escape from misery and prostitution. He became the bishop of Myra and died on 6 December, between 345 and 352; his relics being enshrined in the basilica of Myra, which was taken by the Byzantines and Saracens over time. According to Theophanes, in 808 the fleet of Caliph Hārūn ar-Rashīd, led by the admiral Kumeid, was disrupted *en route* to Rhodes because of his intention to besiege Myra. Pilgrims continued to visit the basilica after the thefts discussed in this section.⁷² St Nicholas' tomb was in jeopardy in a number of ways, especially during the Cretan pirate raids in the ninth and tenth centuries and the expedition of the Berber emirs of Ifriqiya against the Lycian coast in 1034.⁷³

The history of St Nicholas' removal is complex and involves many locations. The main famous place in which he is still venerated today is Bari, but there are hagiographic traditions about the translation of his relics to Venice and Benevento.⁷⁴

The bringing of his remains to Bari in 1087 is narrated in three different hagiographic texts:⁷⁵ the *Translatio sancti Nicolai* (BHL 6190–6199),⁷⁶ commissioned by Archbishop Ursus (1078–1089) and composed by Archdeacon

70 On the saint, see Anrich, *Hagios Nikolaos*; Josi and Romanelli, 'Nicola'; Del Re and Celletti, 'Nicola'; Jones, *Saint Nicholas of Myra*; Cioffari, *S. Nicola nella critica storica*; Bacci, *San Nicola*.

71 Cioffari, 'Gustav Anrich e la Praxis de stratelatis'; Cioffari, '*La Praxis de stratelatis* (BHG 13492)'.
72 Jones, *Saint Nicholas of Myra*, pp. 172–175.

73 Bacci, *San Nicola*, p. 104.
74 Papasidero, *Translatio sanctitatis*, pp. 42–43, 56–62.

75 On the translation to Bari, see Praga, 'La traslazione di S. Niccolò'; Nitti di Vito, 'La traslazione delle reliquie di san Nicola'; Corsi, *La traslazione di san Nicola*; Otranto (ed.), *San Nicola di Bari e la sua Basilica*; Limone, 'Italia meridionale', pp. 34–37; Bronzini, 'Culto e leggenda di S. Nicola'; Cioffari and Laghezza (eds), *Alle origini dell'Europa*; Silvestro, *Santi, reliquie e sacri furti*; Oldfield, *Sanctity and Pilgrimage in Medieval Southern Italy*, pp. 97–101.

76 The most ancient manuscript of the *translatio* dates back to the eleventh or twelfth century although, according to Silvia Silvestro, it is conceivable to date the composition to the end of the eleventh century (Silvestro, *Santi, reliquie e sacri furti*, p. 90). She noted that this version of the legend, which was considered over time *the* legend of St Nicholas' translation, is the oldest (Silvestro, *Santi, reliquie e sacri furti*, pp. 151–153). See also Cioffari, 'Giovanni Arcidiacono', for further discussion of this topic.

John before the archbishop's death in 1089; the *translatio* written by the monk Nicephorus (BHL 6179–6189)⁷⁷ on the request of an inhabitant of Bari, Curcorius, and other rich nobles of the city, composed between 1087 and 1088; and a Russian text, called the *Legend of Kyiv*, written around 1090 perhaps by the monk Efrem, metropolitan of Kyiv.⁷⁸ Some references to the translation come from Robertus, a monk from Le Bec in Normandy, and Orderic Vitalis around 1130,⁷⁹ but mentions of this theft are contained in many texts, such as the *Chronicon* of Montecassino,⁸⁰ the *Annales Cavenses*,⁸¹ the *Annales Beneventani*,⁸² the *Chronicon* of Lupus Protospatharius,⁸³ and the *Chronicon* of the Anonymous of Bari.⁸⁴ At the political level, the version of the *translatio* written by Nicephorus is more in line with the Norman group – who laid siege to Bari in 1068 and conquered it in 1071 – while that of Archdeacon John is closer to the Byzantine faction, who had previously dominated the city.⁸⁵

The tales – especially those by Archdeacon John and monk Nicephorus – narrate that traders arrived in Myra by sea from Bari to take the relics of St Nicholas, having heard that some Venetian merchants also desired to steal his remains. After reaching the port of Andrake, a group went to the church where there were some custodian monks and began to threaten them to make them reveal where the sepulchre was. In fact, based on archaeological evidence, since the late eleventh or early twelfth century St Nicholas' tomb had gradually been concealed in order to protect it from attempts to steal or destroy his relics, in this case by Turks due to the Islamic ban on the cult of images.⁸⁶ The monks tried to dissuade the thieves with an offer of money,

77 According to Silvia Silvestro, the various versions of this *translatio* are all derived from the original, which was included in a twelfth-century book of passions. In any case, it is possible that the text was revised and modified in superseding versions (Silvestro, *Santi, reliquie e sacri furti*, pp. 89–91, 152–153). On Nicephorus, see Lauritzen, 'Niceforo da Bari'.

78 According to Gerardo Cioffari the text, written in Old Slavonic or Church Slavonic, dates to the eleventh century, although it was transmitted by manuscripts from the thirteenth, fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. For the critical edition, he used the *Rumjancev* codex, which was copied in the sixteenth century.

79 Otranto, 'Riflessi della traslazione di san Nicola a Bari'.

80 Leo of Ostia, *Chronica Monasterii Casinensis*, pp. 450–451.

81 *Annales Cavenses*, p. 190.

82 *Annales Beneventani*, p. 182.

83 Lupus Protospatharius, *Breve chronicon*, p. 46; Cioffari and Lupoli Tateo (eds), *Antiche cronache di Terra di Bari*, pp. 80–81.

84 Anonymous of Bari, *Chronicon*, p. 154; Cioffari and Lupoli Tateo (eds), *Antiche cronache di Terra di Bari*, p. 166.

85 Limone, 'Italia meridionale', p. 34.

86 Bacci, *San Nicola*, p. 105.

but the merchants refused. One of them, Matthew, broke the tomb, to find the saint's body submerged in a miraculous liquid – the famous *manna* or *myron*. After taking all the bones, they returned to their ships, loading the relics onto that of the merchant Matthew because of his leading role in their removal, then set sail for Bari, undertaking a long trip through many localities and islands.⁸⁷ Meanwhile, the inhabitants of Myra, who had discovered what had happened thanks to the supernatural perfume emanating from the empty tomb, grieved over it, tearing their clothes, beards and hair, desiring to die rather than survive this occurrence.⁸⁸ During the journey, many miracles took place. On the ship, some merchants tried to remove some small fragments of the bones for use as personal relics, but the saint showed that he did not wish his body to be fragmented. The fragmentation of holy bodies, which is emphasised also in the Venetian version of the legend, recalls the respect for bodies after their burial and the prohibition of violating them in early Christianity, when it was forbidden to remove portions from them.⁸⁹ When they arrived at the city, the relics were delivered to Elia, the abbot of St Benedict, and temporarily enshrined in the church of St Stephen. The version of the translation written by Nicephorus refers to riots due to the dispute about where to enshrine the remains – for example, in the Cathedral, as desired by the clergy – during which two boys died. In the end, a new basilica was built in honour of St Nicholas.

Some references to this theft are also included in the *Legenda aurea*, where Jacobus de Voragine mentions that the city of Myra was destroyed by Turks (*Turci*), and speaks of a group of forty-two soldiers (not merchants) from Bari ('*milites Barenenses*'), whom four guardian monks permitted to see St Nicholas' tomb, where they found the bones floating in oil ('*in oleo natantia*').⁹⁰

After the theft, the list of the sixty-two people who had allegedly taken part in the translation was given the name of *Societas Sancti Nicolai* ('Society

87 Bianco, 'Il santo, il mare, le 'caravelle'', p. 36.

88 'Plangunt et vestres scindant e pectore sacras. Cum barba crines vellunt ex vertice tristes. Et melius cupiunt ista discedere vita', Nicephorus, *Translatio sancti Nicolai*, p. 115.

89 Delehaye, *Les origines du culte des martyrs*, pp. 50–51. Before the theft, there were fragments of St Nicholas' body in different parts of Europe, such as a finger in the papal chapel of Sancta Sanctorum in Rome or a bone fragment in Gandersheim, Germany (Bacci, *San Nicola*, p. 108). This topic was considered significant also in Late Antiquity, as evidenced by the *passio* of the Forty Martyr Saints of Sebaste, who requested that none of their remains be removed because they all had to rest in the same place (Musurillo, *The Acts of Christian Martyrs*, pp. 355–356). On the fragmentation of bodies in the Early Middle Ages and later, see Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, pp. 201–214.

90 Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda aurea*, vol. 1, III.111 (p. 44).

of St Nicholas’): written on a scroll dating from 1175–1180 enshrined in the Archive of the Basilica, it contains the names not only of merchants, but also of nobles (‘nobiles homines’) and various important men (‘boni viri’) of the city.⁹¹

A very relevant aspect of this theft is that the hagiographers referred to the need for St Nicholas to leave Myra and go to Bari. This is pointed out many times in the text and is also explicitly stated by the saint himself. According to Nicephorus, the saint’s going away would have been advantageous for the monks. The dream is a rhetorical device that aims to underline the saint’s will and is the sign of a more elaborate hagiographic construction about the theft and the changing of his home. This episode has to be put in relation with another, written at the beginning of the *translatio* by Archdeacon John, related to ancient attempts to take St Nicholas’ remains (‘temptaverunt abripere’)⁹² without his permission – conceded instead in the case of Bari – for instance, the case of a count who tried to take away the liquid that flowed out from the sepulchre and a tooth, but had to return them after being reprimanded by the saint himself in a dream.⁹³

The theft must be regarded as the city of Bari taking the relics of a saint who was not only very important in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, to whom many people prayed and who was the object of much preaching,⁹⁴ but who also had a cult in the city before the arrival of the relics. After the first half of the eleventh century, in fact, there is mention of at least five buildings named after St Nicholas.⁹⁵ At the same time – and this aspect is underlined by the later legend of translation composed in Venice – Bari tried to gain the upper hand in its commercial and symbolic competition with the Serenissima by taking the saint’s relics before its Venetian rivals did. Moreover, having a very important patron saint such as Nicholas could be a helpful strategy in the dynamics of the building of power, authority and symbolic representation of the city in the ‘international’ context and in Mediterranean trade, also in relation with the Norman conquest.⁹⁶ In any case, although Bari was unable to equal Venice in commerce, the acquisition of Nicholas’ relics meant attracting many pilgrims to the city, whose visits reached a peak in the twelfth century. In 1094, only a few years after the

91 Cioffari and Milella (eds), *Il tesoro della basilica di San Nicola di Bari*, pp. 126–127; Galdi, ‘Strategie politiche e *furta sacra*’, p. 107.

92 John Archdeacon, *Translatio sancti Nicolai*, p. 93.

93 John Archdeacon, *Translatio sancti Nicolai*, p. 94.

94 Cioffari, *Il Pellegrinaggio medievale alla Basilica di San Nicola*, p. 4.

95 Silvestro, *Santi, reliquie e sacri furti*, p. 22.

96 Geary, *Furta sacra*, p. 88.

theft, Bari built a hospital for pilgrims, blessed by the Abbot Elia, who then became archbishop of the diocese (1089–1105), with the patronage of Bohemond of Taranto.

The central place related to the cult of St Nicholas is his basilica in Bari, the building of which began in 1097, when Count Roger gave Archbishop Ursus the catepan court for the purpose of its construction; the crypt was completed on 1 October 1089 at the wishes of Urban II to house the relics.⁹⁷ After the end of the works, the basilica was to come under the direct control of the pope.⁹⁸ A very secular tradition that reaches us today refers to the *myron* (*manna*) – a fragrant liquid that also distinguishes the bodies of other Eastern saints – that was said to flow out from the holy remains and fill the sepulchre.

As already observed in the translation of St Mark's body, the merchant and commercial dimensions played a key role in this theft too. The merchants of Bari who were on the ships were going to Antioch, one of the most important commercial ports with which Bari was in business. At that time, as in the case of Alexandria, Myra was under the rule and control of the Muslims, nevertheless commerce was still allowed and even flourishing.

While in many thefts that occurred in the Early Middle Ages the acquisition of holy remains was often the consequence of a siege, the theft of St Nicholas, like most of those perpetrated in the Central Middle Ages, is related to the desire to steal the relics of a specific saint and not – as in the cases of St Mark or St Januarius – simply a generic saint to bring to Bari. The theft also reveals some useful details about the already mentioned topic of the 'compensation of saints'. Just as after the transfer of Sts Firmianus and Primianus the inhabitants of Larino decided to take the body of St Pardus to compensate for the loss of those of their previous patrons, in the case of St Nicholas, Nicephorus' version narrates that there were two objects that the merchants decided to give the locals – who were clamouring for the restitution of the remains⁹⁹ – as consolation: a quantity of *manna* from the tomb and an ancient icon of the saint, which they had been unable to take away with them.¹⁰⁰ This image represented the object of devotion on which

97 On the basilica, see Schettini, *La basilica di S. Nicola di Bari*; Cioffari, *Storia della basilica di S. Nicola*; Silvestro, *Santi, reliquie e sacri furti*, p. 27; Campione, 'Bari. S. Nicola'.

98 Jones, *Saint Nicholas of Myra*, p. 202–209.

99 'Reddite patrem nostrum et dominum nostrum tutorem [...] qui nos omni modo sua protectione tutabat a visibilibus inimicis' ('Restore our father and our lord, our guardian [...] who protected us in every way with his protection from visible enemies'), Nicephorus, *Translatio sancti Nicolai*, p. 118.

100 Nicephorus, *Translatio sancti Nicolai*, p. 118.

the cult of St Nicholas could continue to be practised in Myra even after the theft. In fact, according to the sources, it reproduced his aspect in such a way as to suggest an *acheiropoieton* image, that is, a likeness not made by human hands.¹⁰¹

The interesting translation of St Nicholas to Bari should be put in relation to the analogous theft that Venetian merchants are said to have carried out in Myra some years later – in 1116¹⁰² or, more probably, around 1100¹⁰³ – owing to the presence in the tale of Bishop Contarini, who died in 1108. The theft must be placed in the context of the First Crusade (1096–1099), which Pope Urban II ‘solicited’ in 1095.

In the text, the translation of relics was legitimised with the explanation that Bari’s merchants had not found the sepulchre. The legend is narrated in the *Historia de translatione monachi anonimi Littorensis* (BHL 6200), composed at the beginning of the twelfth century, probably some years after 1100.¹⁰⁴ According to the source, the Venetian merchants arrived in Myra, with the aim of taking the body of St Nicholas. After praying the saint to go with them to Venice (‘dignare tuam Venetiam et Occidentem visitare’),¹⁰⁵ they forced the custodians against their will to reveal the real place in which the body was enshrined – and which had not previously been revealed to those from Bari. After looking into the tomb that had already been opened by the Bari merchants and contained only the holy liquid¹⁰⁶ – and after the uttering of prayers by Bishop Enrico – they were guided to another altar by the custodians (called *canonici*: possibly, according to Michele Bacci, members of a ‘confraternity’ that watched over St Nicholas’ tomb),¹⁰⁷ which on being broken revealed the saint’s relics, together with those of St Theodor and St Nicholas (the latter being the uncle of his more famous namesake). The locals tried to obtain the restitution of the relics, but just one of the two sacred bodies was returned to them, while the other was loaded onto one of the merchants’ ships to sail with them to Venice. On the ship the remains were arranged in a small chapel, and it was forbidden to take even small

101 Bacci, *San Nicola*, pp. 115–116.

102 Jones, *Saint Nicholas of Myra*, p. 209.

103 Chiesa, ‘Santità d’importazione a Venezia’, p. 108.

104 Tomea, ‘L’agiografia dell’Italia settentrionale’, p. 118.

105 *Historia de translatione monachi anonimi Littorensis*, XIII (p. 262).

106 ‘Haec est – inquit – arca, unde Barenses partem reliquiarium abstulerunt, partemque reliquerunt’ (‘This is the arch, they say, from which the people of Bari took part of the relics and left part behind’), *Historia de translatione monachi anonimi Littorensis*, XI (p. 261); Bacci, *San Nicola*, p. 107.

107 Bacci, *San Nicola*, p. 107.

fragments, in order not to separate them. A small delegation announced the arrival of the travellers, who were welcomed by a crowd of people. The holy body was given to the abbot of the St Nicolò al Lido monastery,¹⁰⁸ an important sacral point in the city, from which the name of the new doge was customarily declared, as happened on the occasion of the election of Domenico Silvo (d. 1087) in 1071.¹⁰⁹ In 1053 the church of St Nicholas had already existed in Venice for many years,¹¹⁰ which is proof of the city's interest in his relics. Moreover, also on account of the mention in the legend written in Bari that their people arrived in Myra before the Venetians, it is possible to hypothesise that the latter's interest was longstanding. It is important to point out that in the context of commercial development between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, St Nicholas was considered the patron saint of merchants. It was natural that two of the leading commercial cities of the Mediterranean should want to claim his remains.¹¹¹

This legend is significant because it is an example of a hagiographic text intertwined with another previous legend, which had been composed in Bari for the same purpose. The *translatio* has many references to Bari in order to stress that the real remains of St Nicholas were in the hands of the Venetian merchants.¹¹² It aimed to oppose the analogue tradition elaborated in Bari, for the purpose of restoring Venice's symbolic superiority on the commercial seas. That of the saints was a fight conducted through the hagiographic tales. For example, the legend pointed out that it was impossible for the merchants of Bari to take the authentic relics of Nicholas because the emperor had had them hidden so that no one could find them. However, it is useful to reflect on the number of similarities that characterise the two traditions, from the description of the context to the relation with the guardian monks, the voyage by sea, and to the arrival at the new destination.

Unlike that of St Mark, which was linked to the doge, this theft was related to the clergy, represented by the monastery, and to the merchants.¹¹³ The role of the Church is emphasised by the presence of the bishop of Castello, Enrico Contarini (d. 1108), who, according to the sources, took part in the translation. The interest of Venice in the relics, as already seen in the case of St Mark and as will be clear in other examples as well, was also linked to the desire to effect a transferring of sacredness from the Middle East and Byzantium to the

108 Pertusi, 'Ai confini tra religione e politica', p. 50, n. 121.

109 Cracco, 'I testi agiografici', p. 216.

110 Jones, *Saint Nicholas of Myra*, p. 209.

111 Geary, *Furta sacra*, p. 24.

112 Chiesa, 'Santità d'importazione a Venezia', p. 110.

113 Cracco, 'I testi agiografici', p. 219.

Mediterranean Sea and Venice, above all in the light of the Muslim conquest of many places, from Alexandria to Asia Minor and Byzantium itself.

The tale of the theft of St Nicholas is completed by a list of miracles (BHL 6202), probably composed some years after 1116,¹¹⁴ some of which are related to the robbery. One of them, for example, talks about the saint in the guise of an old man who met two Greek monks from Venice. He revealed that he had a house at the monastery of St Nicolò al Lido and that soon he would return home, pre-announcing the translation of his relics. Two miracles are linked to the dispute over relics between Bari and Venice. A priest from the latter city, while he was praying, suddenly saw an elderly Greek dressed as a priest. The priest asked him where the body of St Nicholas was, whether in Bari or Myra,¹¹⁵ and the old man replied confirming the predestination of his holy body to Venice.¹¹⁶ Another miracle is included in the collection with the same purpose. An elderly blind woman from Tours was going to visit the relics of St Nicholas in order to obtain healing, solicited by the apparition of the saint. She had already been to Greece and Puglia and did not know where to go next, and wondered where else she might find St Nicholas.¹¹⁷ The saint insisted that she had to go to Venice, where she could find him and her sight would be restored.¹¹⁸

This interesting attempt to legitimise the St Nicholas of Venice to the detriment of that of Bari emerges in another case related to him. In the *Adventus sancti Nicolai in Beneventum*, a text composed at the end of the eleventh century – probably between 1089 and 1091 – there is a tale in which a disabled man from Aquitaine was sent by the saint himself from Bari to Benevento to obtain healing, just two years after the theft of his relics in 1089.¹¹⁹ The episode shows the intense dispute about the real ownership

114 Tomea, 'Lagiografia dell'Italia settentrionale', p. 158.

115 'si est in Smirrea, sicut Graeci dicunt, vel Bari, sicut multi Latinorum credunt' ('Whether it is in Myra, as the Greeks say, or in Bari, as many of the Latins believe'), *Historia de translatione monachi anonimi Littorensis, Miracula*, III (p. 284).

116 'quia corpus sancti Nicolai [...], in ecclesia sua, quae est in littore Rivoalti, divina praedestinatione requiescit' ('Because the body of St Nicholas [...] rests by divine predestination in his church, which is on the shore of the Rialto'), *Historia de translatione monachi anonimi Littorensis, Miracula*, III (p. 284).

117 'ubi potero sanctum Nicolaum invenire?', *Historia de translatione monachi anonimi Littorensis, Miracula*, VIII (p. 288).

118 'vade Venetiam. In Venetia enim Sanctum Nicolaum reperies, in Venetia enim visum recipies', *Historia de translatione monachi anonimi Littorensis, Miracula*, VIII (p. 288).

119 Cangiano, 'L'Adventus Sancti Nicolai in Beneventum'; Oldfield, *Sanctity and Pilgrimage in Medieval Southern Italy*, pp. 101–102; Papisidero, 'Esperienze di pellegrinaggio', pp. 61–63; Iadanza, *Principi, vescovi e reliquia a Benevento*, p. 50.

of the remains of St Nicholas, a dispute carried out through accounts of miracles, which, from this perspective, could be considered supernatural proof of the real presence of the saint in his church.

Both legends concerning the translation of St Nicholas exemplify a very strong expression of the *furta sacra* genre. The complexity of the narration and the presence of the details that are characteristic of the theft of relics place these texts among the most prominent representative examples of *furta* on the peninsula and beyond. Like the thefts that occurred beyond the Alps, these narratives underscore the pivotal role of merchants and commercial routes, showing how cults, relics and legends travelled across the sea. The traditions of Bari and Venice epitomise the full maturity of the *furta sacra* genre, represented by these hagiographic legends with all the established characteristics already evident in the translation of St Mark. The *topos* of the weak cult is already in the background of the narration, with the church of Myra threatened by the Muslims and protected only by a few guardian monks ('tribus tantummodo custodientibus monachis').¹²⁰ In the long history of *furta sacra*, the Nicholaian legends must be considered among the peak expressions of this phenomenon.

As initially suggested, the thefts of St Nicholas' body are not the sole occurrences impacting the city of Myra. The *Legenda translationis beatissimi Johannis Baptistae Genuam* (BHL 4308) is a text composed, probably on the basis of a previous one,¹²¹ at the end of the thirteenth century by Jacobus de Voragine, with the aim of describing how St John the Baptist's ashes arrived in Genoa.¹²² According to the legend, after taking the Syrian city of Antioch during the First Crusade, a group of Genoese soldiers began their journey home, stopping at Myra, where the relics of St Nicholas were venerated. When they entered the church – described as abandoned – they learnt from some guardian monks that his body had already been stolen ('per violentiam est sublatum').¹²³ However, they began to dig under the altar of the saint and, after discovering an empty marble tank believed to have been opened by merchants from Bari ('de quo beati Nicolai corpus olim a Barenibus fuerat asportatum'),¹²⁴ found another marmoreal container, which they transferred to their ships. The monks followed them, weeping ('clamore valido et lachrymis')¹²⁵ and pleading for its return, revealing that it did not

120 John Archdeacon, *Translatio sancti Nicolai*, p. 95.

121 Polonio, 'L'arrivo delle ceneri del Precursore', p. 7, n. 17.

122 On this translation see: Bozóky, *L'imaginaire de la sainteté*, pp. 130–131.

123 Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda translationis beatissimi Johannis Baptistae Genuam*, D (p. 231).

124 Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda translationis beatissimi Johannis Baptistae Genuam*, E (p. 231).

125 Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda translationis beatissimi Johannis Baptistae Genuam*, F (p. 231).

contain St Nicholas' body but the ashes of St John the Baptist. The Genoese men divided the relics among their ships ('dividerentur reliquiae')¹²⁶ but a violent tempest and a revelation (*revelatum*)¹²⁷ received by a priest prompted them to reassemble the relics on the expedition leader's ship ('magistro navium').¹²⁸ They eventually returned to Genoa, where clergy and laity greeted the relics and placed them in the cathedral of St Laurence, the seat of episcopal power. After a time, a group of inhabitants went to Jerusalem to take part in the conquest of this city in 1099. On their way back, they stopped in Myra, where the authenticity of the relics transferred to Genoa was confirmed by the guardian monks. The text indicated that the relics were taken on 6 May 1098, and arrived in Genoa in 1099, while other later sources say 1098.¹²⁹ Another version of the legend was written by Nicola della Porta in 1410, and refers to the previous theft of St Nicholas' relics by the people of Bari, who travelled to Myra with soldiers to take the body.¹³⁰

The text is a highly pertinent example and variant of the most well-known *translationes* of St Nicholas to Bari and Venice, confirming their widespread circulation.¹³¹ The narration is a compilation of hagiographical *topoi* from the legends about St Nicholas and other sources. The main narrative is based on the Bari version, with the soldiers from Genoa arriving at Myra with the intent to steal the bishop's relics, like the merchants from Bari and Venice; the discussion with the guardian monks bears the influence of the same legends. The voyage by sea, with the storm and the saint's supernatural intervention reveals similarities with the *translatio* of St Mark, in which the saint manifested himself to provide comfort and reassure the travellers about their direction. The priest's function is comparable to that of the monk Domenic on the Venetian ship. Moreover, the details of the division of the relics are derived from the *translatio* of St Nicholas, which is present in both the Bari and Venice versions, but most probably originated from the first.¹³²

The text, composed for St John the Baptist's *dies natalis* on 23 June, contains references to his life and, more importantly for our discourse, the

126 Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda translationis beatissimi Johannis Baptistae Genuam*, H (p. 231).

127 Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda translationis beatissimi Johannis Baptistae Genuam*, I (p. 231).

128 Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda translationis beatissimi Johannis Baptistae Genuam*, B (p. 232).

129 Polonio, 'L'arrivo delle ceneri del Precursore', p. 2

130 'Barenses [...] iverunt cum exercitu ad dictam civitatem Mireae [...], et corpus praefati Nicolai ceperunt', Nicola della Porta, *Historia translationis reliquiarum beati Iohannis Baptistae ad civitatem Januae*, VI (p. 243).

131 Jacobus de Voragine provided an overview of the *translatio* in his *Legenda Aurea*, vol. 2, CXXI.61–64 (pp. 877–878).

132 Valerina Polonio pointed out a connection with the same *topos* included in the translation to Genoa of St Fructuosus' remains (Polonio, 'L'arrivo delle ceneri del Precursore', p. 11).

history of his body. It is pertinent to emphasise, for instance, that Jacobus de Voragine describes how the relics were recovered after his death. After he was beheaded (*decollatus*),¹³³ some of his disciples took his body ('venientes discipuli sui tulerunt corpus eius')¹³⁴ and buried it in a tomb in Samaria. It was then violated and the remains scattered by 'pagans'; subsequently they were collected and burnt ('ad cremandum'),¹³⁵ and most of the ashes sent first to the bishop of Jerusalem, then to that of Alexandria. Later, the relics are said to have been transferred in a marble receptacle to Myra by St Nicholas himself, who requested to be interred near these precious remains.

The reflection on the transfer of St Nicholas' body is also useful because the justification given is related to the *topos* of adequate devotion: Jacobus argued that since the entire area in which the church was located had been devastated, the relics would be more fittingly worshipped in Genoa ('maiori devotioni ac reverentiae').¹³⁶ It is relevant to note that the *translatio* mentions only the previous theft by the Bari merchants and not that of Venice – a clear indication of which legend was known.

The cult of St John the Baptist's relics is supported by other historical sources. The oldest is that of two seals issued by Innocent II (1130–1143) in 1133, which mention the previously unknown cult of St John the Baptist in Genoa.¹³⁷ Another is included in the *Annali Genovesi* and is about an episode that occurred in 1169.¹³⁸ In 1179, during the III Lateran Council, Pope Alexander III (1159–1181) formally acknowledged the devotion to the holy ashes.¹³⁹ Later, in 1244, the Genoese Pope Innocent IV (1243–1254) expanded the cult, proclaiming a partial indulgence for those who visited the relics during the feast that was instituted on the first Sunday following the Ascension.

The Genoese theft must be viewed as an attempt to acquire for Genoa the relics of one of the most revered Christian saints, a powerful *patronus* who could protect the city and its maritime commerce and travel. Simultaneously, the arrival of his relics was tied to the difficult and complex political situation of the city, and the contrast between St Laurence, the symbol of the rising *comune*, and St Syrus, who represented the episcopal see. The relics of St John the Baptist, transported by merchant-soldiers from Genoa who had participated in the First Crusade, may have been viewed as a novelty,

133 Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda translationis beatissimi Johannis Baptistae Genuam*, A (p. 230).

134 Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda translationis beatissimi Johannis Baptistae Genuam*, A (p. 230).

135 Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda translationis beatissimi Johannis Baptistae Genuam*, B (p. 230).

136 Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda translationis beatissimi Johannis Baptistae Genuam*, C (p. 231).

137 Polonio, 'L'arrivo delle ceneri del Precursore', p. 6.

138 Polonio, 'L'arrivo delle ceneri del Precursore', p. 5.

139 Polonio, 'L'arrivo delle ceneri del Precursore', p. 3.

as was the case in Venice with St Mark, whose relics were transferred there by some *negotiatores*.¹⁴⁰

In the long history of *furta sacra*, this case allows us to reflect on the complex influence of different legends on one another, demonstrating how a tale such as that of St Nicholas could be used to elaborate several distinct traditions, whose authority rested on the current knowledge of the people, in this case, the presence of the famous shrine in Myra and the fact that it contained the bishop's remains. Finally, the three cases mentioned concern three of the most important maritime powers in the following centuries – Bari, Genoa and Venice – and show how the cult of the saints was considered an indispensable element in the protection and defence of their commercial and political role.

4.5. Between weapons and devotion: St Adam of Guglionesi and St Maurus in Lavello

At the beginning of the eleventh century a theft of relics took place in relation to the remains of St Adam of Guglionesi. There is no clear information about the identity of this saint, but it is possible he was the abbot of the Benedictine monastery on Tremiti Island, in the Adriatic Sea opposite Molise. He probably died on May 3, 1071 and soon came to be considered a saint; the church in which he was buried, that of St Paul in Petacciato in Molise,¹⁴¹ becoming a local pilgrimage destination.¹⁴² The legend of the theft, the *Historia translationis sancti Adami* (BHL 68), was written by an anonymous hagiographer many years after the translation, which happened on 3 June 1102.¹⁴³ According to the sources, a pious man from Guglionesi named Benedict¹⁴⁴ was going to Lesina to take part in the feast of Sts Primianus and Firmianus, whose relics had arrived there after being stolen.¹⁴⁵ In this city, Benedict received many supernatural visions of an Angel, who asked him to take the relics of a local saint named Adam, buried in a small suburban church dedicated to St Paul. He visited the church, guarded only by one 'custodian' – referred to in the text as a child (*infantulus*;

140 Polonio, 'L'arrivo delle ceneri del Precursore', p. 10.

141 *Historia translationis sancti Adami*, 1 (p. 329).

142 Cioffari and Sorella, *Sant'Adamo di Guglionesi*, p. 39; on the saint, see also Gordini, 'Adamo di Guglionesi'.

143 On this theft see Papisidero, *Translatio sanctitatis*, pp. 70–71.

144 *Historia translationis sancti Adami*, 1 (p. 329).

145 See § 3.4.

puer), perhaps a reference to the previous angelic vision – and discovered where the relics were kept. On his return home he went to the archpriest of his church to narrate everything that had happened and the visions he had received. One night the archpriest, together with Benedict, led a group of men from Guglionesi – composed of laymen and clergy, some of whom armed – back to the church to seize the relics of the saint. They found the holy body and laid hold of it with profound reverence and much crying.¹⁴⁶ When they came out, it started to rain, providing some cover for their furtive doings; other miracles occurred during their return journey. The thieves arrived at the church of St Lucia, where the relics were welcomed by the inhabitants of Guglionesi and enshrined in the church of St Mary the Major, which had been built in the second half of the eleventh century.

The account of this translation has all the elements of the *furta sacra* genre: the supernatural request for removal, the action during the night, the possibility of the use of force – the men were armed – the silence during the return journey, and the miracles, such as the rain, performed in order to hide the theft. As fully attested in the cases of the Central Middle Ages, in this example too we are dealing with a translation in which the desire to steal is clear, as is also underlined by the specific lexicon used by the anonymous hagiographer. This is another instance in which relics were stolen from isolated, poorly guarded places: in the legend there was just one young man who could be considered a custodian and who went to open the church to Benedict. In this theft, as already seen in the cases of Benevento, there is an explicit use of force, with many armed men remaining outside the church during the translation to prevent any attempts to impede it.¹⁴⁷ This detail allows us to reflect on the clear military dimension of the theft, hidden in the text under the rhetorical expedient of the supernatural mission entrusted to Benedict. This character, despite his mysteriousness, permits us to understand the divine dimension in which the episode was involved. The fact that the theft was committed on the inspiration of a pious and devoted person is a sign that the mission, even if conducted with weapons, could be considered inspired by God. The later tradition of *furta sacra* shows, in fact, a more explicit role given to ordinary people, who received dreams and visions, thanks to which they could execute the theft. The element of resorting not only to violence but also to weapons is also evident in the case

¹⁴⁶ 'Introeuntibus autem illis, ad illum ubi sancti Adae iacebat corpus loculum, multis cum precibus lacrymisque perrexerunt', *Historia translationis sancti Adami*, 5 (p. 330).

¹⁴⁷ 'Alii deforis remanserunt, ut viam armatis custodirent manubiis, ne aliquis in eorum offensionem adventare possit', *Historia translationis sancti Adami*, 5 (p. 330).

of the Bari merchants in Myra, who, armed with their clubs, succeeded in intimidating the monks guarding the tomb and forcibly gaining access to the saint's grave.

The translation of St Adam probably occurred so that the city of Guglionesi could take the local saint's relics, give them more appropriate veneration, and have a new patron saint, in accordance with the increasing dynamics of the *comuni* at the beginning of the twelfth century.¹⁴⁸ As pointed out by Gerardo Cioffari, Guglionesi probably did not have a patron saint, or perhaps only one that had been 'borrowed' from Termoli, the centre of the Diocese; in that period, the city would have been under the authority of some families of that city who lived in the castle.¹⁴⁹ This case confirms the key role of cities and the civic dimension in the history of Italian *furta sacra*, especially in the centuries under consideration. The secrecy of the action is present in the text, and the church, unlike in the examples from the Early Middle Ages, is not abandoned or unattended, but merely infrequently visited, as confirmed by the presence of a single custodian. Additionally, St Adam was the thieves' target, and the crime was planned in order to steal the relics of this specific saint.

Another relevant case concerns the relics of St Maurus, whose hagiographic dossier is quite complex, with numerous *passiones* in which it is not always easy to identify a single saint.¹⁵⁰ It is unclear whether the figure mentioned here is to be associated with the homonymous bishop of Parenzo, or with the martyr of Rome/Fondi, or another figure entirely. According to the version contained in the text under consideration, Maurus was a native of Libya during the reign of Emperor Numerian (283–284) and was captured and martyred after arriving in Rome to visit the tombs of the apostles. His relics were stolen by some followers ('latenter eius reliquias auferentes'),¹⁵¹ who were stopped and massacred at Gallipoli, where the relics remained.

The *Vita beati Mauri et sociorum eius* (BHL 5791f) is the work of James of Venosa, a hermit of St Augustine known only from this text, and is found in a fifteenth-century Latin codex containing the liturgical office of the saint in Lavello, Basilicata.¹⁵² The text contains, after the *passio*, the translation of the relics to Gallipoli, Salento, and then to Lavello. Other versions of the text (BHL 5786–5791d) suggest other locations for the translation of the relics.

148 Cioffari, Sorella, *Sant'Adamo di Guglionesi*, p. 29.

149 Cioffari, Sorella, *Sant'Adamo di Guglionesi*, p. 30.

150 On the saint, see Jurlaro, 'Mauro'; Colomba, 'La "Vita sancti Mauri"', pp. 89–90.

151 James of Venosa, *Vita beati Mauri et sociorum eius*, I.4 (p. 98).

152 Colomba, 'La "vita sancti Mauri"', p. 87.

The *furtum* from Gallipoli to Lavello is generally traced to the eleventh century, although the specific dates vary. Tradition places it in 1042, while Ferdinando Ughelli dates it a few years later, during the tenure of the first bishop of the diocese of Lucania, Vincenzo (1060).¹⁵³ Coralba Colomba, while emphasising the lack of explicit internal references in the text to confirm these dates, notes that the name ‘Terra d’Otranto’ goes back to the second half of the eleventh century, establishing this period as the *terminus post quem* for the legend. Additionally, the collection of tithes by the Church originated in this epoch.¹⁵⁴ However, the text, though possibly based on previous documents or oral traditions, was written no earlier than the mid-thirteenth century, coinciding with the emergence of the hermits of St Augustine, to whose Order the author, James, claims affiliation.

According to the account, Giralduus, the archdeacon of Conza and papal commissioner in the Terra d’Otranto, arrived in Gallipoli and was accommodated in the coenoby near which the relics of St Maurus and his companions (named Leontius, Patamonius, Terence, Andrew, Vincent, John, Parmoncius, Domnus and Passarion) were kept. Noticing the value of these relics, he prayed and conceived a plan to steal them. The archdeacon organised a grand feast, during which he got the hermit guardian drunk (‘propter vini ferocitatem’)¹⁵⁵ so that, with his companions, he could seize the relics. The men loaded them onto their mules and set off under the cover of night (‘in tempore vero noctis’);¹⁵⁶ after several miracles and a stop at Gaudio – now a district of Lavello – they hurried on to prevent anyone from reclaiming the relics. On reaching Lavello, near the area called ‘Santa Maria in Speranza’, the mules halted, indicating that this was the designated place for the relics’ deposition. The town’s bishop was notified and the relics were entrusted to devout locals, who carried them to the Church of Mary. A building was soon erected in the saint’s honour, which probably corresponds with the Chapel of the Crucifix in the city’s cathedral.¹⁵⁷

According to the hagiographical *topos*, Giralduus is described as a noble man, devoted to God and of great holiness (‘Deo devotus et mirissime sanctitatis decoratus’).¹⁵⁸ This theft must be read in the light of the need to show how the relics supposedly travelled from Gallipoli to Lavello. What emerges is the mode of deception that becomes firmly established in these

153 Ughelli, *Italia sacra*, 7, col. 740; Colomba, ‘La “vita sancti Mauri”’, p. 92.

154 Colomba, ‘La “vita sancti Mauri”’, p. 93.

155 James of Venosa, *Vita beati Mauri et sociorum eius*, IV.3 (p. 100).

156 James of Venosa, *Vita beati Mauri et sociorum eius*, V.1 (p. 100).

157 Colomba, ‘La “vita sancti Mauri”’, p. 94.

158 James of Venosa, *Vita beati Mauri et sociorum eius*, II.1 (p. 99).

centuries: the protagonist actually gives wine to the guardian of the relics so that he can steal them without being disturbed. Here, as in many other cases, the theft is an unplanned action, but one that takes place as soon as Giraldus becomes aware of the presence of the relics. The episode, even though it was written in the thirteenth century, possesses the various cultural *topoi* and themes typical of the *furta sacra* tales of the Central Middle Ages.

4.6. Two other Venetian thefts: the relics of St Stephen and St Isidore of Chios

As previously noted, Venice's utilisation of *furtum sacrum* extended beyond the relics of St Mark; in fact, there were numerous such transfers over the centuries, of which we will explore two that occurred before 1150.

The translation of the relics of St Stephen¹⁵⁹ from Constantinople to Venice dates to 25 May 1110.¹⁶⁰ According to the sources, and especially the Acts of the Apostles, Stephen was the first martyr in the history of Christianity, stoned to death because he declared his faith in Jesus. Based on a *passio* included in a manuscript of the tenth century – perhaps the legend dates back to the fifth or sixth century – he suffered many tortures, receiving solace from an angel, before being condemned to stoning by the Synedrion, also due to the violent accusation made by Saul, who had still not converted to the Hebrew followers of Jesus. After that, according to other late antique (in Greek) and early medieval (in Latin) hagiographies, in 415 his relics are said to have been discovered by the priest Lucian, together with the bodies of Gamaliel, the master of St Paul, and those of the saints Abibo and Nicodemus. Most of his relics were translated to Jerusalem when St Cyril of Alexandria consecrated a basilica in 439, later rebuilt by the Empress Aelia Eudocia (d. 460).

Although many medieval tales report a great deal of information about the copious number of St Stephen's relics in Western and Eastern Christianity, there is also a Venetian tale written by an anonymous hagiographer titled *De translatione sancti prothomartyris Stephani de Constantinopoli in Venetias* (BHL 7891–7893). While according to some scholars the text was written in the thirteenth century,¹⁶¹ Giorgio Cracco suggests that the most ancient copy was composed in the fifteenth century, but based on some elements

159 On this saint, see Gordini, 'Stefano, protomartire'.

160 On this theft, see Papisidero, *Translatio sanctitatis*, pp. 43–44.

161 Meersseman, *Ordo fraternitas*, pp. 90–94.

included in the original text, such as the expression ‘Dux et Senatus’, which could be dated back to the second half of the twelfth century.¹⁶²

The legend narrates the theft of the body, justifying its presence in Jerusalem with an ancient translation made by a matron who wanted to transfer her husband’s remains.¹⁶³ According to the source, the Venetian monk Peter was in Constantinople where his abbot had sent him under the Emperor Alexios I Komnenos (1081–1118). By virtue of divine inspiration, he started thinking about how to procure the relics of St Stephen. Later he began to frequent the church in which they were enshrined, where he gained the trust of the custodian, praying and occasionally eating with him (‘secum cibos portabat et cum eo gustabat’),¹⁶⁴ and only after much insistence (for example, the guardian monk told him to keep quiet and not say these things again otherwise he would endanger them both)¹⁶⁵ was able to persuade him to hand over the relics. After many days of prayers (‘laudibus et precibus’)¹⁶⁶ to the saint and the custodian himself, Peter discovered the place in which they were kept, promising that he would take the relics for eight years. During the night, the church was entered and the sepulchre broken into, the monk taking away the saintly remains after giving the custodian an amount of money. On setting sail to Venice, a storm was quelled just after the supernatural revelation of the presence of the holy body aboard. Finally, the relics arrived in Venice, welcomed by the Doge Ordelafo Falier (1102–1117) and the patriarch of Grado, Giovanni Gradenigo (1105–1108; 1112–1128), and by the lay and religious authorities of the city. Although the doge wanted to put them in the basilica of St Mark, they were placed in the monastery of St George.

In the final part of the legend, as already seen in the case of St Nicholas in Bari, there is a reference to a *schola* that was founded in Venice after the

162 Cracco, *Santità straniera in terra veneta*, pp. 452–453. On this text, see Veronese, ‘Una devozione nata sul mare’.

163 According to the source, a wealthy senator of Jerusalem was permitted to construct a small chapel (*oratorium*) to enshrine St Stephen’s relics, where, upon his death, his body could be interred as well. After he died, his wife Iuliana returned to her family in Constantinople, obtaining permission to bring her husband’s body with her, but after a while she realised that the body she had moved was actually that of St Stephen (*De translatione sancti prothomartyris Stephani*, pp. 97–99).

164 *De translatione sancti prothomartyris Stephani*, p. 99; as emerges in this text, the *topos* of the necessity to acquire the guardians’ trust, which was previously present in some early medieval tales of theft written beyond the Alps, in the peninsula only bashfully appears at the end of the eleventh century.

165 ‘Tace iam et cessa, et amplius ne loquaris talia, quia tua et mea, que inde eminent profutura non procuras pericula’, *De translatione sancti prothomartyris Stephani*, p. 100.

166 *De translatione sancti prothomartyris Stephani*, p. 99.

arrival of the saint's remains, with the names of seventy-two *socii*. It was probably composed not only of merchants, but also of devotees who wanted to have St Stephen as their patron, taking part in rites and intercessions.¹⁶⁷

This theft is part of the long Venetian tradition of *furta sacra*, and the legend is composed using both previous and contemporary legends as a model. In this case, too, all the elements of this hagiographic genre are present. The interest towards this saint could be explained in light of St Stephen's great importance in Christianity. The ownership of the first martyr in history, whose miracles enjoyed extraordinary fame during Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, was considered very important. Through his translation, Venice confirmed its role in Western Christianity, where many of the holy bodies of the East were to arrive. This goal was elaborated thanks to the Crusades, but at the time it was a way to transfer sacredness, for a long period guarded by the Byzantine Empire, to the West.¹⁶⁸ The *translatio sanctitatis* ('transfer of sanctity') could perhaps become a *translatio imperii* ('transfer of the Empire and its authority'), as would partially happen with the conquest of Constantinople and the institution of the Latin Empire with the so-called Fourth Crusade, in 1202–1204,¹⁶⁹ when there was a further influx of relics.

At the end of the *translatio*, there is another text titled *De mirabilibus sancti Stephani prothomartyris* (BHL 7892), probably composed in the same period. It is a list of miracles on the model included in the hagiographic dossier of St Nicholas, in which some miracles, also related to the translation, are narrated, among them some linked to the relics' authenticity. This interest, as in the case of St Nicholas, in which they were motivated by the necessity to demonstrate that Venice had his tangible remains, must be put in relation to the long, complex history of St Stephen's relics, rediscovered many times during the centuries and translated to many places in Western and Eastern Christianity. The second miracle on the list is about a man from Rome who went to the monastery of St George where, on finding the body of St Stephen, he did not venerate it, thinking that the real one was kept in Rome. A punishment miracle on the road home caused him to change his mind, making him go back to the shrine and acknowledge that it did indeed contain the saint's real body.¹⁷⁰ In another episode, a farmer with a shrivelled right foot went to the monastery of St George to ask the saint

167 Cracco, 'Santità straniera in terra veneta', p. 459.

168 Cracco, 'Santità straniera in terra veneta', p. 460.

169 Cracco, 'Santità straniera in terra veneta', p. 462; on this topic, see also Claverie, 'Les acteurs du commerce des reliques'.

170 *De mirabilibus sancti prothomartyris Stephani*, p. 112.

to heal him if he were really in Venice ('si verum est, quod creditur de tuo corpore, [...] sanitati pristinae me restituere').¹⁷¹

There are two other similar accounts: the first is another miracle related to the presence in Venice of the authentic relics,¹⁷² while the second deals with a blind woman who had been sent by St Leonard to St Stephen in Venice, because only the latter could heal her;¹⁷³ there she would find the relics of the saint, translated from Constantinople to the monastery of St George.¹⁷⁴ The hagiographer repeatedly accentuates the necessity to trust in the real translation of the saint's relics.¹⁷⁵ The collection of miracles related to the authenticity of St Stephen's relics allows us to confirm the role that this hagiographic dossier played in the resolution of the *querelle* about the sacred bones. Moreover, reading these texts shows that sometimes the most relevant question in regard to stolen relics was to demonstrate that they were authentic and performed miracles. The fact that the monks played a central role in the tale emphasises the desire to underline the importance of the monastery in the urban context.¹⁷⁶

Let us now turn to the second case. According to the source, in 1125 the body of St Isidore of Chios¹⁷⁷ arrived in Venice, in continuity with the city's policy of acquiring relics through *furta sacra*. His *passio*, written in the sixth century, describes how he was enlisted in Chios during the reign of Emperor Decius, under the commander Numerius. After another soldier named Lucius had denounced him for being Christian, he was condemned to tongue-cutting and decapitation. Based on Gregory of Tours' information, at the time there was a big basilica and a well in the place where he was buried.¹⁷⁸ According to another *vita*, that of St Marcellinus, Isidore was tortured and lashed with ox sinews. His relics are said to have been miraculously found by the Ephesian matron Myrope. The text that talks about his removal is the *Translatio mirifici martyris Isidori a Chio insula in civitatem Venetam*

171 *De mirabilibus sancti prothomartyris Stephani*, p. 115.

172 *De mirabilibus sancti prothomartyris Stephani*, p. 115.

173 Papasidero, 'Esperienze di pellegrinaggio', pp. 63–66.

174 *De mirabilibus sancti prothomartyris Stephani*, p. 117.

175 'Fortassis, Fratres, ab aliquo adhuc incredulo, et ad credendum corde tardo corpus sanctissimi Prothomartyris Stephani translatum esse in Venetiam non credebatur' ('Perhaps, Brothers, there were still some unbelievers, unwilling in their hearts to believe, who didn't believe that the body of the most holy Protomartyr Stephen had been transferred to Venice'), *De mirabilibus sancti prothomartyris Stephani*, p. 117.

176 Cracco, 'Santità straniera in terra veneta', p. 457.

177 On this saint, see Frutaz, 'Isidoro di Chio'; Lucchesi, 'Isidoro di Chio'; on the theft, see Papasidero, *Translatio sanctitatis*, pp. 44–45.

178 Gregory of Tours, *Liber in gloria martyrum*, 101 (p. 105).

(BHL 4480), written between 1124 and 1133 by Cerbano Cerbani,¹⁷⁹ the main character in the tale. Just one copy of the legend, included in the legendary of St Mark, has been preserved.¹⁸⁰ According to this, he was associated with the court of John II Comnenus in Constantinople, when he decided to go on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem without the authorisation of the emperor, in that period on bad terms with Venice and the crusaders, who from 1099 had regained control of the *Loca sancta* and Jerusalem. After the emperor denied his request, he fled from the city and arrived in Chio, where he discovered that the relics of St Isidore were enshrined. Intercepted by the katepano of Crete, he was sent back to Constantinople and imprisoned, but subsequently escaped to Rhodes, where there was also the Venetian fleet, the vanguard of that of the doge, who took control of the island after a while, overturning the Byzantine governor.¹⁸¹ Cerbano decided to organise the theft of the relics with other Venetian merchants. He entered the church during the night ('media nocte')¹⁸² with the collaboration of a Greek monk, and prayed to the saint for permission for the translation, kneeling on the floor with tears in his eyes.¹⁸³ Cerbano talked to the saint and asked for his consent to depart from Chios, describing the journey and quoting St Mark, the 'ducal saint' stolen two centuries before.¹⁸⁴ Later, he took the saint's remains together with those of the other four: Afra, Ilaria, Myrope and Myrope's son. The holy remains were put inside a basket full of grapes to mask the scent emanating from the former with the pleasant perfume of the latter. After his departure, the relics of the other four saints were returned to the inhabitants of Chios, while those of St Isidore were brought to Venice. Finally, after the voyage by sea, the fleet guided by Doge Domenico Michiel arrived at the Serenissima, where the holy body was enshrined inside a chapel in the basilica of St Mark.

The theft is linked to a specific historical context – that is, the Crusades and the possibility for Venice to seize possession of many holy bodies – in order to make the city a centre of sacrality. The new relics that arrived in the Serenissima were considered particularly significant: the acquisition of the body of St Isidore became the occasion for the doge to link the Republic's

179 On Cerbano Cerbani, see Palma, 'Cerbano Cerbani'. The tale is dedicated to the bishop of Castello, Bonifacio Falier (1120–1133). On this text, see Tomea, 'L'agiografia dell'Italia settentrionale', p. 125.

180 Chiesa, 'Santità d'importazione a Venezia', p. 110.

181 Chiesa, 'Santità d'importazione a Venezia', p. 107.

182 *Translatio mirifici martyris Isidori*, V (p. 325).

183 'in pavimento prostratus, primo omnipotenti Deo gratias cum lachrymis retulit', *Translatio mirifici martyris Isidori*, VII (p. 327).

184 *Translatio mirifici martyris Isidori*, V (p. 326).

power to another saint from the Eastern tradition, and a precious chapel was consecrated inside the basilica to house the new relics in 1354–1355.¹⁸⁵ In the tale many figures can be found with Cerbano Cerbani, such as the doge, the noble merchants, the soldiers, the clergy – all characters in the imminent experience of the *comuni*.¹⁸⁶ The decision to steal the relics of St Isidore is due, as in the other cases, to a specific motivation, that is, the fact that he was considered, during the Middle Ages, the patron saint of sailors.¹⁸⁷

This theft of relics must be placed in connection with that of St Mark, which constituted its hagiographic model. Many details are common to both events, but perhaps the most interesting is the hiding place of the holy body. To cover the pleasant fragrance emanating from St Isidore's remains, the merchants put them in a basket. This episode is modelled directly on the translation of St Mark, in which the holy body had been hidden under some pork, with the aim of keeping away the Muslim inspectors. This aspect reveals that the memory of the translation of St Mark and the details of that story were still alive and considered a source of inspiration. The prayers to St Isidore also contain some references to other saints who were living in diverse locations; for instance, St Mark in Venice,¹⁸⁸ St James who was relocated from Jerusalem to Spain,¹⁸⁹ Sts Matthew and Bartholomew from Ethiopia and India to Puglia.¹⁹⁰ This geography of the sacred bodies also underlines the power of these saints and their decision to go and live in a different city from where they had been buried. The theme of the 'cities of saints' is compelling in Venetian thefts and is one of the main topics of the thieves' prayers. The role of the saint is now crucial: he is the only one who can approve the theft and go and live in another place.¹⁹¹

It has already been pointed out that in the translation of St Nicholas to Venice, together with his remains, the merchants also found those of St Theodore and St Nicholas the uncle. In the case of St Isidore there is a similar situation, in which in addition to his holy body, Cerbano also found those of Afra, Ilaria, Myrope – who had collected St Isidore's relics after his martyrdom – and Myrope's son. In both cases, the relics of the 'minor' saints

185 Lucchesi, 'Isidoro di Chio', col. 967.

186 Chiesa, 'Santità d'importazione a Venezia', p. 115.

187 See also the position of Chiesa, 'Santità d'importazione a Venezia', pp. 107–108.

188 'Marci scilicet Alexandria in Venetiam', *Translatio mirifici martyris Isidori*, VII (p. 327).

189 'Jacobi Ierosolimis in Hispaniam', *Translatio mirifici martyris Isidori*, VII (p. 327).

190 'Mathaei et Bartholomaei ab Aethiopia et India in Apuliam', *Translatio mirifici martyris Isidori*, VII (p. 327).

191 'si divinae dispensationi et martyris voluntati placeret', *Translatio mirifici martyris Isidori*, VII (p. 327).

were returned to the cities – to Myra and Chios, respectively – while the thieves took with them just the relics of the saints whom they had originally wanted to steal. If on the one hand this approach confirms a sort of large availability of holy bodies, on the other hand it shows the selection made by the thieves and the fact that one body was considered more precious than another. The legend also contains references to other relics stolen on that occasion, such as a sheet of stone on which Jesus was said to have sat.¹⁹² An important perspective on this theft is included in the mosaics of St Isidore's chapel, where Doge Domenico Michiel reprimands Cerbano for secretly taking the relics.¹⁹³ Marco Palma, based on this data, hypothesised that the restitution of some holy bodies by Cerbano was prompted by the doge, who probably had initially been unaware of their translation.¹⁹⁴

From the historical-cultural perspective, it is worth mentioning that before the translation Cerbano talked with the saint about the journey that he would make and his arrival in Venice, where the other important saint of the Republic was waiting for him. This relation between the thieves and the saint underlines the importance of the ritual of *evocatio* of the saint himself, which, as already highlighted in the case of St Himerius, was crucial for obtaining consent from the saints rather than being met with opposition. The concept of authorisation of theft began to emerge in the ninth century, becoming a constant element in the thefts of the Central Middle Ages. It is a relevant detail that could indicate the growing importance of the role of the saints themselves in their translations and their supernatural cooperation, as well as the effort to incorporate legitimising strategies into the narratives of theft.

4.7. Theft of a female saint: St Agatha from Constantinople to Catania

The removal of the relics of St Agatha could be considered among the last thefts occurring in the Central Middle Ages.¹⁹⁵ According to the *passiones*,

192 'quaedam venerandum et sacrum lapidem, super quem Salvatorem nostrum sedisse', *Translatio mirifici martyris Isidori*, X (p. 330).

193 'Cerbano a duce reprehenditur quod corpus beati Isidori latenter subtractum' ('Cerbano is reprimanded by the doge for secretly removing the body of the blessed Isidore').

194 Palma, 'Cerbano Cerbani'.

195 On the saint, see Casagrandi, 'S. Agata e l'ideale del suo martirio'; *Studi su S. Agata e il suo culto*; Scaduto, 'Agata'; Gordini, Aprile and Rigoli, 'Agata'; D'Arrigo, *Il martirio di sant'Agata*; Stelladoro, 'Ricerche sulla tradizione manoscritta', pp. 63–89; Stelladoro, *Agata la martire*. On the two translations, see Scalia, 'La traslazione del corpo di S. Agata'; Oldfield, *Sanctity*

composed in the middle of the fifth century, Agatha was born in Catania in the third century and martyred on 5 February 251 under the Emperor Decius. She came from a wealthy noble family and decided to take a vow of chastity. Later, a man named Quintinianus, who had fallen in love with Agatha and could not have her, had her (unjustly) arrested for being corrupted by an indecent woman. She suffered many tortures, including the amputation of her breasts, which were restored later thanks to the miraculous apparition of St Peter.

As mentioned before, the *passio* of St Agatha declares that her body was recovered by some Christians after her martyrdom, confirming, from a hagiographic perspective, the preservation of her relics over the centuries.¹⁹⁶ In 1040 they were taken by general George Maniakes (d. 1041), who arrived in Sicily at the head of the Byzantine troops to free the island from the Arabs. He first triumphed at Rometta (1038), after which he took control of thirteen further cities, including Syracuse. Following the significant victory of Troina in 1040, however, the Saracens managed to evade the surveillance of the Byzantine fleet, for which general Maniakes blamed admiral Stephen, the emperor's brother-in-law. The general was then accused and had to return to Constantinople where he was imprisoned. Some references to these events can be found in the *Synopsis historiarum* by John Skylitzes (1040s–1101/1110), the *Chronographia* by Michael Psellos (d. ca. 1096), and Michael Attaleiates' *Historia*, written between 1034 and 1079, none of which texts allude to the translation of the relics.¹⁹⁷

The theft of St Agatha is mentioned in Orderic Vitalis' *Historia ecclesiastica*, composed in the first half of the twelfth century. According to this source, Maniakes – referenced in the text as *Manichetus*¹⁹⁸ and probably to be identified with him – stole her relics in order to preserve them from the dangers posed by the Muslim presence in Sicily.¹⁹⁹ After their intervention, the Normans – some of whom had been members of Maniakes' troops – seized power in Sicily, on his departure defeating the remaining Byzantine troops and settling down in Melfi.²⁰⁰ A further mention of St Agatha's body

and Pilgrimage in Medieval Southern Italy, pp. 119, 140–145, 153–169; Cafà, 'Sulla *translatio* di Sant'Agata'.

196 See § 2.3.

197 Cafà, 'Sulla *translatio* di Sant'Agata', pp. 144–146.

198 Cafà, 'Sulla *translatio* di Sant'Agata', pp. 151–152.

199 'Ossa quoque sanctae Agathae virginis et martyris, aliorumque sanctorum corpora [...] de Sicilia Constantinopolim reverenter transtulit' ('He carefully carried the bones of St Agatha, virgin and martyr, and of other saints back with him from Sicily to Constantinople'), Orderic Vitalis, *Historia aeclesiastica*, vol. III, book V, no. 369 (pp. 86–87).

200 On the historical context, see von Falkenhausen, *La dominazione bizantina nell'Italia meridionale*; Caruso, 'La Sicilia nelle fonti storiografiche bizantine'; Caruso, 'Il bios di s. Filareto

appears in William of Malmesbury's *Gesta regum Anglorum*, which was composed approximately between 1125 and 1135 and lists her relics alongside those of numerous other saints.²⁰¹ It is difficult to say exactly where the remains were brought to in Constantinople. According to Constantine Lascaris (1434–1501), an erudite refugee who arrived in Messina in 1465 to teach Greek literature, they were taken by the empress Theodora and put in a monastery of virgins.²⁰²

The theft of her relics that we deal with narrates the return of St Agatha's remains to Catania. The main source is the *Historia translationis corporis sanctae Agathae* (BHL 139) – also known as *Epistola Mauriti Cataniensis Episcopi* – written in the form of an epistle composed between 1155 and 1169 by Maurice, the Benedictine monk who was bishop of Catania from 1122 to 1143 or 1144.²⁰³ The original manuscript was probably lost in the earthquake of 1693, but two codex, the *Liber Prioratus* from the second half of the fifteenth century and the *Codice degli Uffici* from the beginning of the sixteenth, allow us to read the text.²⁰⁴ The *translatio* was also included in the hagiographical collection *Vitae Sanctorum Siculorum* by Ottavio Gaetani published in 1657.²⁰⁵

After narrating St Agatha's passion and Maniakes' first theft of the relics,²⁰⁶ Bishop Maurice writes that two soldiers, Gislebertus from France and Goselinus from Calabria (*calabricus*), the present Salento, decided to take the body of the martyr. The latter, in fact, had three visions in which St Agatha requested him to take her relics secretly (*latenter*)²⁰⁷ and bring them home. During the night, with the use of a ladder, they entered the church in which the relics were enshrined,²⁰⁸ putting them in a basket with roses. Then they arrived at the house of Goselinus, where they arranged the holy head between two plates and the bones inside two quivers. John II Komnenos (1118–1143), who had discovered the theft, attempted to find the thieves in vain. After going to Smyrna and Corinth, and after receiving

il Giovane'; Stelladoro, *Agata la martire*, pp. 73–89. On the religious context, see Tramontana, 'Sant'Agata'.

201 Quoted in Cafà, 'Sulla *translatio* di Sant'Agata', p. 149.

202 D'Arrigo, *Il martirio di sant'Agata*, p. 84; Cafà, 'Sulla *translatio* di Sant'Agata', p. 159.

203 Limone, 'Italia meridionale', p. 44; Stelladoro, *Agata vergine e martire*, p. 36. On this bishop, see Imperia, *I vescovati nella Sicilia normanna*, pp. 183–188.

204 Stelladoro, *Agata vergine e martire*, pp. 10; 32–35; Cafà, 'Sulla *translatio* di Sant'Agata', p. 153.

205 On the theft also see: Papisidero, *Translatio sanctitatis*, pp. 63–65.

206 *Historia translationis corporis sanctae Agathae*, 2 (p. 643).

207 *Historia translationis corporis sanctae Agathae*, 3 (p. 643).

208 'quieto tempore noctis una cum illo scala supposita [...] ecclesiam introivit', *Historia translationis corporis sanctae Agathae*, 4 (p. 643).

another dream, the soldiers sailed to Taranto, where a mass was celebrated. On that occasion, they lost one of St Agatha's breasts, which was then miraculously found by a child who was being breastfed, and later the clergy built a church to enshrine the relic. Finally, Goselinus and Gislebertus arrived in Messina where the latter went to Bishop Maurice, who was at that moment at the *castrum* of Aci, donated to the bishop by Roger II with the privilege of 1091, which was confirmed again in 1196 by Henry VI, and finally taken away by Frederick II.²⁰⁹ The bishop sent to the city two monks, Luca and Holdomanus, who, together with the thieves, and on bare feet and dressed in white robes ('*nudis pedibus et in albis vestibus*'),²¹⁰ brought the relics to Catania, where they were welcomed on 17 August by the locals and enshrined in the cathedral, built by Roger I of Sicily between 1086 and 1090 together with a Benedictine monastery.²¹¹ In 1091 the count restored the episcopacy of Catania, declaring that the monastery's abbot was also the bishop.²¹²

In Andrea Dandolo's *Chronica*, which he wrote in the first half of the thirteenth century detailing the operations of the Crusade and the taking of Constantinople, there is a mention of the purported translation of St Agatha's body. He mentions the fact that some crusaders discovered the bodies of the two Sicilian martyrs Agatha and Lucy,²¹³ giving the first to some pilgrims from Sicily,²¹⁴ and transporting the second to Venice.²¹⁵

The miracles performed at the sepulchre of St Agatha are among the documents pertaining to the period of the translation. The text (BHL 140) composed by monk Blandinus includes a list of healing miracles that occurred in particular to Sicilian people. One about a woman from Syracuse possessed by an evil spirit begins with a chronological reference to the theft, as the miracle is supposed to have happened nearly five years after the holy body was transferred from Constantinople to Catania.²¹⁶ Later, the relics were used to heal sick people; for instance, a possessed woman named Bona, who was exorcised by the guardian of the saint's tomb who

209 Scalia, 'La traslazione del corpo di S. Agata', p. 93.

210 *Historia translationis corporis sanctae Agathae*, 14 (p. 643).

211 Consoli, *S. Agata vergine e martire catanese*, pp. 118–134; von Falkenhausen, 'Tra Catania e Paternò'; Stelladoro, *Agata la martire*, p. 73.

212 von Falkenhausen, 'Tra Catania e Paternò', p. 162.

213 'Inventis similiter corporibus sanctarum Agathae et Luciae virginis', Andrea Dandolo, *Chronicon Venetum*, p. 331.

214 'Corpus vero beatae Agathae quibusdam Siculis peregrinis concessum est', Andrea Dandolo, *Chronicon Venetum*, p. 331.

215 Cafà, 'Sulla *translatio* di Sant'Agata', p. 142.

216 Blandinus, *Sanctae Agathae miracula*, 4 (p. 649).

placed the holy head ('gloriosissimum virginis caput')²¹⁷ on the woman's body and prayed for an extended period.

The theft of St Agatha should be considered, like that of St Januarius, a *furtum* designed to transfer the remains to their original place, Catania, the city in which the saint had been martyred. Moreover, as in the case of Benevento's bishop, Agatha also appeared in some dreams to the two soldiers to persuade them to bring back her remains to her home in Catania.

At the same time, the theft can also be analysed in the Norman context in which the legend was composed. From this perspective, the translation of the relics could be linked to the necessity of St Agatha's cult's being relaunched as a broader symbolic sacralisation plan on the part of the island's new owner. In fact, as also emphasised by Marina Manuela Cafà, Sicily was subjected to a phase of Latinisation following the Norman conquest of 1071, during which the Greek liturgy and rites were progressively replaced with their Latin counterparts, and Latin dioceses were established that were subservient to Rome.²¹⁸ A new cathedral was constructed in the centre of Catania during this time, and in 1092 the Benedictine monastery was built, which quickly became the diocese led by the Breton Benedictine monk Angerius as its first bishop.²¹⁹

Agatha stands out as one of the few female saints whose relics were stolen in the Middle Ages. While there were other cases in later centuries – such as that of St Barbara transferred to Venice during the Fourth Crusade – even this example does not necessarily reflect a particular interest in the body of a female saint. Rather, it is tied to the imperative of reclaiming possession of the relics and returning them to their original location. Consequently, femininity appears to be a relatively marginal theme in Italian – and, as we have observed, transalpine – *furta sacra* narratives.

217 Blandinus, *Sanctae Agathae miracula*, 7 (p. 650).

218 Cafà, 'Sulla *translatio* di Sant'Agata', pp. 161–162.

219 Cafà, 'Sulla *translatio* di Sant'Agata', p. 163.

5. The Accounts of Translation: Historical, Literary and Visual Representations

Abstract: The fifth chapter covers the compositional strategies of the texts, beginning with an analysis of the characters, including the thieves, the instigators of the thefts, the custodians of the relics, the communities that were robbed, and the populations that received the saints' bodies in their cities. The chapter focuses on the cultural themes and *topoi* present in the texts, which serve to make the narratives full of miraculous events. These themes and *topoi* constitute a specific language employed by hagiographers to recount the arrival of the relics, reflecting a shared cultural and interpretative horizon. The chapter concludes with a detailed examination of the artistic representations of certain clandestine narratives, linking tale and visual memory to offer a comprehensive understanding of how these stories were perceived and remembered.

Keywords: *furta sacra*; narrative analysis; lexicon of theft; art and *furta sacra*

5.1. The characters

The narrative analysis of the tales that we are considering helps us reflect on the characters mentioned by the hagiographer, who only partially represent historical figures.¹ The most relevant characters contained in the stories are the instigators of the theft and the thieves; that is, the individuals who steal, transfer and relocate the relics. Sometimes the instigator and the thief are

¹ Useful, in this regard, are the observations of Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*; Baroni, *La tension narrative*. On the narrative structure of the *translationes*, see Appleby, *Hagiography and Ideology in the Ninth Century*. More generally, on hagiographic tales as narrative texts, see De Temmerman, 'Saints, Narratives, and Hero(in)es'.

the same person, while at other times they are different people.² The tales frequently include their names; for instance, Bonus from Malamocco and Rusticus from Torcello for St Mark, Gunderada for St John, the merchant Matthew for St Nicolas, Bishop Liutprandus of Cremona for St Himerius, Prior Augustin for Sts Margaret and Euprepia, the pious Benedict for St Adam, Gislebertus and Goselinus for St Agatha, and so on. These names are included in the tales not only to serve a narrative function – it is obvious that the remains have been stolen by someone – but also for a celebratory purpose. The instigator was frequently a person endowed with political or religious power and the material executor was typically a merchant or a layperson. All their actions, including the robbery, appear inspired by God. In almost all the cases under consideration, the thieves are men. Abbess Gunderada is the only female character, responsible for stealing St John of Spoleto's remains. This particular condition emerges in the text when the hagiographer emphasises the uniqueness of her and her nuns' actions in his description of the 'masculine' behaviours they exhibited during the body's exhumation. Due to the speed of the translation, despite her belonging to the female gender ('sexus femineus') she is referred to as strong (*robustissimus*) and masculine (*virilis*).³ In spite of women's prominent role in the late antique and early medieval *passiones*, where they were depicted as the individuals who cared for martyrs' bodies, here they are rarely involved in the theft of relics. This can be attributed to the fact that roles such as merchants, priests, monks and soldiers were associated with the male gender, while women occupied different roles and functions within Christianity during the Middle Ages. It can be observed that, initially, lay women were regarded, even symbolically, as those responsible for caring for and supporting the emerging Church as it asserted itself in society. Conversely, during the medieval centuries, the female figure underwent a gradual process of concealment, only to resurface significantly in the mystical sphere after the year 1000 and particularly in the Late Middle Ages.

The *furta sacra* legends considered mention the guardians at the tomb, although less than in the tales from beyond the Alps,⁴ because numerous stories were composed in monasteries, where it was common for one or more monks to serve as guardians. In our context, this is exemplified in the tale of the theft of St Himerius' remains. As the two bishops of

2 On the characters who miraculously found relics, see Maraval, 'Songes et visions', pp. 588–590.

3 John of Montecassino, *Translatio corporis et miracula sancti Ioannis episcopi Spoletini*, 7 (p. 31).

4 On the guardian monks, see Herrmann-Mascard, *Les reliques des saints*, pp. 383–384.

Cremona and Amelia entered the crypt to take them, a sleeping monk awoke and began to call the others to come and impede the translation. This case emphasises the role of the guardians at the tombs of saints, who were tasked with the supervision of the holy remains and their constant veneration. The monk alerted his brothers to wake up as quickly as possible because the saint was being stolen,⁵ but Liutprand offered him some money, thus obtaining his silence.⁶ This feature permits us to reflect on the related phenomenon of the commerce of relics. As emerges from this episode, the monks might occasionally sell the relics that they were supposed to guard. It is reasonable to postulate that the stories in which the theft was accompanied by the payment of a small amount of money amounted in fact to trade in relics. A similar circumstance is that of the monk who guarded the tomb of St Martin of Mount Massico. According to the tale, he intended to steal the saint's relics in order to sell them for profit.⁷

The tale of St Mark's translation mentions two guardians – the monk Stauracius and the priest Theodore – who played a crucial role in the theft. After several visits to the church of St Mark, the Venetian merchants persuaded the pair to give them the holy body and go with them to Venice.⁸ In this case, the guardians were not won over by money but by the prospect of taking care of the body once they arrived in Italy. The political context of Egypt, which was under Arab domination, arguably justified abandoning the country in which the bones of St Mark were enshrined. Additionally, according to the *Translatio Liparim et Beneventum et inde in Galliam*, some years after the theft of St Mark, certain monks who were guarding St Bartholomew's remains on Lipari Island received a similar proposal from Prince Sico, including the possibility of going to Benevento along with the relics.

Guardian monks are also mentioned in the versions from Bari and Venice of St Nicholas' removal. In both cases, the custodians attempted to protect his relics and revealed where his body was concealed only when threatened. The number of guardians varies greatly from one version to another and, unlike in other examples, in this instance they do not collaborate with the thieves. According to the sources, Muslim control of the territory also

5 'Surgite Fratres, surgite velociter. Nobis beati Hymerii corpus furatur!', *Translatio sancti Himerii*, 13 (p. 265).

6 'occurrrens illico ei dat munera, et petiit silentium', *Translatio sancti Himerii*, 14 (p. 265).

7 'qui [the monk] furtim venerabile corpus abducere et aliquid pretii se posse acquirere cogitavit', *Vita, translatio et miracula sancti Martini abbatis*, 9 (p. 838).

8 *Translatio sancti Marci*, X.4 (p. 119).

affected the church where a small group of monks continued to devote themselves to the cult and care of St Nicholas' tomb.

In the case of the theft of St Stephen's relics, the Venetian monk Peter established a close relationship with the church's guardian. Although the latter was initially astonished when the monk revealed his desire to steal the relics, he later collaborated in the theft, ensuring its success. From a narratological point of view, the custodians typically played the role of accomplices of the thieves; occasionally, though, they might be adversaries, like the monk at the tomb of St Himerius. Sometimes, the tales only mention a few accomplices, as in the story of Sts Margaret and Euprepia, whose tomb Prior Augustin opened with the assistance of two relatives, Luca and Robertus, before seeking shelter in the home of a friend, Crisperius. The guardians did not always turn out to be the ideal individuals to take care of relics; for instance, the monk who was supposed to guard St Martin of Mount Massico's body actually intended to steal and sell it. The custodian described in the *Vita beati Mauri* refers explicitly to the act of guarding (*custodia*) the body of the saint.⁹

At the same time, many cases did not include any guardians, as can be seen in the theft of St Metrone where, according to Ratherius' invective, the removal of his relics was made possible because the local people had not protected them. In other circumstances, the absence of custodians can be explained by the context of the relics' abandonment, as has already been discussed.

These sources help us to better understand the role of relic guardians at saints' tombs from a broad perspective. The fact that they had been charged with their care was evidence of a trusting relationship between the abbot (or comparable figures) and the custodians. While the presence of a custodian was well attested in monastic contexts, this function was fulfilled by secular clergy in other contexts, such as cathedrals and churches that were not part of monasteries.

Other significant characters in the tales are the local townsfolk, generally described as a group of individuals who react to the theft and attempt to prevent it. Their desperation on being deprived of the relics serves as a narrative device to emphasise the value of the holy bodies. The negative or positive function of the locals depends on the author of the story: if he belonged to the community that stole the relics, the locals were depicted as having been guilty of inadequate worship and care; on the other hand, if the hagiographer was part of the community that had been robbed, the

9 James of Venosa, *Vita beati Mauri et sociorum eius*, III.3 (p. 99).

locals were described as victims, sometimes innocent, as in the case of St Trofimenia, and other times guilty of impious behaviour, as in the example of St Juvenal in Narni. In this case, after the body had been transferred to Lucca, supernatural signs began to occur to emphasise that it had to be returned to the inhabitants of Narni: frequent hailstorms ('grandinem frequentem'), rains of fire ('sulfurei imbres'), foul odours and worms emerging from springs and wells ('fontes et putei eorum fetore ac verminibus scaturiebant'), and dead animals.¹⁰ Other than a trace of some phenomena interpreted as a punishment from God, all of these factors must be seen as the hagiographer's attempts to emphasise the immorality of the theft perpetrated.

Einhard narrates in his *translatio* that after stealing the saints' relics, his secretary waited in Rome for seven days to determine whether the locals had learned that the holy bodies had been moved.¹¹

The community that transferred the relics was also described as a generic group of people. Upon the relics' arriving in a new city, the citizens – females and males, children and elders, religious and laypeople, etc. – thronged the streets to celebrate the *adventus*,¹² recalling, from a literary and morphological standpoint, the advent of Emperor Constantine in Autun in 311, when the population came out to greet him carrying its deities.¹³

However, the most significant characters in the stories were the saints themselves. Because of their tangible presence in their relics, they were considered living individuals who desired to be either transported to another church or left at rest in their tombs, and with whom the thieves had to establish a relationship. Their will constantly emerges by means of supernatural devices including dreams, non-human voices, and miracles, especially at the opening of their tombs and on their entering the new town where they were to be relocated.

The principal characters – namely, the thieves and the saints – negotiate the translation: the former, with prayers and tears, ask for the departures to occur without opposition, while the latter, by miracles and signs, may either accept the offer or reject it and remain in their homes. In a broader sense, the saints reveal their wishes through a series of manifestations;

10 *Translatio Iuvenalis et Cassii*, 71 (p. 246); Previously, we have incorrectly attributed these supernatural occurrences to the town of Narni, when they actually occurred in Lucca (Papasidero, *Translatio sanctitatis*, p. 115).

11 'si de sublatis sanctorum corporibus aliquid ad notitiam civium pervenisset', Einhard, *Translatio sanctorum Marcellini et Petri*, I, 6 (p. 46).

12 Bozóky, 'Le rôle du petit peuple', p. 549.

13 *XII Panegyrici Latini*, V(VIII).8 (p. 180); MacCormack, *Adventus*, p. 28.

for example, when St Trofimenas's body was brought out of the crypt to be transferred to Amalfi, it began to bleed as though she were experiencing a second martyrdom, and later she appeared to the church custodian, displaying her presence despite the absence of her body.

As demonstrated in the previous paragraphs, the role of the saints is of paramount importance, and their direct involvement in facilitating or thwarting theft seems to have been more clearly defined over the centuries. Initially, many translations occur as a result of divine inspiration but often involve the use of force. In other instances, especially during nocturnal thefts, prayer to the saint supplants the use of violence, and it is the saint's consent to relocate to the new community that proves decisive for the success of the operation. Furthermore, as evidenced by the cases of St Mark, St Nicholas and St John the Baptist, among others, the saint spiritually accompanies the travellers, performing miracles with their body and demonstrating constant vigilance over the fate of the returning travellers.

Even if all these characters are part of a rhetoric-narrative structure, a diachronic analysis can reveal the evolution of these figures across time. The instigator, who is more frequently mentioned in the tales composed in the Early Middle Ages – especially in Benevento – partially loses his role in the later tales. This figure usually appears while a war or siege is in action and the soldiers are raiding the cities because they are at his orders. In the passage from the early to the Central Middle Ages, as the number of thefts committed in secret increases, the independence of thieves also grows, gradually overshadowing the function of the instigators. Theft thus becomes a phenomenon involving individual monks, priests and merchants, with the result that the acquisition of new relics is tied not only to the major powers, but also to the different levels of society, which are generally depicted as groups (the monks of a monastery, some merchants, etc.).

Moreover, although they may sometimes remain in the background, depicted as a looming threat to the integrity of holy relics yet seldom directly implicated, Islamic communities are occasionally portrayed as antagonists. They feature prominently in various accounts of theft; notably in the narrative concerning the relics of St Mark, where they not only control Egypt and Alexandria but also manifest themselves physically in the port, seeking to assert authority over the goods loaded onto the ships by the Venetians. These communities are often used almost as a pretext to justify furtive translations, much as occurred in other contexts and regions beyond the Alps with invaders such as the Hungarians.

5.2. *Topoi* and narrative themes

The theft of relics is primarily a phenomenon involving the mythopoeic and aetiological dimension of texts, in which it is more important to explain *how* the relics arrived in a church than the historical details of the event. Simultaneously, the narratives serve to perpetuate beliefs and perspectives deeply ingrained in folkloric culture, sharing common themes and aspects. In this light, the narrative structure and the *topoi* employed by hagiographers are essential ingredients in the construction of the legend of translation. Despite the fact that hagiographic themes and *topoi* are present in numerous texts of this typology, which may make them appear repetitious and pointless, they are actually useful because they are part of the vocabulary authors used to describe the lives of saints and their supernatural acts. As Gennaro Luongo argues, *topoi* are not to be considered objects of heuristic curiosity or a sterile recording of annoying and superfluous materials, but have to be restored to their original 'argumentative function' as instruments of evidence and proof, the privileged conveyance of the hagiographic message.¹⁴ Additionally, they are essential for the study of cultural history since they reveal the belief system of the age.

The *passiones* analysed in the second chapter include numerous hagiographic *topoi*, but the most relevant for our purpose is that of the retrieval of holy bodies in order to prevent their destruction. This feature was crucial in the development of the idea that the sacred remains of martyrs should be recovered at the moment of their death. The occurrence of this event has an 'archaeological' function in the establishment of the cult of a saint, as this was founded on the existence of relics allegedly preserved at the time of martyrdom.

An example of this can be found in the *passio* of Sts Gordianus and Epimachus. After their martyrdom, Clementianus, the emperor's representative, ordered their bodies to be left unburied for five days so that the dogs might consume them. When the animals arrived to feed, they began to bark and lament ('latratum et mugitum emittebant')¹⁵ because they could not get at the corpses. This mysterious occurrence permitted a member of the saints' family and other Christians to secretly take and bury their bodies, giving rise to the devotion to Sts Gordianus and Epimachus; according to

14 Luongo, 'Agiografia fondana', pp. 194–195, n. 5; see also van Uytfanghe, 'Le remploi dans l'hagiographie'.

15 *Passio sanctorum Gordiani et Epimachi*, 5 (p. 552).

the hagiographer, miracles and signs continued to occur even during his lifetime.¹⁶

The recurrence of several *matronae* who recovered martyr's relics must also be regarded a hagiographic *topos*, as discussed in the second chapter. Figures such as Lucina, Plautilla and Savina, regardless of their historical existence, are probably a means of emphasising the role of women during the persecutions, while at the same time revealing the consistent diffusion and influence of a cultural theme, that of the pious woman who cares for the bodies of martyrs like a mother.

As regards the *furta sacra*, it is possible to identify numerous themes in the tales under consideration that are profoundly tied to the translation and why it was deemed necessary. One of the most important is the issue of inadequate worship, where the hagiographer emphasises the fact that the relics had been abandoned and uncared for in order to justify the theft.¹⁷ As in the case of St John of Spoleto, whose body was discovered by Abbess Gunderada, in several stories the holy remains were in forgotten locations without guardian monks, and the translation was the only way to ensure that they would be accorded their due worship. The absence of masses, liturgies and devotions are components of this *topos*. Other instances are the thefts occurring throughout the Early Middle Ages, when Saracen attacks, local battles and the presence of Arabs and Normans established the historical conditions for holy remains to be left untended.¹⁸ Numerous saints' relics were in these circumstances, like those of St Leucius of Brindisi and Sts Primianus and Firmianus. Furthermore, the location where the body of St Magnus had originally been enshrined was portrayed as having been devastated by the Saracens and forgotten by all;¹⁹ similarly, the monks who stole St Leucius' bones did not find anyone at his tomb ('nullum illic reperientes').²⁰ Occasionally, this inadequate care was an indication of poverty and destitution; for instance, in the case of the twelve martyr saints, whose relics were enshrined in squalid and unsuitable receptacles ('inhonestis oculis tenerentur',²¹ 'squalidis et inhonestis oculis').²²

16 'In quo etiam loco [the crypt] beneficia eorum ac virtutes florent usque in hodiernum diem', *Passio sanctorum Gordiani et Epimachi*, 5 (p. 552).

17 Bozóky, 'The theft of relics in the Middle Ages', pp. 133–134.

18 See Geary, *Furta sacra*, p. 131; Galdi, 'Traslazioni di reliquie in Campania', p. 83.

19 *Translatio Verulam inde Anagninam*, 35 (p. 708); 44 (p. 709).

20 *De translationibus sancti Leucii*, 2 (p. 673).

21 *Translatio Beneventum duodecim fratrum*, 1 (p. 142).

22 *Translatio Beneventum duodecim fratrum*, 3 (p. 143).

In both the Bari and Venetian versions of St Nicholas' translation, a variant of this *topos* appears. The guardian monks at his tomb were described as taking care of his holy body while the Arabs had taken control of that territory, endangering the existence of his remains. From this perspective, the theft was considered a necessary action perpetrated to protect the relics from destruction or the absence of worship.

Another important element in the *furta sacra* genre is the use of force and violence to obtain the relics during a war or siege.²³ Numerous instances of this *topos* originated in early medieval Benevento, during the principalities of Arechis II, Sico and Sicard. In this scenario, the majority of translations occurred during sieges and the removal of holy remains was the outcome of a military operation. The transfer of St Juvenal to Narni occurred during an attack by Adalbert I of Tuscany, who transferred his relics to Lucca. In the case of the twelve martyr saints, Arechis demanded a tribute (*tributum*), having the relics handed over to him with the use of force ('*manus suas misit ad fortia*').²⁴ In a variation of the legend of the translation of St Bartholomew's relics, the Beneventans threatened the guardian monks who had recently reassembled the relics after the Saracen attempt to destroy them. The soldiers unsheathed their swords ('*districtis gladiis*') and demanded to see the relics quickly.²⁵ Weapons are mentioned also in relation to the translations of St Pardus²⁶ and of St Adam of Guglionesi, where they were employed by the thieves to defend themselves during their endeavour.²⁷

On the basis of the predominant tradition of *furta sacra* established beyond the Alps, the thieves frequently had to deceive the guardians in order to carry the remains off to their city or monastery. Many French and German tales contain this element, which is linked to monastic contexts where the relics were extracted from a tomb guarded by a monk, whose trust had been won before the theft, as in the case of St Faith, who was stolen from Agen and taken to Conques.²⁸ According to the *Translatio sanctae Fidei Arinisdus*, a monk from the monastery of Conques, gained the trust of the monks of Agen, obtaining from them the right to guard the saint's relics after many years. In this way he was able to steal them and return to

23 Bozóky, 'The theft of relics in the Middle Ages', p. 137.

24 *Translatio Beneventum duodecim fratrum*, 3 (p. 143).

25 *Translatio corporis sancti Bartholomei apostoli in Gallias*, 15–17 (p. 6).

26 *Vita sancti Pardi*, p. 4.

27 *Historia translationis sancti Adami*, 5 (p. 330).

28 An Italian case that was not included in our research due to its being relatively recent is that of the body of Pope St Stephen, which was brought from Trani to the monastery of St Mary of Column (Papasidero, *Translatio sanctitatis*, pp. 82, 93, 167).

Conques.²⁹ On the basis of the *Translatio sancti Maiani*, two monks from Cognac in southern France employed a similar strategy to take the body of St Maianus from Gascony.³⁰

An illustrative instance of deception is that of Bonus and Rusticus at the tomb of St Mark in Bucoli. To conceal the theft from the inhabitants of Alexandria, the nearby body of St Claudia was put in place of his at the moment of his transfer. This strategy continued on board the ship, where St Mark's body was hidden beneath some pork to keep away the Muslim soldiers. During the relocation of St Isidore of Chios, the holy odour was similarly concealed beneath scented grapes.

The element of secrecy during translation is well attested too, especially in the Central Middle Ages.³¹ In fact, many thefts occurred during the night, which was the best time to steal the relics without anyone noticing. An example is contained in the translation of Sts Margaret and Euprepia's relics, extracted by Prior Augustin who opened the tomb in the silence of the night ('Noctis [...] silentio')³² and then fled to the house of his friend Crisperius; similarly, Abbess Gunderada, who had planned to take St John's remains during the quiet of the night ('in hora noctis silentii'),³³ carried out the operation clandestinely (*clancule*).

The episodes generally mentioned at the conclusion of the translations describe the reaction of the local people. It is a hagiographic *topos* that enables readers or listeners of the text to comprehend the value of the relics. Since their robbery caused a profound sense of sadness, they had to be deemed precious and authentic. In the case of Sts Gratian and Felinus, the inhabitants of Perugia unsuccessfully attempted to stop the thieves by pursuing them. The legends about St Nicholas include several references: in Bari's tradition, Archdeacon John stated that the monks of Myra wept and tore their garments³⁴ and pulled out their hair,³⁵ claiming that they would rather die than be deprived of their patron saint. At the moment of the merchants' departure, the guardians observed them with expressions bordering on insanity ('veluti dementes').³⁶ According

29 Geary, *Furta sacra*, pp. 59–60, 138–141.

30 Geary, *Furta sacra*, pp. 78–81.

31 Bozóky, 'The theft of relics in the Middle Ages', pp. 134–135.

32 *Translatio sanctae Margaritae in Tusciam*, 3 (p. 41).

33 *Translatio corporis et miracula sancti Ioannis episcopi Spoletini*, 5 (p. 31).

34 'Plangunt et vestres scindant e pectore sacras', Nicephorus, *Translatio sancti Nicolai*, p. 115.

35 'Cum barba crines vellunt ex vertice tristes', Nicephorus, *Translatio sancti Nicolai*, p. 115.

36 Archdeacon John, *Translatio sancti Nicolai*, p. 99; Nicephorus, *Translatio sancti Nicolai*, p. 118.

to Nicephorus, a monk was also struck after being accused of handing over the body.³⁷

All these *topos* are constantly described in conjunction with another crucial aspect; the piety of the thieves. All the deeds of Arechis, Sico and Sicard are depicted as being directly influenced by the will of God. Arechis, for instance, was aroused and inspired by the Holy Spirit ('Sancti Spiritus gratia inflammatus').³⁸ This aspect is confirmed by Leo of Ostia who wrote in the *Chronica monasterii Casinensis* that Arechis had a vision of the twelve martyr saints while praying in front of their altar after the translation.³⁹

The merchants of Bari were also inspired by God ('quasi divina inspiratione'),⁴⁰ demonstrating their godliness during the execution of the theft by praying and being humble (*humiliter*).⁴¹ In the instance of St Adam, pious Benedict received the saint's appeal to be transferred to another place, and his life was fully characterised by his devotion to God ('timore Domini atque amore repletus'),⁴² as corroborated by the fact that he regularly attended the feasts of saints, fasting and praying. The group of thieves that was with him is also portrayed as being extremely religious, weeping and praying ('multis cum precibus lacrymisque') at the opening of the tomb.⁴³

An important exception to this *topos* can be found in the account of the translation of St Juvenal's body by Adalbert of Tuscany, who is described as diabolically inspired ('Inito consilio diabolico').⁴⁴

As regards the narrative framework of the tales under consideration, it is important to recall the *Translatio sanctorum Marcellini et Petri*, which mentions the famous Deusdona, the Roman deacon who stole and sold relics of saints from the catacombs, especially to monks from beyond the Alps.⁴⁵

37 Nicephorus, *Translatio sancti Nicolai*, pp. 118–119.

38 *Translatio Beneventum duodecim fratrum*, 1 (p. 142).

39 Leo of Ostia, *Chronica monasterii Casinensis*, p. 587. Arechis II's piety is underlined by several sources, including Erchempertus, who reported that he was extremely religious ('vir christianissimus et valde illustris', Erchempertus, *Historia Langobardorum Beneventanorum*, p. 235), and the *Chronicon Salernitanum*, which defines him as a very pious prince, 'piissimus princeps', *Chronicon Salernitanum*, 10 (p. 13).

40 Archdeacon John, *Translatio sancti Nicolai*, p. 94; see also Nicephorus, *Translatio sancti Nicolai*, p. 114.

41 Archdeacon John, *Translatio sancti Nicolai*, p. 96; see also Nicephorus, *Translatio sancti Nicolai*, p. 115.

42 *Historia translationis sancti Adami*, 1 (p. 329).

43 *Historia translationis sancti Adami*, 5 (p. 330).

44 *Translatio Iuvenalis et Cassii*, p. 243, 44.

45 Stella (ed.), *Traslazione e miracoli*, p. 20.

The tale reveals the presence of various hagiographic *topoi* that inspired the subsequent stories, while also including many elements from earlier traditions. The collaboration between thieves and saints, the nocturnal activity, the reaction of the locals and the triumphal arrival of the relics in the new community are among the major topics.

5.3. The lexicon of theft

The examination of the tales reveals the presence of a specialised lexicon employed by the hagiographers to characterise this specific typology of translation, although not all the accounts use the same terms. This lexicon was also helpful in the process of classifying the stories, since certain words demonstrated the authors' intention to describe a theft and not a generic translation. For this reason, it is important to analyse the lexicon of *furta sacra*, which essentially reveals the hagiographers' and society's perspective on the theft of relics. It is possible to identify two semantic groups: that of theft, which includes many words explicitly referring to *furtum*, and that of secrecy and quickness of action. Both groups are utilised particularly in the part of the stories concerning the opening of the tomb and the removal of the holy body.

In the first set we find the terms related to the theft *per se*. The verbs include *furo/furor* (to steal, to rob), *fraudo* (to steal, to deprive of, to swindle), *rapio* (to steal), *abripio* (to kidnap, to take away), *diripio* (to take away) and *fugio* (to run away). Many nouns such as *furtum* (theft), *fraus* (trick), as well as certain adverbs, including *furtim* and *furtive* (secretly, furtively), are employed too. These words are used with others that are more generic, such as *fero* (to bring) and its compounds *aufero*, *defero* and *transfero* (to carry off), *tollo* (to take, to bring away) and *porto* and its compounds *transporto*, *deporto* and *asporto* (to bring, to transfer, etc.), *transmuto* and *subtraho*; there are also nouns, such as *translatio* (transfer).

The second large set of words relates to the concepts of secrecy and speed, and is intricately interwoven with the notion of thievery. We find numerous adverbs, including *clam*, *clancule*, *occulte* (secretly, covertly), *festine* and *statim* (extremely swiftly), *silentio* (in the stillness) and *latenter* (secretly). Certain terms are directly associated with the concept of silence or night, which, as previously underlined, was the favoured time for the taking of the relics: *noctis silentio* (during the silence of the night), *nocturnis horis* (during the night) and *nocturna mysteria* (that is, the liturgies after sunset). Among the verbs are *propero* and *festino* (to

move quickly), and *celo* (to conceal); the most common noun is *secretum* (secret).

The lexicon can reveal whether the hagiographers considered the translations they were describing as theft or as something else. Before analysing the numerous medieval tales, it is necessary to briefly examine the *passiones* in order to highlight the earliest evidence of the use of a specific lexicon. In the Latin version of the *Acta Eupli*, the verb *aufero* (in the expression ‘sublatum est’)⁴⁶ refers to the theft of the saint’s body. The same verb appears in the *Passio sanctae Agnetis* to describe the removal of St Agnes’ and St Emerentiana’s bodies when Agnes’ relatives recovered the bones of their daughter (‘abstulerunt corpus eius’)⁴⁷ and the pious Emerentiana (‘abstulerunt corpus’).⁴⁸ In the last example, the saint’s body was removed during the night (*nocte*).

The *Passio sancti Cornelii*, another text composed between the fifth and sixth centuries, contains the verb *rapio* (‘rapuerunt corpora sanctorum martyrum’),⁴⁹ as well as the temporal expression ‘during the night’ (‘Eadem vero nocte’).⁵⁰ Occasionally, the tales resort to more generic verbs whose meaning is strengthened by an adverb. This is the case with the *Passio sancti Eusebii*, in which the hagiographer alludes to the retrieval of the relics with the verb *colligo* (‘corpus collegerunt’)⁵¹ but emphasises, in another account of the theft of a holy body, that the action occurred at night (*noctu*) and in secrecy (*occulte*). Although these are just a few examples, most passions are characterised by the use of such words. The *Passio sanctae Agathae*, too, employs various words to describe the mode of action. To avoid being detected by the Romans, the Christians went to take her body (‘auferentes corpus’)⁵² in great haste (‘nimia celeritate’).⁵³

These few instances allow us to understand how the late antique *passiones* – as well as those composed later in the Early Middle Ages – incorporate the vocabulary that defined the *furta sacra* tales in the subsequent centuries. As pointed out in chapter 2, the presence of a particular style is crucial to elucidate how the lexicon of theft of relics is rooted in late antique stealing of martyrs’ bodies. Indeed, while tales within the *furta sacra* genre

46 *Acta Eupli*, 12 (p. 318).

47 *Passio sanctae Agnetis*, 13 (p. 717).

48 *Passio sanctae Agnetis*, 13 (p. 717).

49 *Passio sancti Cornelii papae*, 52–53 (p. 373).

50 *Passio sancti Cornelii papae*, 52 (p. 373).

51 *Passio sancti Eusebii*, 6 (p. 167).

52 *Passio sanctae Agathae*, 13 (p. 623).

53 *Passio sanctae Agathae*, 13 (p. 623).

make more extensive use of the 'lexicon of theft', it is important to observe a significant lexical consistency and continuity between the two textual typologies. This is evident even with regard to verbs and expressions that are more associated with stealthy stealing, such as the root *fur-* and the verb *rapio*.

It is possible to scrutinise the recurrence of such vocabulary in the medieval texts analysed, with special attention to cases where the most explicit terms are employed. Certainly, providing a detailed analysis would require many pages, instead of which we will provide just a few representative examples.

In the translation of the relics of St Januarius, the verb *fero* and its compound *aufero* are used, the latter employed at the moment when the Neapolitans realise that the body has been stolen and acknowledge their own responsibility as a result of their sins ('a nobis nunc aufertur').⁵⁴ The case of St Trophimena is relevant because the concept of theft emerges in several passages, for instance, during the division of the body between Benevento and Minori, carried out to ensure that neither community felt entirely cheated ('non fraudemur').⁵⁵ Additionally, the verb *aufero* is used to denote the subtraction that occurred and the deprivation experienced by the Minori/Amalfi community.⁵⁶ The verb – and, in general, the compounds of *fero* – are among the most frequently used in the various tales, as they are the most relevant to the idea of being carried away.⁵⁷

In the instance of the theft of the relics of St Mark, the verbs *furo/furor* are used when the protagonists reflect on the transfer of the body and again during the voyage to Venice.⁵⁸ The vocabulary employed in the narratives of the translations of the relics of Sts Primianus and Firmianus, as well as St Pardus, is also worth noting: concerning the first two bodies, the author specifies that they were clandestinely taken away ('furtim tulerunt duo corpora').⁵⁹

In the concise narrative of the attempted theft of the relics of St Appianus, the hagiographer explicitly employs the verb *rapio* to describe the action

54 *Translatio sanctorum Ianuarii, Festi et Desiderii*, 3 (p. 140).

55 *Historia inventionis ac translationis et miracula sanctae Trophimenaе*, 23 (p. 238).

56 *Historia inventionis ac translationis et miracula sanctae Trophimenaе*, 30 (p. 239).

57 *De translationibus sancti Leucii*, 2 (p. 673); *Translatio Iuvenalis et Cassii episcoporum Narniensium Lucam*, 63 (p. 244).

58 'quod corpus beati Marci furatum esset', *Translatio Marci evangelistae Venetias*, XIII.2 (p. 123); 'Videamus [...] ne forte a nautis illis Veneticis corpus beati Marci furetur', *Translatio Marci evangelistae Venetias*, XIII.3 (p. 123).

59 *Vita sancti Pardi*, p. 3.

of the citizens of Pavia, who clandestinely entered the place where he was buried at night ('rapientes beati Apiani corpus').⁶⁰ Similarly, in the other account of attempted theft, that of St Martin of Mount Massico, the guardian monk who sought to steal the relics initially pondered how he could secretly (*furtim*) take the body, then swiftly (*festine*) gained access to the tomb, triggering a powerful earthquake.⁶¹

The theft of the relics of Sts Margaret and Euprepia is also marked by this lexicon, particularly at the moment when the tomb is opened and the removal executed: the tomb is excavated in the silence of the night ('Noctis igitur silentio') and Prior Augustine, who seeks refuge at Crisperius' house, does so in an effort to avoid being detected (*clam*).⁶²

The translation of St Himerius by the bishops of Cremona and Amelia again features numerous lexical references. The first is the use of the verb *furor* in the cries of the guardian monk, who, alarmed, attempts to raise the alarm and alert the other monks ('Nobis beati Hymerii corpus furatur').⁶³ Additionally, the adverb 'secretly' (*clam*) is adopted to describe the manner in which the two men leave the city.⁶⁴ Lastly, reference is made to the nocturnal context with the celebration after sunset ('quasi nocturna celebraturi mysteria').⁶⁵

Some narratives, albeit characterised by a less explicit lexicon, unmistakably imply episodes related to theft. For instance, in the case of Count Amitto and the translation to Arona, the hagiographer used words such as *aufero* to describe the removal of the relics, or adverbs like *silentio* to depict the silence in which the removal occurred.⁶⁶ In his narrative of the *inventio/furtum* of the body of St John of Spoleto, John of Montecasino vividly portrays the actions of Gunderada and her group, which occur in the silence of the night ('in hora noctis silentii').⁶⁷ Moreover, he describes in even greater detail the past attempted theft, employing an adverb indicating secrecy (*clancule*) and a verb denoting kidnapping (*rapere*).⁶⁸ Similarly, the nun who steals a fragment of St Mark of Atina's relics does so furtively (*furtim*).⁶⁹

60 *Vita sancti Apiani monachi*, 10 (p. 320).

61 *Vita, translatio et miracula sancti Martini abbatis*, 8 (p. 838).

62 *Translatio sanctae Margaritae in Tusciam*, 3 (p. 41).

63 *Translatio sancti Himerii*, 13 (p. 265).

64 *Translatio sancti Himerii*, 15 (p. 265).

65 *Translatio sancti Himerii*, 8 (p. 265).

66 *Translatio sanctorum Gratianiani et Felini Aronam*, 5 (p. 24).

67 *Translatio corporis et miracula sancti Ioannis episcopi Spoletini*, 5 (p. 31).

68 *Translatio corporis et miracula sancti Ioannis episcopi Spoletini*, 5 (p. 31).

69 *Translatio sancti Marci episcopi Atinensis*, 8 (p. 564).

While the *translatio* of St Mark constitutes the first genuine text to present an elaboration of the theme of secret removal, articulated and fully characterised by the *topoi* of the *furta sacra* genre, the eleventh- and twelfth-century traditions concerning the theft of St Nicholas exhibit an explicit lexicon entirely revolving around the theme of clandestine removal. Archdeacon John's *translatio* systematically employs such terminology, both in the opening section, when he enumerates numerous past attempts to steal the relics ('temptaverunt abriperere'),⁷⁰ and when the merchants, contemplating the theft they are beginning to conceive, refer to it as a treasure to be pilfered ('de tanto rapiendo thesauro').⁷¹ The process of stealthy removal is labelled as 'stealthy stealing' ('occulte furari')⁷² and on several occasions, the action that has taken place is explicitly termed *furtum*.⁷³ Furthermore, there is no shortage of more general terms that simply denote taking and carrying away, with the verbs *aufero*,⁷⁴ *tollo*⁷⁵ or *transmuto*.⁷⁶

Nicephorus' text exhibits striking similarities. When the merchants discuss the risk of the Venetians being faster than them, they fear that the latter will surreptitiously (*furtim*)⁷⁷ enter the church and appropriate (*deportarent*)⁷⁸ the relics by breaking through the floor. The verb *tollo* is quite prevalent, particularly in the conversation with the guardian monks.⁷⁹ In addition to the use of the term 'deception/trickery' (*fraus*),⁸⁰ the lexicon of theft resurfaces during the debate on the return journey regarding who managed to steal particles of the holy body.⁸¹

The choices made by the anonymous hagiographer who penned the account of the transfer of the relics of St Nicholas from Myra to Venice are also meticulous. He very explicitly alludes to the theft of St Mark's body in order to draw a parallel.⁸² Additionally, there are more general references

70 John Archdeacon, *Translatio sancti Nicolai*, p. 93.

71 John Archdeacon, *Translatio sancti Nicolai*, p. 94.

72 John Archdeacon, *Translatio sancti Nicolai*, p. 96.

73 John Archdeacon, *Translatio sancti Nicolai*, pp. 97, 99.

74 John Archdeacon, *Translatio sancti Nicolai*, pp. 93, 97.

75 John Archdeacon, *Translatio sancti Nicolai*, p. 96.

76 John Archdeacon, *Translatio sancti Nicolai*, p. 94.

77 Nicephorus, *Translatio s. Nicolai*, p. 114.

78 Nicephorus, *Translatio s. Nicolai*, p. 114.

79 Nicephorus, *Translatio s. Nicolai*, p. 114–115.

80 Nicephorus, *Translatio s. Nicolai*, p. 115.

81 Nicephorus, *Translatio s. Nicolai*, p. 119.

82 'Leonem ingenioso furto de Alexandria rapuisti' ('You stole the lion [sc. St Mark] from Alexandria with a clever theft'), *Historia de translatione monachi anonimi Littorensis*, 22 (p. 267).

to subtraction, indicated by the verbs *tollo* or *sublevo*.⁸³ Furthermore, in the list of miracles that follows the translation, there are various references to secrecy (*latenter*)⁸⁴ and once again to subtraction; for instance, when the saints translated alongside St Nicholas are listed – namely, his uncle and St Theodore ('a nobis abstulerunt').⁸⁵ The translation of the relics of St John the Baptist is closely linked to that of St Nicholas, even in the lexicon. When asked by the Genoese about the relics of the saint from Bari, the guardian monks reported that they had indeed been taken by force ('per violentiam est sublatum').⁸⁶

In the narrative of the translation of the relics of St Adam, the hagiographer employs a less semantically connotated verb (*defero*),⁸⁷ but underscores the clandestine (*clam*) nature of the operation in at least two instances: first, when Benedict reveals what he has learned in a dream to the archpriest Adalbert, and then when the latter covertly involves three other religious figures.⁸⁸ In the *Vita beati Mauri*, James of Venosa uses a rather explicit lexicon. When Archdeacon Giralduus reflects on the transfer of the holy bodies, he uses the verb *transferre*. When the heavenly voice authorises him to transfer the bodies, he uses the imperative *tolle*. After the stop in Gaudio, the archdeacon, fearing that the relics would be taken away from him, sets off at night (*nocte*), quickly ('cum velocissimo cursu')⁸⁹ towards Salento.

The transfer of the body of St Stephen the Protomartyr to Venice is also characterised by a specific lexicon, with particular emphasis on the reference to the transfer by night ('certa noctis hora').⁹⁰ In the translation of the relics of St Isidore, too, the hagiographer employs a specific vocabulary; for example, when describing how the actions of the thief and his accomplice are carried out as secretly and carefully as possible ('quam occultius et cautius possumus'),⁹¹ and employing verbs such as *asporto* or *subtollo*.⁹²

Finally, to depict the kidnapping of the body of St Agatha from Constantinople, the hagiographer uses the adverb *latenter* to denote the secrecy of

83 *Historia de translatione monachi anonimi Littorensis*, 11 (p. 261), 15 (p. 264).

84 *Historia de translatione monachi anonimi Littorensis, Miracula*, p. 285.

85 *Historia de translatione monachi anonimi Littorensis, Miracula*, p. 291.

86 Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda translationis beatissimi Johannis Baptistae Genuam*, D (p. 231).

87 *Historia translationis sancti Adami*, 4 (p. 330).

88 *Historia translationis sancti Adami*, 3–4 (p. 329).

89 James of Venosa, *Vita beati Mauri et sociorum eius*, V.4 (p. 101).

90 *De translatione sancti prothomartyris Stephani de Constantinopoli in Venetias*, p. 102.

91 *Translatio mirifici martyris Isidori*, V (p. 326).

92 *Translatio mirifici martyris Isidori*, V (p. 326); XI (p. 331).

the act, while conveying the act itself in a less explicit manner related to theft, using the verb *aufero* together with the adverb *latenter*, meaning ‘to take away’.⁹³

The examples provided illustrate how terms from the ‘lexicon of theft’ are employed in the texts, and numerous additional instances could be cited. Some narratives indeed exhibit a richer use of such vocabulary due to their length, while others may feature it less prominently. Nevertheless, what they all share is a precise lexical usage that appears to remain relatively stable over the centuries, from *passiones* to *furta sacra*.

In addition to the use of individual words in describing the theft – such as *translatio* and *furtum* – the hagiographers also employ specific expression as indicators of the perceived gravity or significance of the theft. In his invective, Ratherius uses the well-established phrase ‘praiseworthy theft’ (*furto laudabili*),⁹⁴ which it is possible to find in other texts. This binomial reflects the concepts of both thievery and piety, frequently motivated by divine inspiration. Archdeacon John resorts to a similar expression to describe the theft of St Nicholas’ relics. He describes it as ‘furtum laudabile’,⁹⁵ emphasising the same points as in the preceding case. The expression appears again in the legend of St Agatha, where Gislebertus and Goselinus’ action is classified as ‘furtum laudabile’.⁹⁶ In the relocation of St Nicholas’ relics to Venice, the robbery committed by St Mark’s merchants is described as ‘ingenious theft’ (*ingenioso furto*),⁹⁷ probably because of the concealment of the relics beneath pork meat. The words *furtum* and *rapina* are used to refer to the imminent translation of St Nicholas.⁹⁸

Some of the lexicon contained in the tales under discussion is also included in Einhard’s *translatio* of relics – a text that we have frequently regarded as comparable – such as *subfero*,⁹⁹ *deporto*¹⁰⁰ and *furtum*.¹⁰¹ The inclusion of this last word is significant because, as noted earlier, it underscores the text’s clear and unavoidable adherence to the cultural motif of ‘theft’.

93 *Historia translationis corporis sanctae Agathae*, 3 (p. 643).

94 Ratherius, *De translatione sancti Metronis*, 3.107 (p. 14).

95 Archdeacon John, *Translatio sancti Nicolai*, p. 97.

96 *Historia translationis corporis sanctae Agathae*, 4 (p. 643).

97 *Historia de translatione monachi anonimi Littorensis*, XX (p. 267).

98 Archdeacon John, *Translatio sancti Nicolai*, p. 97.

99 Einhard, *Translatio sanctorum Marcellini et Petri*, I.6 (p. 46); II.1 (p. 66).

100 Einhard, *Translatio sanctorum Marcellini et Petri*, I.11 (p. 56).

101 Einhard, *Translatio sanctorum Marcellini et Petri*, I.9 (p. 52); II.1 (p. 66).

5.4. The memory of theft and visual culture

The visual representations of theft are frequently unrelated to a translation itself, but rather to the need, often decades or centuries afterwards, to commemorate, memorialise or establish an official and collective memory of what occurred.¹⁰² The language of images is very potent because it permits people to learn the story of a theft without reading the legend, which was generally written in Latin, but often disseminated in vernacular languages or by storytellers in the squares or in front of the churches, especially during the feasts of the saints.¹⁰³ The notion of the audiences of hagiographic texts is crucial to comprehending how much the population might know about the lives of saints and the furtive translations of their relics. As demonstrated by Marc van Uytvanghe, a scholar who studied the Merovingian context, people could learn about the acts of martyrs and their miracles above all during liturgies, where passages of *vitae* and *passiones* were generally read or cited during sermons or panegyrics. According to his analysis, numerous tales were composed to reach a wider audience by using a simpler style. While monks and clerics were the primary spectators of these tales, there were also less educated people who were partially able to comprehend them.¹⁰⁴ In the Early Middle Ages, the story of a theft was typically read – or just narrated – during the *dies translationis*, a celebration day commemorating the arrival of the relics that was frequently included in the local calendar in addition to the *dies natalis*.¹⁰⁵ An example that demonstrates the significance of this new date on the calendar is contained in the final section of one of St Agatha's miracles written by monk Blandinus, in which the date of the event recorded takes into account not only the current year (1141), but also the number of years that have passed since the translation.¹⁰⁶

As mentioned above, therefore, a potent narrative tool is the image, frequently crafted years or sometimes centuries after the translation, which is valuable for understanding the cultural identity of the community, as well as the narrative strategies of representation of the theft, often highlighting its salvific dimension. Given the available space, we will focus on five cases

102 On collective and cultural memory, see Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective*; Fabietti and Matera, *Memoria e identità*; Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian*.

103 De Gaiffier, 'La lecture des Actes des martyrs'; De Gaiffier, 'L'hagiographe et son public'; De Gaiffier, 'La lecture des Passions des martyrs'; Benvenuti, 'Le conoscenze religiose dei fedeli'. See also Golinelli (ed.), *Il pubblico dei santi*.

104 van Uytvanghe, 'L'audience de l'hagiographie'.

105 Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 20.

106 Blandinus, *Sanctae Agatae miracula*, 6 (p. 650).

where representations exist, ranging from a few years after the translation to several centuries later. As we shall observe, one of the crucial elements is the consistent depiction of the saint's relics as an intact body, although this was frequently not the reality.

In the crypt of the cathedral of Anagni, a cycle of frescoes depicts the translation of St Magnus' relics from Fondi to Veroli and then to Anagni. The crypt was constructed between 1073 and 1104 at the same time as the cathedral by Bishop Peter of Salerno (d. 1105), while the frescoes were painted between the end of the twelfth century or, more probably, during the first half of the thirteenth during the restoration of the church under Bishops Albert (1224–1237) and Pandolph (1237–1256).¹⁰⁷ Pietro Toesca dates the frescoes to between 1250 and 1255,¹⁰⁸ but the question is extremely complicated, and some hypotheses trace the cycle to no later than the end of the twelfth century.¹⁰⁹

On the walls of the main altar are the 'Stories of St Magnus', and the first section on the left shows the portion of the story of the translation.¹¹⁰ The theft is represented in two scenes. The first displays the transfer of St Magnus' body by six men using a catafalque. Compared to the tale, which merely mentions the tribune Plato, the cycle is significantly different. The bishop and the inhabitants of Veroli are shown greeting the thieves. The town of Fondi, from where the procession starts, is labelled with the word 'FUNDI', and Veroli with the word 'BERULA CIVI<TAS>...', while another reference unfolds under the whole scene ('PLATO DEDIT NUNC BERULANUS'). Above St Magnus' body is an inscription preceded by a cross ('+ MAGNUS'). Plato is depicted at the entrance to Veroli, in front of the bishop, with an inscription ('<TRIBU>NUS PLATO') above his head to clarify his identity, and bearing a long white cross, while his right hand indicates the bishop, the clergy – easily distinguished by their tonsures – the lay inhabitants and the city of Veroli. His clothing, and that of some of the characters transporting the coffin, is made of precious materials, denoting their social status (Fig. 1).

In the second section of the frescoes, the saint's body is portrayed inside a chapel with two horses whose death, according to the *translatio*, was caused by a miracle performed by St Magnus to punish the Saracen Prince

¹⁰⁷ Hugenholtz, 'The Anagni Frescoes', p. 140.

¹⁰⁸ Smith, 'Anagni', p. 4.

¹⁰⁹ Cappelletti, *Gli affreschi della cripta anagnina*, pp. 10–31.

¹¹⁰ Kaftal (ed.), *Iconography of the Saints in Central and South Italian Schools of Painting*, cols 718–726; Cappelletti, *Gli affreschi della cripta anagnina*, pp. 204–206.



Figure 1 *Stories of St Magnus: the translation of St Magnus' body from Fondi to Veroli, Crypt of Anagni Cathedral, © Courtesy of the Chapter of the Cathedral Basilica of Anagni.*

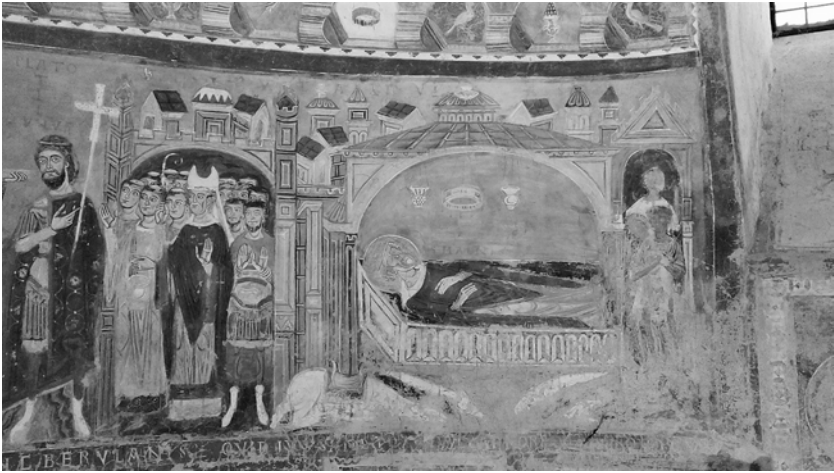


Figure 2 *Stories of St Magnus: the body of St Magnus in Veroli, © Courtesy of the Chapter of the Cathedral Basilica of Anagni.*

Muca for having transformed his crypt into a stable. The entire sacred area is occupied by the sarcophagus containing the saint's body, above which hang a chandelier and two incense burners. On the right, some figures are observing the scenario, perhaps the Saracens who are distraught over the horses' demise (Fig. 2).¹¹¹

¹¹¹ The episode is described by the inscription: 'QUID IUS SANCTORUM VALEAT MORS DICTAT EQUORUM'. For the description of the scene, see Smith, 'Anagni', p. 28.

The following scenes display the inhabitants of Anagni paying to take the holy remains, which were transferred to the cathedral and interred in the crypt. According to the custom, the body of the deceased saint is pictured as uncorrupted, similar to that of a sleeping man. The facial features – including beard and skin tone – are intact, and there is a golden nimbus surrounding the upper part of the head. His face appears that of an elderly man, with a grey beard and hair. The palms are positioned on the abdomen. In every instance, the head is depicted without the upper portion of the cranial lid, which, according to the hagiographic legend, was cut after his martyrdom.¹¹² In addition, the clothes seem undamaged, as though no time has passed. The concept of the saints as glorified sleeping bodies could be tied to the belief in their being alive and in the virtues emanating from them. The artist does not paint the sepulchre as a closed container, but reveals the body's integrity and sanctity to the observers. This example thus demonstrates a commendable adherence to the hagiographic text, illustrating key episodes accurately, albeit with some deviations in other details from the narrative, which suggests the artist may have drawn on additional narrative or oral sources for reference.

The translation of St Pardus' relics is another instance. The theft is portrayed on a wooden low relief from the fourteenth century that is housed in the Cathedral of Larino. The artwork only represents the entrance to the city, not the opening of the tomb, with the relics being hauled on a wagon drawn by two oxen and enclosed in what appears to be a wooden coffin (Fig. 3).¹¹³ A man who plays a musical instrument to signal the arrival of the treasure is on the wagon with two soldiers and the coachman. A bishop and three deacons – two holding candles and one holding an incense burner – greet them. Since the body is enclosed in the coffin, it is not shown. The author adds the detail of the wagon drawn by two oxen, probably as the result of the impact of the widespread *topos* of the miraculous arrival of sacred relics and images; he does not replicate exactly the information found in the hagiographic writings, in which the body is borne to Larino by people (*vectores*).¹¹⁴

The case of St Mark, the features of which we have endeavoured to present here as most pertinent to the subject, stands out as one of the best represented. The presence of paintings and mosaics in the basilica in Venice – as well as in that of Aquileia, constructed at the beginning of the eleventh century for Patriarch Poppo (1019–1044)¹¹⁵ – was tied to the desire of the

112 Cappelletti, 'Su gli affreschi della cripta', p. 316.

113 Mammarella, *San Pardo*, p. 47.

114 Radoynus, *Vita sancti Pardi*, 10 (p. 369); see also Miscione, *Larino Micaelica*, pp. 186–188.

115 Dale, 'Inventing a Sacred Past', pp. 59–61.



Figure 3 *The arrival of the body of St Pardo in Larino*, fourteenth-century wooden bas-relief, Cathedral of Larino, © Courtesy of Diocesan Historical Archive of Termoli and Larino.

Republic to elaborate a visual representation of the hagiographic traditions, in which the saint's figure could be celebrated as the city's patron.¹¹⁶ It is conceivable that the original church built in honour of St Mark in the ninth century contained images of the theft but, unfortunately, no trace of them remains.¹¹⁷ The translation is vividly depicted in several mosaics in his basilica, which assumed its present aspect under Domenico Contarini (1043–1071), who elaborated the form and structure also in response to the basilica of rival Aquileia.

One of the earliest portrayals of the theft is contained in the Pala d'Oro, an altarpiece commissioned by Doge Ordelafo Falier in 1105 for the main altar of St Mark's basilica.¹¹⁸ The ten scenes from his life, which were initially arranged in a row at the base, are now included vertically on the left and right sides of the Pala.¹¹⁹ The final three are associated with the theft. The eighth panel displays the moment of the *furtum* (Fig. 4): two individuals, whose names are not given but who are identifiable as the merchants Bonus

116 On these aspects, see Dale, 'Inventing a Sacred Past'.

117 Demus, 'Frühmittelalterliche Reminiszenzen', p. 4.

118 On the Pala, see Demus, 'Zur Pala d'Oro'.

119 Dale, 'Inventing a Sacred Past', pp. 61–67.



Figure 4 *The body of St Mark is stolen*, Pala D'Oro, Basilica of St Mark in Venice, © Courtesy of the Procuratoria di San Marco.

and Rusticus, are removing the body, which lies in a coffin with marble decorations.

The saint is clad in a cloth and has bare feet. His visage is slightly reclined, and his eyes are closed. The black hair and beard are more likely to be those of a man in his prime than of an elderly one, and his head is surrounded by a nimbus. The scene bears the Latin phrase 'TOLLITUR BEATUS MARCUS DE ALEXANDRIA', which means that the body of St Mark was extracted from his tomb in Alexandria. The next two scenes describe the journey to Venice: the ninth one shows a ship at sea with four characters who can be identified as the two merchants and the two guards, while the textual description 'HIC DEFERTUR CORPUS S(AN)C(T)I MARCI' clarifies that the holy body is being transported by sea to Venice.¹²⁰ The tenth panel depicts the two merchants

120 Kaftal (ed.), *Iconography of the Saints in the Painting of North East Italy*, col. 682–683.



Figure 5 The body of St Mark arrives in Venice and is handed over to the bishop, Pala D'Oro, Basilica of St Mark, Venice, © Courtesy of the Procuratoria di San Marco.

delivering a case to Bishop Ursus at Olivolo-Castello, who blesses them: 'HIC SUSCIPIT VE(NE)TIA(M) BEATU(M) MARCU(M)', which indicates that the body has arrived in the city (Fig. 5). This final panel displays three distinct members of Venetian society: the merchants, the soldiers to their left, and the clergy.¹²¹

This first work was realised in the eleventh century, around two centuries after the alleged theft. Excluding the political dynamics associated with the composition of the Pala d'Oro in this period, related to the *inventio* of St Mark's relics which, according to the sources, occurred on 25 July 1094¹²² and was well described by Thomas Dale, it is interesting to note that the saint's body is only depicted in the first of the three scenes showing the removal. In fact, neither the voyage aboard the ship nor the delivery of the

121 Dale, 'Inventing a Sacred Past', p. 66.

122 See also Böhm, 'Note on the Mosaic'.



Figure 6 *The extraction of St Mark's body in Alexandria and its transfer into baskets*, Chapel of St Clement, Basilica of St Mark, Venice, © Courtesy of the Procuratoria di San Marco.

relics reveal the body. In addition, the first representation portrays the sleeping body of an adult man, similar to that of St Magnus, whose fresco was painted roughly during the same period.

The other significant representation of St Mark's theft was created some years later, around 1155 or 1159,¹²³ and is included in the eighteen mosaic scenes from the Marcan legend in the vaults of the choir in St Peter's and St Clement's chapels, which were probably based on those in the ninth-century church.¹²⁴ St Clement's east-facing barrel vault contains the most relevant aspect for our purpose (Fig. 6).

On the left is a description of the city of Alexandria, indicating that the location from which the body was stolen was near the city. In the central scene, four figures are shown beneath some towers, which reproduce a church. Two bearded monks are identified by their inscriptions as the priest Theodore ('THEODOR(US) P(RES)B(YTE)R') and the monk Stauracius

123 Dale, 'Inventing a Sacred Past', p. 67.

124 Demus, 'Frühmittelalterliche Reminiszenzen', p. 5; Demus, 'Das älteste venezianische Gesellschaftsbild', p. 42. On these images, see Kaftal (ed.), *Iconography of the Saints in the Painting of North East Italy*, cols 681–684.

(‘STEURACIUS MON(ACHUS)’), as are two merchants (‘TRIBUN(US)’, who is the tribune Bonus, and ‘RUSTIC(US)’). All four are removing St Mark’s body – also identified by the inscription ‘S(ANCTUS) MARCU(S)’ – from the tomb, shrouded in a pale cloth, with his arms folded, his eyes closed, and his bearded face surrounded by a nimbus. The next scene depicts Bonus and Rusticus carrying a basket, a clear reference to the episode of the *translatio* related to pork meat. St Mark’s face appears to be that of a slightly older individual than that depicted in the Pala d’Oro. The scene is decorated with an inscription in the upper part of the mosaic, which describes the theft of the saint’s corpse and its concealment beneath pork.¹²⁵ The body is rigid, which facilitates its removal. The following image, represented in the lower register, shows a Muslim man claiming that inside the receptacle carried by the merchants there is pork meat (he says: ‘KANZIRI / KANZIRI’, which means pork). Below him is a depiction of the voyage by sea, with merchants and one of the two guardians who is carrying the coffin. As in the previous instance, St Mark’s body is not seen on the ship – as was the case with St Nicholas – but only a closed coffin is portrayed. This scene is located on the west side of the vault’s upper register. Before the scene of the ship’s arrival in Venice, depicting the clergy and merchants, there is the description of the miracle in which the saint rescues the ship and the merchants from shipwreck (Fig. 7). It is relevant to notice that St Mark is portrayed standing, half-length, as though emerging from the coffin, his identity clarified by an inscription (‘S. MARCU(S)’), while he is calming the storm. The decision to realise this cycle of mosaics in this location can be explained by the fact that the chapel of St Clement was ‘customarily occupied by the doge and his entourage – including, on occasion, the patriarch of Grado’.¹²⁶

A fascinating cycle was executed on the exterior of the basilica in the thirteenth century, prior to 1272. Unfortunately, the decorations on the main façade depicting scenes from the *translatio* have been lost, but they can be analysed thanks to a painting by Gentile Bellini (1429–1507), who depicted St Mark’s square in his tempera on canvas ‘Procession in Piazza San Marco’ from 1496, which is today exhibited at the Galleria dell’Accademia in Venice.¹²⁷ The first image shows different scenes: the merchants stealing the holy body from the sepulchre, represented in a manner similar to the

125 ‘MARCUM FURANTUR KANZIR HII VOCIFERANTUR’ and below the scene: ‘CARNIB(US) ABSCONSU(M) QVERUNT FUGIUNTQ(UE) RETRORSU(M)’; Saccardo, *Les mosaïque de Saint-Marc*, p. 275.

126 Dale, ‘Inventing a Sacred Past’, p. 71.

127 Demus, *The Mosaics of San Marco*, pp. 192–193; Dale, ‘Inventing a Sacred Past’, image 46; 199–206; Rodini, ‘Mapping Narrative’, pp. 389–391.



Figure 7 *St Mark saves sailors from shipwreck*, Chapel of St Clement, Basilica of St Mark, Venice, © Courtesy of the Procuratoria di San Marco.

illustration in St Clement's chapel, on the basis of which it was probably composed; their gentle placing of the body in a container and covering it with meat and leaves; the transport of the container by hand, as depicted in the mosaics in Saint Clement's chapel; the controls by the Egyptian authorities and, probably, the words 'KANZIRI, KANZIRI', as in the chapel; the next lunette shows the loading of the coffin onto the ship and the departure; the arrival in Venice and the procession with a coffin depicting a corpse in a supine position.¹²⁸ The central lunette on the basilica's façade illustrates the final stage of the theft when the body was welcomed in Venice and transferred to the basilica or, according to Thomas Dale, the dedication of the basilica in 1094 after the miraculous *inventio*.¹²⁹ In this case, too, St Mark's body is

128 The original inscriptions on the first lunette that described the mosaics were copied by G.B. Stringa and included in his edition of Francesco Sansovino's *Venetia*, published in 1604. For the first episodes they are: 'Tollitur ex archa furtim Marcus Patriarcha / Quem sporta ponunt carnes, caulesque reponunt / Canzir dicentes Marcum vitant referentes. / In barcam corpus mittunt ex rupe deorsum' ('Marcus the Patriarch is secretly taken from the chest / They place him in a basket with meat and cabbages, / Saying 'Canzir', they avoid revealing Marcus. / They lower the body down the cliff into a boat') (Sansovino, *Venetia città nobilissima et singolare*, p. 10). The presence of the word *furtim* (furtively) is important, being the one and only reference to the lexicon of theft included in the Venetian mosaics. A precise description of each lunette can be found in Demus, *The Mosaics of San Marco in Venice*, pp. 199–206.

129 Dale, 'Inventing a Sacred Past', p. 92.



Figure 8 *The translation of the relics of St Mark, Door of St Alipius, Basilica of St Mark, Venice,*
 © Courtesy of the Procuratoria di San Marco.

displayed inside an open coffin carried by several people. The saint's eyes are closed and his head, adorned with a red-bordered nimbus, reclined in death. Despite the fact that the previous lunettes were gradually replaced by mosaics created between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries and that we only know about them because of Bellini's tempera,¹³⁰ the work is visible today on the lunette of St Alipius' Door (Fig. 8).¹³¹ All these visual sources are highly valuable even though none of them were created around the time of the translation; the artists may have drawn inspiration from earlier images which no longer exist.

A miniature of the missal enshrined in the Marciana Library, which dates to the fourteenth century, contains another visual narration of St Mark's translation (Fig. 9).¹³² The images, which are based on the mosaics of St Clement's chapel, depict three moments of the *translatio*. The first represents Bonus and Rusticus stealing St Mark's body with the assistance of two guardians. The bearded saint is wrapped in a blue cloth, with a golden

¹³⁰ Dale, 'Inventing a Sacred Past', p. 90.

¹³¹ Kaftal (ed.), *Iconography of the Saints in the Painting of North East Italy*, cols 685–686; Demus, 'Das älteste venezianische Gesellschaftsbild', p. 36.

¹³² Biblioteca Marciana, cod. lat. III, 111 (2116), fol. 134r; on the missal, see Toesca, 'Quelques miniatures vénitienes', pp. 72–73. See also Kaftal (ed.), *Iconography of the Saints in the Painting of North East Italy*, cols 679–680.



Figure 9 The theft and translation of St Mark's body, cod. Lat. III, 111 (2116), fol. 134r © Courtesy of the Ministry of Culture – Marciana National Library. Prohibition of reproduction.

nimbus outlined in red. His hands rest softly and loosely on his stomach, and his feet are also visible, clad in sandals. The body lies on a gold-and-red sepulchre on the side of which there is a white inscription: '(S)ANCTUS MARCU(S) EVA(N)GEL(I)STA'. The other four characters are identified by their names. The scene unfolds under a structure, indicating the shrine in which the tomb was placed. The next scene of the miniature depicts the four characters arranging the holy body in a round basket; while the two guardians are handling the body, the merchants are standing by with pork – a whole pig – and leaves. In the last section Bonus – always indicated as *tribunus* – and Rusticus have artfully arranged the meat and leaves so that the body is no longer visible.¹³³ The sequences are helpful because they depict St Mark's body in its entirety, adopting the common technique of depicting him as a sleeping man and not as a decomposed body. The second scene also provides valuable information because it

¹³³ Some comparison with the other representations of St Mark's translation are in Demus, *The Mosaics of San Marco*, p. 200.

shows how the body is placed in the basket and describes the procedure for concealing it.

The case of St Mark, therefore, seems to have been extensively documented visually, displaying notable adherence to the text of the translation. This only serves to confirm the undisputed dominance of the translation legend, which from the outset had to establish itself as the official account of the theft.

Another Venetian example is that of St Isidore of Chios. After arriving in Venice, his relics were placed in the basilica of St Mark and, as the long inscription recalls,¹³⁴ later rediscovered and transferred to a chapel dedicated to him, begun by Andrea Dandolo and completed on 10 July 1355 under the Doge Giovanni Gradenigo (d. 1356).¹³⁵ On the walls there is a visual account of the theft,¹³⁶ the first scene showing the arrival of the Doge Domenico Michiel to Chios and the next describing the extraction of the relics, with Cerbano, identified by an inscription ('CERBANU(S) CLERICU(S)'), and three other characters stealing the saint's body (Figs 10 and 11). The thief, whose clerical status is underlined by his tonsure, and two of his collaborators are wearing blue clothes, while a third person is dressed in red. The corpse, identified by an inscription ('CORPU(S) S(AN)C(T)I YSIDORI'), is being extracted from a tomb beneath a decorated ciborium.¹³⁷ The sepulchre is open, and the stone lid lies nearby. The body of the saint, which seems to be smaller than those of the thieves, is completely enveloped in a purple cloth with golden decorations, and the grey-bearded visage is surrounded by a big nimbus encircled in red. It is relevant to observe that Cerbano, along with a collaborator, is gently transporting the corpse to another coffin that lies open in front of him. One of the other figures has his hands joined together in a sign of reverence. In the context of visual narrations of thefts, the case under consideration constitutes an interesting exception to the modalities of representation of sacred bodies. Enzo De Franceschi observes that the body is not presented as uncorrupted but rather manifests the beginning of the process of decomposition of the skin.¹³⁸ In fact, the face, which is

134 Gerevini, 'Art as Politics', p. 250, n. 18.

135 Palma, 'Cerbano Cerbani'; on the mosaic cycle, see Gerevini, 'Art as Politics'.

136 On these scenes see: Kaftal (ed.), *Iconography of the Saints in the Painting of North East Italy*, cols 430–438. De Franceschi, 'I mosaici della cappella di Sant'Isidoro'.

137 On the description of the images and the inscriptions see Saccardo, *Les mosaïque de Saint-Marc*, pp. 250–252.

138 De Franceschi, 'I mosaici della cappella di Sant'Isidoro nella basilica di San Marco a Venezia', p. 18; De Franceschi, 'I mosaici della cappella di Sant'Isidoro nella basilica di San Marco fra la tradizione bizantina e le novità di Paolo Veneziano', p. 127.



Figure 10 *The transfer of the relics of St Isidore of Chios*, Chapel of St Isidore, Basilica of St Mark, Venice, © Courtesy of the Procuratoria di San Marco.



Figure 11 *The extraction of the body of St Isidore of Chios*, Chapel of St Isidore, Basilica of St Mark, Venice, © Courtesy of the Procuratoria di San Marco.

the only visible body part because the rest of the corpse is covered, reveals a glimpse of the cranium beneath the skin, especially the cranial lid and the jawbone, and inside the mouth, where there are no lips, the teeth are

clearly visible. This sense of decay is heightened by contrast with the artist's previous depiction of the deposition of the saint's body after his death, when it was pictured with brown hair and intact facial skin. The same process of corruption emerges in the final scene of the translation, when the corpse enters the basilica: here, the body is depicted in the coffin, draped in a red cloth, and the face, which resembles a skull, is surrounded by a golden halo. This example demonstrates a high level of artistic realism, but above all suggests an intriguing reflection on the generally intact representations of saints' bodies, and indicates considerable medical-anatomical sensibility.

In the scene in which Cerbano and his men are carrying the saint's body aboard the ship, the corpse is covered by a red drape in order to conceal the theft. In the already-mentioned last scene, the coffin is transferred into the basilica with the upper part of St Isidore's body exposed. In several scenes depicting the theft, Domenico Michiel (1116/1117–1129/1130), the doge who received the holy bodies from Cerbano, is also portrayed.

The case of St Isidore may be aligned with that of St Mark, yet the intricate detail of the decomposing face's skin demonstrates a fresh sensitivity, unparalleled in the depiction of sacred bodies in translation. Moreover, the mosaics remain remarkably faithful to the narrative, which was written shortly after the theft occurred.

However, the most commonly represented theft of relics – even though the depictions are generally very late – is that of St Nicholas, a fact that can be attributed to the widespread veneration of the saint in both Western and Eastern Christianity. In the second quarter of the thirteenth century, Wauchier de Denain copied a Parisian manuscript, which is now housed in the British Library in London and contains miniatures (Cover image).¹³⁹ The one which interests us is included in an illustrated capital letter – an A – and depicts nine merchants on a small boat, with the holy body in the centre. It is wrapped in a sheet and has the shape of a human body, in contrast to the hagiographical tales that mention a collection of bones. This representation is considerably different from the others analysed here because it displays a covered body rather than a miraculous one with living features. At the same time, the detail of the remains of a body enveloped in a shroud is more consistent with hagiographic tradition. According to Nicephorus' *translatio*, the merchants moved St Nicholas' body from an old to a new cloth, arranging it on a barrel on board.¹⁴⁰ The gestures of the merchants are significant: those represented in the front are pictured placing the body on a board or

¹³⁹ British Library, Royal 20 D VI, f. 153v.

¹⁴⁰ Nicephorus, *Translatio sancti Nicolai*, p. 98.

carrying it during the journey, while those at the back, and particularly on the right, seem to be in prayer or in a reverent posture.

Another example is contained in the manuscript Rumjancev which was included in a 1570 collection written in ecclesiastical Slavic under Ivan the Terrible (1547–1584). This section contains the illuminated life of St Nicholas (*Žitie Nikolaja Čudotvorca*),¹⁴¹ reporting the history of his translation to Bari in the so-called *Legend of Kiev*. According to medieval usage, St Nicholas' body is depicted in the numerous images of the *translatio* as a sleeping man: he lies in a coffin, with a long beard and bishop's robes, a book on his chest, and a halo that emphasises his sanctity. A cloth covers his hands, while his shoes are partially visible. The face, represented in its wholeness, is highly expressive. The merchants are portrayed in the miniature next to St Nicholas' body, kneeling and expressing devotion.

Another remarkable image is part of a cycle of Serbian frescoes painted in 1673–1674 by the artist Radul in the church of St Nicholas, constructed in 1337 within the historical complex of the monastery of the patriarchate of Peć, Kosovo. The cycle depicts the life of St Nicholas as well as an episode related to his transfer to Bari (Fig. 12). In the fresco, the saint's body, clad in episcopal attire and carrying a Bible, is in a chest that some men are carrying on their shoulders. The bearded saint's eyes are closed, giving him the appearance of a sleeping person, and a large halo encircles his head and shoulders.

These examples illustrate that adherence to the texts is partial. The transfer of the uncorrupted body of St Nicholas follows representational criteria that are not always mirrored in the narrative sources. The temporal distance – and often geographical, as seen in the case of the monastery in Kosovo – from the narrated events appears to have weakened the connection between image and text.

The final example pertains to a female saint, Agatha, although the oldest depictions of her translation date back to the early modern period. A fascinating iconographic depiction of the relocation of her body was created centuries after the event, between 1591 and 1598, commissioned by Bishop Juan Corrionero (d. 1592) and completed under the episcopate of Giandomenico Rebiba (d. 1604). It is a sculpted choir stall executed by Scipione di Guido (fl. 1580–1590s) with some assistants in the martyr's cathedral in Catania.¹⁴² The

141 A copy of this manuscript was realised in 1878–1879 and is today enshrined in the Pontifical Oriental Institute's Library in Rome.

142 The importance of this masterpiece was also pointed out by Alexandre Dumas, who in 1835 visited Catania: 'Tous ces bas-reliefs sont charmants de naïveté' (quoted in Mancuso, 'Una "capricciosa macchina" lignea', p. 487). Panels with the scenes of the translation are also included in the silver 'fercolo' – the machine used to carry the relics in procession – realised starting



Figure 12 Radul, *The translation of the relics of St Nicholas*, Church of St Nicholas, Monastery of the Patriarchate of Peć, Kosovo, 1673–1674, Courtesy of the BLAGO Fund.

panels of thirty-two nutwood backrests include scenes of St Agatha's life, her martyrdom, the translation of her relics, and some miracles.¹⁴³ The series relating to the theft is comprised of sixteen panels that reproduce specific moments of the legend: seven describe the theft itself and the journey to Italy; five deal with the miracle of the breast in Taranto; and four recount the final part of the trip, from Taranto to Messina and Catania, with the deposition of the relics. This series is extremely interesting on account of the artist's attention to rituals, anatomy and supernatural elements. The artist drew inspiration from the story of the translation attributed to Bishop Maurice, which can be followed by observing the images.

The first low relief depicts the appearance of St Agatha to Gislebertus in a dream (Fig. 13). The image shows a sleeping soldier, while the saint appears in a cloud. Gislebertus was persuaded to carry the relics from Constantinople to Catania, as indicated by a Latin inscription at the basis of the panel.¹⁴⁴ The next low relief is the most significant because it displays the moment

from the sixteenth century with several additions during the following centuries. In this series three panels are interesting: two include the representation of the theft, and one Gislebertus' dream, all realised by the silversmith Mistruzzi between 1947 and 1958.

143 On this work, see Mancuso, 'Una "capricciosa macchina" lignea'.

144 'Gislibertum monet ut se Constantinopoli Catanam reducat' ('She [Agatha] advises Gislebertus to bring her back from Constantinople to Catania').

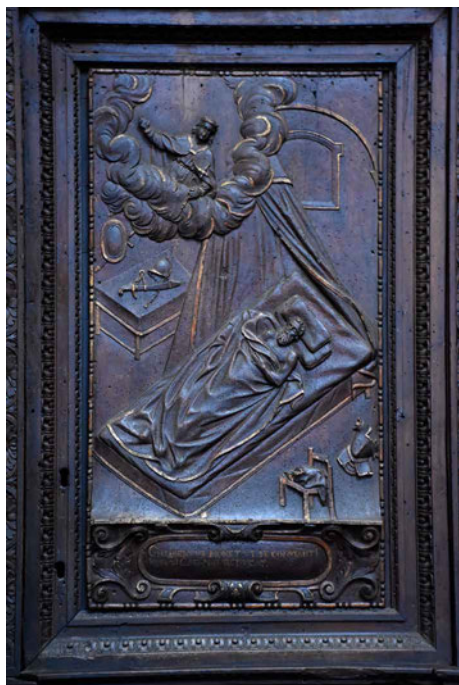


Figure 13 Scipione di Guido, *The appearance of St Agatha to Gislebertus in a dream*, wooden choir stall, Cathedral of Catania, 1591–1598, © Courtesy of the Cathedral of Catania.

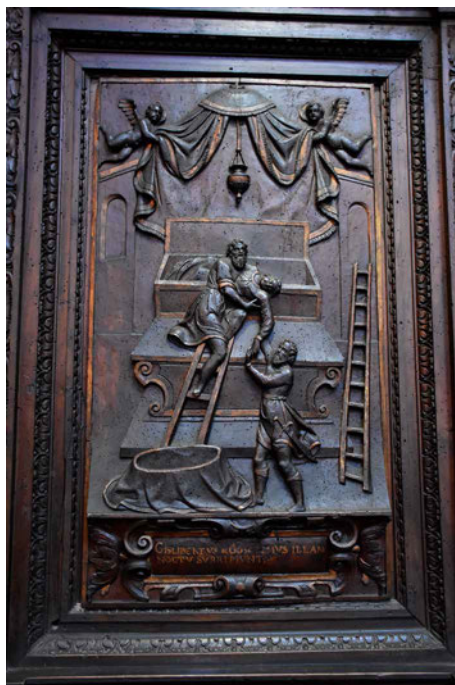


Figure 14 Scipione di Guido, *The theft of the body of St Agatha*, wooden choir stall, Cathedral of Catania, 1591–1598, © Courtesy of the Cathedral of Catania.



Figure 15 Scipione di Guido, *Gislebertus and Goselinus arrange St Agatha's relics in their quivers and bowls*, wooden choir stall, Cathedral of Catania, 1591–1598, © Courtesy of the Cathedral of Catania.

of the theft (Fig. 14). The two soldiers are removing St Agatha's body from her tomb: one is at the top of a ladder – probably Gislebertus – and the other at the bottom. The sepulchre is represented as an open coffin, and a sheet covers a basket placed on the floor. Unlike the hagiographic legend, there are no roses inside. The primary detail is the glowing body of a sleeping woman whose head is resting on her shoulder. In accordance with tradition, the body is not carved as a corpse; rather, the presence of a glorious *virtus* within it gives it the appearance of a living body. In this instance, too, there is an explanatory inscription.¹⁴⁵ The following panel illustrates the two soldiers arranging the relics in their quivers and bowls. One arm and one leg are visible on the table, while another leg is being stored. It is important to note that whereas in the previous panel St Agatha's body was depicted as a living being, in this one it appears as if it were not whole (Fig. 15).

After the scenes of leaving Constantinople through the city gate and setting sail, another panel portrays the two soldiers in Smyrna, verifying the body's integrity. As in the previous case, a fragmented body is revealed, of which it is possible to recognise two arms and one leg. The next low relief illustrates the saint's apparition to Gislebertus and subsequent departure from Corinth (Fig. 16). Agatha is pictured in a cloud, as she was in the previous dream, holding a cross in her left hand and gesturing with the right to order the departure.

The miracle of St Agatha's lost breast is depicted in the following five panels, among the other parts of her body (Fig. 17). In the subsequent dream, the child's mother sees the saint revealing her breast. Agatha is in the upper portion of the panel, surrounded by a cloud. After being transported through Messina, where they were displayed in quivers, the relics were moved into the *castrum* of Aci, courtesy of Bishop Maurice. At the conclusion, in another low relief, the relics are entering the gate to Catania, in the presence of numerous individuals. The final illustration in the series of translations portrays a case on top of an altar, surrounded by various kneeling worshippers.

Scipione's work illustrates a particular interpretation of the hagiographic tale and also demonstrates his knowledge of the *translatio*. In the cycle, the body is depicted in both its wholeness and fragmentation. In the panel that renders the saint's kidnapping, the lifeless body appears as fresh as in the panel that depicts her burial, despite the passage of more than ten centuries after her death. In this instance, her body is placed on a catafalque and transported to the tomb. At the same time, numerous low reliefs show her

¹⁴⁵ 'Gislibertus et Goselinus illam noctu surripiunt' ('Gislibertus and Goselinus steal her away by night').



Figure 16 Scipione di Guido, *St Agatha appears to Gislebertus to make him leave Corinth*, wooden choir stall, Cathedral of Catania, 1591–1598, © Courtesy of the Cathedral of Catania.



Figure 17 Scipione di Guido, *Gislebertus and Goselinus forget a saint's breast in Taranto*, wooden choir stall, Cathedral of Catania, 1591–1598, © Courtesy of the Cathedral of Catania.

relics, which are frequently separated and fragmented. In fact, the cycle is highly relevant because of the presence of several episodes that show St Agatha's body as a collection of bones, a feature that is typically omitted from visual representations and only mentioned in hagiographic sources.¹⁴⁶ This choice may have been influenced, among other factors, by the early modern sensibility towards achieving the most accurate representation of anatomical aspects possible. In this reflection, there appears to be no distinct or privileged treatment of the sacred body due to its female nature. On the

146 It can be noted that the passions of the martyrs often depict cases of bodily fragmentation, usually due to torture. One example is St James Intercisus, a Persian martyr said to have died at the beginning of the fifth century, depicted in a thirteenth-century fresco by Martino di Bartolomeo di Biagio (died before 1435) in Siena. Similarly, Saint Quirinus of Neuss, a Roman tribune who lived between the first and second centuries, is depicted in a fifteenth-century fresco in the Oratory of the Madonna delle Querce near Florence (Kaftal (ed.), *Iconography of the Saints in Tuscan Painting*, cols 519–520; 870).

contrary, there are no discernible differences between representations of male and female corpses during their translation.

The proposed examples offer a broad spectrum of insights into the analysis of the visual culture surrounding *furta sacra*. The depiction of the saint's body emerges as the most salient theme. Similar to narratives concerning non-stealthy translations, the saint's portrayal typically resembles that of a slumbering or recently deceased figure. Among the numerous examples that can be cited, there is the transfer of the body of St Florian by St Petronius, bishop of Bologna, ransomed with money. This event is depicted in the cycle of frescoes in the basilica of the saint by Giovanni da Modena (ca. 1379–ca. 1455), where St Florian's face, the only visible detail, appears intact.¹⁴⁷ Only in rare instances is the body depicted as decomposing – as in the case of St Isidore – or reduced to a pile of bones. The interplay between hagiographic tales utilised as sources and depictions of theft constitutes a significant aspect to consider. In many cases, the instances analysed demonstrate a thorough understanding of the texts, or at the very least, a profound familiarity with the oral traditions associated with the thefts of the depicted saints. However, it is also evident that there are deviations from the original images in certain cases. Overall, the fact that these images typically originated long after the date of the theft underscores how older depictions often became lost, while simultaneously highlighting the enduring significance of the theme of theft as a pivotal moment in the arrival of relics in a city. This theme, through its depiction, continued to be perpetuated in later centuries as a foundational legend of the cult.

147 Kaftal (ed.), *Iconography of the Saints in the Painting of North East Italy*, col. 865.

6. Anthropology of the Thefts of Relics

Abstract: The sixth chapter undertakes a comprehensive investigation of the cultural elements embedded in the stories. It begins with a sensory study aimed at reconstructing the landscape of sounds and smells described in the texts, along with the emotions expressed by the characters when they come into contact with the saints' relics. Following this, there is an analysis of the material elements discussed in the texts, including objects and food. The chapter also explores the natural world, encompassing plants, flowers, atmospheric phenomena and animals. The final part is dedicated to the theme of the saints' bodies, their description and representation, as well as their clothing and blood, which is a recurring motif in many of the narratives examined.

Keywords: *furta sacra*; history of emotions; the bodies of the saints; material culture; sounds; clothes

6.1. Sounds, feelings and emotions

This chapter focuses on analysing all the cultural-historical facets embedded within the corpus of stories examined, encompassing emotions, sensory elements, material culture, natural surroundings, bodily and blood-related imagery. The objective is to illuminate the cultural context surrounding the thefts and to scrutinise the underlying concepts and precedents, which are expressions of a broader culture and mentality.¹

The legends of theft are characterised by a complex soundscape – that is, the sonority landscape composed of sounds and noises – in which the translations were immersed.² The soundscape described in the tales consists of two components: natural sounds, for instance those of women's and men's

1 Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*; Sbardella, *Antropologia delle reliquie*.

2 On the sensory perception of spaces and landscapes in the Middle Ages, see Turner, 'Architecture: Experiencing Buildings and Landscapes in the Middle Ages', pp. 153–160, 167–169.

daily lives, including chants, prayers and voices; and supernatural ones, which express a higher or simply different level of perception. Moreover, sounds and noises can originate from either humans or natural agents, such as animals and meteorological occurrences, including rain and earthquakes. In both types of instance, the sources emphasise the auditory dimension of the experience, describing and permitting us to imagine the richness of the soundscape perceived by people. A specific role is played by the music and singing performed by the clergy. Our tales lack musical details, but the references to the hymns and chants sung by those carrying the relics provide evidence of the significance of liturgical and ritual actions in such moments.

The arrival of new relics in a town was celebrated by a specific liturgy that could vary from one place to another. In some of the thefts examined, such as those of Benevento or Guglionesi, the ceremony started after the elevation of the relics (*elevatio*), the act by which the bishop or priests removed them from their original location in order to transfer them to their town. The ritual was qualified by the performance of chants, probably antiphons. Antiphons or chants were also executed during the procession and after the rites for entering the town, when the saint was carried to the new church. Occasionally, litanies were recited too. Additionally, the moment of the deposition was characterised by a specific liturgy, during which certain chants were sung. Such a framework has been documented in numerous European ceremonies.³ In the case of St Adam, hymns and canticles ('cum hymnis et canticis')⁴ were performed while returning to Guglionesi, while the relics of the twelve martyr saints were deposited in the church of St Sophia to the accompaniment of hymns and prayers ('cum hymnis et laudibus').⁵

Sometimes hagiographers refer to animal sounds. An example is included in the translation of the relics of St Adam. When thieves stole his remains, there were some dogs outside the building (*canes*), which, according to the hagiographer, generally used to bark ('latrare solebant in nocte')⁶ describing a sound experience that probably involved the area surrounding the church. On that occasion, however, thanks to the exceptional presence of the sacred body, they did not do so, leaving the silence unbroken. In the same translation, there is also the presence of another element, the rain, which does not have a clear auditory dimension in the text ('largita est

3 Sigal, 'Le déroulement des translations de reliques', p. 221.

4 *Historia translationis sancti Adami*, 6 (p. 330).

5 *Translatio Beneventum duodecim fratrum*, 5 (p. 143).

6 *Historia translationis sancti Adami*, 6 (p. 330).

pluvia').⁷ Other natural sounds and noises are included in the writings. The dreadful earthquake that occurred at the tomb of St Martin on Mount Massico produced noises, so that the guardian monk referred that he had heard the 'noise of the earthquake' ('terrae motus sonitu').⁸

In addition to the ordinary auditory system, the tales contain certain examples of extraordinary sounds, pertaining to a supernatural dimension. An interesting example is provided in the translation of St Januarius. According to the sources, a man who had lost his horse approached the saint's body, which was being kept in Prince Sico's camp, to implore his help in finding the animal. After his prayer, while returning to the place where he had lost the horse, he heard a child-like voice ('quasi infantis')⁹ predicting that he would find it in the location where he was going. On arriving there, he found it securely tied up ('vinculis retentum').¹⁰ The mysterious voice heard by the man, who claimed it originated from the inner part of the camp ('de intimis castrorum'),¹¹ was identified as the voice of a child or something similar; however, there was no child at that location, and the voice was deemed to be supernatural in nature, in part because it was privy to information that no one could have known, instructing him to go to a certain place where he would find the horse waiting for him.¹² At the conclusion of the narrative, the hagiographer explicitly interpreted the event: since there was no one present, divine origin was assumed.¹³ It was believed that the voice was connected to St Januarius as a result of the man's prayers.

A very well-known example of this kind of experience is included in Augustine of Hippo's *Confessions*. In his 'autobiography', he emphasises that a mysterious voice contributed to his conversion. The voice, as commonly known, said 'Tolle et lege', a clear command to take the Bible and begin reading it. The episode of St Januarius, the horse, and the mysterious voice clearly recalls that of Augustine, who stated that he heard a voice similar to that of a boy or a girl ('quasi pueri an puellae')¹⁴ coming from a nearby home ('de vicina domo').¹⁵

7 *Historia translationis sancti Adami*, 6 (p. 330).

8 *Vita, translatio et miracula sancti Martini Abbatis*, 9 (p. 838).

9 *Translatio sanctorum Ianuarii, Festi et Desiderii*, 5 (p. 144).

10 *Translatio sanctorum Ianuarii, Festi et Desiderii*, 5 (p. 144).

11 *Translatio sanctorum Ianuarii, Festi et Desiderii*, 5 (p. 144).

12 'Illum ad locum propera, et equum tuum invenies ibi', *Translatio sanctorum Ianuarii, Festi et Desiderii*, 5 (p. 144).

13 *Translatio sanctorum Ianuarii, Festi et Desiderii*, 5 (p. 144).

14 Augustine, *Confessionum libri XIII*, VIII.12.29 (col. 726).

15 Augustine, *Confessionum libri XIII*, VIII.12.29 (col. 762); see also Canetti, 'Bambini, divinazione e profezia nel Tardoantico cristiano'.

In the *translatio* of St Stephen's relics to Venice, another miraculous voice is mentioned. On one occasion, while his remains were secretly on the ship, everyone on board heard a mysterious voice (*vox*) coming from the sky ('de celis auditur'),¹⁶ declaring that the saint's body was on that ship ('In ista navi est corpus sancti Stephani prothomartyris').¹⁷ The episode is clearly modelled on the evangelical revelation of Jesus' identity during John's baptism at the Jordan, when after the immersion in water a voice (φωνή) from the sky declared that Jesus was the son of God,¹⁸ or on the episode in which God spoke through a cloud during Jesus' transfiguration.¹⁹

Another miraculous sound is the singing heard near the town before the translation of St John of Spoleto's relics, a mysterious voice indicating the presence of the body, whose traces had been lost after its initial burial. The delicate song ('cantus nimiae suavitatis') radiating from that location was a supernatural indication, along with a column of fire and some lights in the sky, serving to reveal where St John's body was interred.²⁰ In this instance, too, the human-sounding voice provided a conduit for otherworldly forces to connect with humans.

A reference to a supernatural voice is included in the translation of Sts Festus and Desiderius. During Cyphius' servant's journey to Benevento, he heard the voices of the two martyrs who warned him (*monuerunt*)²¹ about the soldier searching for their bodies and whoever had stolen them ('quidam veredarius, qui quaerat corpora nostra').²² The man was able to hear the voices without being in a state of torpor. This example illustrates how the saints were believed to be able to aid the thieves, facilitating their actions and thus also preserving their own bodies.

The sources show an interesting contraposition between two crucial stages of the theft. While there were generally no sounds during the opening of the tomb and the removal of the saint's body, there is an explosion of sounds during the procession, especially on its approaching the town: hymns, chants, prayers and shouts of joy compose an elaborate auditory system

16 *De translatione sancti prothomartyris Stephani de Constantinopoli in Venetias*, p. 105

17 *De translatione sancti prothomartyris Stephani de Constantinopoli in Venetias*, p. 105.

18 Mt 3:17; Mk 1:11; Lk 3:22.

19 Mt 17:5; Mk 9:6; Lk 9:35.

20 John of Montecassino, *Translatio corporis et miracula sancti Iohannis episcopi Spoletini*, 4 (p. 31).

21 *Translatio sanctorum Festi et Desiderii*, 3 (p. 86).

22 *Translatio sanctorum Festi et Desiderii*, 3 (p. 86).

used by the authors to emphasise the complex experience undergone by the thieves and the townspeople.

Silence also contributes to the soundscape and constitutes one of the conditions for the removal of relics in late antique and early medieval *passiones*. Despite the presence of various sounds and noises, there are numerous moments in which the very lack of these conveys a certain meaning. The tales are very explicit about the fact that most of the thefts considered occurred during the night, when no one was present, therefore the absence of sound was common. Examples of this cultural motif include the tale of Gunderada and her nuns, who took St John of Spoleto's body in the silent hours of the night ('in hora noctis silentii');²³ in the *passio* of Sts Gordianus and Epimachus, too, Christians went to retrieve the martyrs' bodies, previously abandoned by the representative Clementianus, in the silence of the night ('nocturno silentio').²⁴

Although silence denotes the absence of sound, it is not synonymous with a lack of meaning. When describing a moment of quiet, the hagiographer emphasises the sacredness of the act. It is not accidental that silence is more frequent during the opening of the tomb or the deposition of the stolen relics than during a procession or sea voyage. At the same time, the absence of voices, sounds and noises is also essential to ensure the thieves will not be discovered.

Sometimes voices interrupt the silence. When the bishops of Amelia and Cremona attempted to steal St Himerius' body, the guardian friar, awakened by the uproar, started to call ('coepit clamare')²⁵ the others: 'Wake up, brothers, wake up! The body of the blessed Himerius is being stolen from us!'²⁶ Similarly, when the inhabitants of the towns discovered that they had been deprived of their saints, cries could be heard. In the translation of St Nicholas, the inhabitants of Myra started to weep and grieve aloud ('lugentes [...] vocibusque lugubris') on learning that his remains had been stolen by Venetian merchants.²⁷

The tales under consideration are also full of references to the feelings expressed by numerous characters in the texts, which are useful if analysed

23 John of Montecassino, *Translatio corporis et miracula sancti Ioannis episcopi Spoletini*, 5 (p. 31).

24 *Passio sanctorum Gordiani et Epimachi*, 5 (p. 552).

25 *Translatio sancti Himerii*, 13 (p. 265).

26 'surgite Fratres, surgite velociter: nobis beati Hymerii corpus furatur!', *Translatio sancti Himerii*, 13 (p. 265).

27 Archdeacon John, *Translatio sancti Nicolai*, p. 98.

on the basis of the historical perspective on emotions proposed by Lucien Febvre (1875–1956) and developed during the decades.²⁸

Tears are a constant element in the translation of relics. They appear in numerous tales, especially at the opening of the tomb, when the sight of the sacred body created intense emotions, and during the procession of the remains and their arrival in a new town. In the translation of St Adam, the thieves prayed and cried ('cum precibus lacrymisque')²⁹ upon arriving at the small church where the saint's body was enshrined, and wept again ('cumque lacrymis')³⁰ during the opening of the tomb and the procession towards Guglionesi.

The shedding of tears is so common in the translations that they could be described as 'tearful tales'. This manifestation of powerful emotions can be explained in two ways: on the one hand, the act of crying is a means of emphasising the fact that the thieves were not impious or sacrilegious, but religious and pious, because they were touched by their contact with the holy body; on the other hand, the description of weeping characters lent the stories profound expressiveness, endowing them with the capacity to move the readers.

In the past, tears have had a great variety of meanings. Those described in our texts are above all tears of joy and piety, used by the hagiographer to underline a deep sentiment.³¹ They are not the tears of the saints – whose bodies do not produce this kind of liquid but occasionally *manna* – but the tears of the thieves. Hagiography very often describes the compassion and emotion experienced by saints and devout people when worshipping the Christ or saints. In the texts under consideration, we are very far from the most representative expression of the Late Middle Ages, when tears said to come from the Christ were venerated in the churches, especially in France, or the gift of tears (the *donum lacrimarum*) was supposed to be part of the experiences of mystics and saints, as was the miraculous weeping of images that was attested especially from the Late Middle Ages and the early modern period onwards.³² This approach prompts a reflection on the

28 Febvre, 'La Sensibilité et l'histoire'; on his works and perspectives, see Plamper, *The History of Emotions*, pp. 40–43.

29 *Historia translationis sancti Adami*, p. 330, 5.

30 *Historia translationis sancti Adami*, p. 330, 6.

31 For a reflection on the historiography of emotions, see Nagy, 'The Power of Medieval Emotions and Change'.

32 Gertsman, 'Introduction. "Going They Went and Wept"'; at the same time, the first Latin mention of this gift is in the *Moralia in Job* by Pope Gregory I (Boquet and Nagy, *Medieval sensibilities*, p. 47).

role of tears, which must be viewed as an expression of a cultural emotion influenced by the historical and social context in which it is inserted.³³ Consequently, in the texts examined, weeping is not a generic expression of emotion but a clear sign of devotion that surfaces in the presence of holy bodies and their 'divine' meaning. When the thieves cry while taking and transferring saints' relics, the hagiographers aim to represent the feelings aroused in them by their personal involvement in handling and preserving the bodies of saints. The element of weeping can reveal a specific 'emotional landscape' that expresses both a rhetorical-narrative strategy and a likely reaction manifested during the main phases of relic translations. In the Early Middle Ages, tears played a crucial role in devotion. During the Carolingian period, for instance, the Gregorian sacramentary contained two masses for requesting tears (*Pro petitione lacrimarum*), and in the eighth century, prayer books (*libelli precum*) addressed to learned people (*litterati*) began to spread from Anglo-Saxon contexts to Europe, emphasising the close relationship with God and its emotional implications.³⁴ Thus, weeping during the translation and deposition of relics amounts to a specific performance that constitutes one of the ingredients of medieval rituals and liturgies.³⁵ Tears could also be considered a gesture of submission to the saints. The examples related to the tears shed by the townspeople on various saints' entering Benevento may convey a dual emotion: joy at their arrival and submission to them as the new patron saints. Barbara Rosenwein's term 'emotional communities' would be apt in this context, in the sense of emotions shared within particular groups or circumstances, such as the communities where the relics were transferred.³⁶

The accounts of thefts describe a variety of emotions, the lexicon of which can be connected, for example, to the Stoic terms cited by Cicero in his *Tusculan Disputations*, and used by Latin antique authors; for example, *gaudium*, *laetitia*, *metus*, etc.³⁷ When Bishop Peter decided to extract St Trofimenae's relics, she appeared to him in a dream, admonishing him and foretelling his impending demise. On awakening, the bishop was terrified (*tremebundus*)³⁸ and began to reflect on his vision of the saint with horror ('in horror viderat visionis nocturnae').³⁹ When the bishops of Cremona and

33 Blanchfield, 'Prolegomenon', p. xxii.

34 Boquet and Nagy, *Medieval sensibilities*, pp. 61–62.

35 Blanchfield, 'Prolegomenon', p. xxiii.

36 Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*, p. 2.

37 Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*, p. 40.

38 *Historia inventionis ac translationis et miracula sanctae Trophimenae*, 17 (p. 237).

39 *Historia inventionis ac translationis et miracula sanctae Trophimenae*, 17 (p. 237).

Amelia attempted to steal St Himerius's relics, a severe earthquake shook the crypt, causing them to flee in terror. People might also experience emotions arising from their coming into contact with something sacred: a sense of what Rudolf Otto termed *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*; namely, a feeling of fascination and dread in the presence of something considered holy.⁴⁰ On another occasion, when he was startled by the earthquake, the guardian monk of the relics of St Martin of Mount Massico experienced a feeling of fear (*tremefactum*)⁴¹ – which was perhaps not entirely dictated by his fascination for sacred things. Similarly, while attempting to steal a relic of the body of St Mark of Atina, a nun experienced such great terror ('tantus timor') that she became paralysed.⁴²

Feelings and emotions are not exclusive to living people. In the translation of St Trofimenas's relics, one of the most relevant examples of saintly anger is featured once again. She showed herself in the bishop's dream wearing a red cloth ('rubicondo pallio coopertam'),⁴³ leading a procession of female virgin saints, and asked in a threatening tone ('compellatione minaci')⁴⁴ why he had dared to exhume her body. A similar attitude also emerged when St Agatha appeared to Gislebertus to reprimand him and his fellow soldier for their tardiness in travelling to Catania.⁴⁵

Joy is another recurring emotion mentioned in the sources, particularly at the arrival of the relics, as in the previously cited case of the translation of the twelve martyr saints, which was welcomed in Benevento by people of all social classes and ages with happiness ('animo laetanti'),⁴⁶ and on the return of St Trophimena's body, when the people of Minori displayed great joy ('magno gaudio').⁴⁷

Comparable descriptions are also provided for the arrival of the holy bodies of Sts Marcellinus and Peter in Maastricht, on which occasion the people spent the entire day in exultation and merriment ('exultatione atque iucunditate').⁴⁸

It is evident that the emotions depicted in the texts are limited, primarily encompassing joy, sadness, and fear. This can be attributed to the narrative

40 Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, pp. 12–24.

41 *Vita, translatio et miracula sancti Martini Abbatis*, 9 (p. 838).

42 *Translatio sancti Marci episcopi Atinensis*, 8 (p. 564).

43 *Historia inventionis ac translationis et miracula sanctae Trophimenaе*, 17 (p. 236).

44 *Historia inventionis ac translationis et miracula sanctae Trophimenaе*, 17 (p. 237).

45 *Historia translationis corporis sanctae Agathae*, 7 (p. 644).

46 *Translatio Beneventum duodecim fratrum*, 4 (p. 143).

47 *Historia inventionis ac translationis et miracula sanctae Trophimenaе*, 24 (p. 238).

48 Einhard, *Translatio sanctorum Marcellini et Petri*, IV, 11 (p. 158).

simplification implemented by the hagiographers. However, their narrative perspective offers insights into certain aspects of their cultural context and worldview, so that reconstructing certain aspects of the auditory and emotional landscapes described in the texts helps underscore their value and the evocative power that they exercised.

6.2. Smells, liquids and material culture

Smells and scents are significant indicators of supernatural conditions. Beginning with the earliest hagiographies, saints' bodies are characterised, especially after death, by a pleasant odour that emphasises their state as living bodies, glorified by their closeness to God.⁴⁹ This aspect is more easily understandable if we consider Antiquity: in ancient Egypt and Rome, for instance, the natural odours of corpses were veiled during funerals not merely to perfume the air, but also to counteract the health risks that were thought to be associated with foul odours.⁵⁰

The fragrance is also evidence of the saints' power and their actual presence in their remains, the so-called 'odour of sanctity'.⁵¹ The fact that smells might indicate the presence of the supernatural *virtus* could date back to the Greek and Roman religions, in which the gods were associated with certain aromas.⁵²

The legends examined here contain numerous references to inexplicable perfumes, which are an expression of a broader tradition regarding the reputation for sanctity that finds a Biblical basis in the second letter to the Corinthians.⁵³ Moreover, starting in the twelfth century, the medieval conception regarding smells and odours was more systematically retrieved and refined in Western Europe, in connection to Greek and Arab thought.⁵⁴

While the relics of St Januarius were being taken to Benevento in procession, a sweet-smelling odour ('fragrantie odor')⁵⁵ permeated the area, tracing the path taken by Sico's troops. This mystical fragrance even lingered for hours after their passage. The hagiographer emphasises

49 Toner, 'Smell and Christianity'.

50 Classen, Howes and Synnott, *Aroma*, pp. 42–44.

51 Classen, Howes and Synnott, *Aroma*, pp. 52–54; Reinartz, *Past Scents*, pp. 38–43.

52 Classen, Howes and Synnott, *Aroma*, pp. 45–48.

53 'We are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved' (2Cor 2:15).

54 On this question see Robinson, *The Sense of Smell in the Middle Ages*.

55 *Translatio sanctorum Ianuarii, Festi et Desiderii*, 6 (p. 144).

this feature because of his role as an eyewitness.⁵⁶ Upon their arrival in Benevento, the relics of St Januarius were placed together with those of Sts Festus and Desiderius, which had been stolen centuries before. When Bishop Orso opened the tomb containing the other two saints, he found it completely filled with a mysterious substance, or manna ('caeleste manna'),⁵⁷ and a smell akin to that of all flowers ('odor quasi tot floribus').⁵⁸ As the supernatural fragrance reached everyone's noses ('nares omnium perlustrabat')⁵⁹ the hagiographer, who claims to have witnessed the translation and deposition, smelt a fragment taken from the bodies.⁶⁰ Later, in response to a question concerning that mysterious odour, he stated that it was so unique that no one could identify it, although it seemed to be a balm emanating the scent of all the flowers combined ('balsamum cum floribus omnibus permixtum').⁶¹ The special perfume radiating from the corpse was a sign of miraculous virtue.

The presence of perfume is also mentioned in the miracles listed in the final part of St Januarius' legend. One night, a woman who was at the church of St Sophia with her son witnessed a tremendous light ('splendorem tanti luminis'),⁶² which was visible from various parts of the city. The deacon, fearing it was a fire, went to the church and, on entering it a mere two hours later, saw that the light was encircling the altar. Moreover, a mysterious odour ('odor inenarrabilis') lingered for three days,⁶³ not only in the church but also in the surrounding areas. The hagiographer interpreted the phenomenon as evidence of the saint's presence in his remains.⁶⁴ The performative nature of this episode is substantiated by an unidentified healing miracle that occurred at the end. This case, too, confirms the idea that the scent of flowers was one of the most prevalent associated with the medieval concept of the 'odour of sanctity'.⁶⁵ In the area of Benevento, a similar case is that of St Bartholomew's body which released a particularly pleasant scent ('ambrosei odoris')⁶⁶ during the procession.

56 *Translatio sanctorum Ianuarii, Festi et Desiderii*, 6 (p. 146).

57 *Translatio sanctorum Ianuarii, Festi et Desiderii*, 8 (p. 150).

58 *Translatio sanctorum Ianuarii, Festi et Desiderii*, 8 (p. 150).

59 *Translatio sanctorum Ianuarii, Festi et Desiderii*, 8 (p. 150).

60 'particulam quamdam sacratissimi corporis naribus meis apposuit', *Translatio sanctorum Ianuarii, Festi et Desiderii*, 8 (p. 150).

61 *Translatio sanctorum Ianuarii, Festi et Desiderii*, 8 (p. 150).

62 *Translatio sanctorum Ianuarii, Festi et Desiderii*, 14 (p. 156).

63 *Translatio sanctorum Ianuarii, Festi et Desiderii*, 14 (p. 156).

64 *Translatio sanctorum Ianuarii, Festi et Desiderii*, 14 (p. 156).

65 Robinson, *The Sense of Smell in the Middle Ages*, pp. 157–182.

66 *Translatio sancti Bartholomei*, p. 345.

As previously delineated, perfume is a cultural device that can reveal the authenticity of relics. In the translation of St John's remains, the Abbess Gunderada, four nuns and a priest smelt a pleasant odour ('*miris odoribus*') when removing the holy body.⁶⁷ This also happened in the case of St Mark: when the two Venetian merchants extracted his corpse,⁶⁸ an intense scent ('*odoris fragrantia*')⁶⁹ pervaded not only the church but the entire town, reaching Alexandria and prompting the locals to investigate whether the saint's body had been stolen. According to these examples, perfumes are indicators of the virtue (*virtus*) that is activated at the moment of the theft or the translation, constituting a way in which saints confirm their presence. This *virtus* residing in their bodies may flow out once the tomb is opened.

In some instances, the fragrances emanated not only from the holy bodies but also from the liquids that flowed from them. In the translation of St Nicholas from Myra to Bari, as the merchants broke into the sepulchre, a deliciously gratifying scent ('*flagrantissimus [...] ac suavissimus odor*') was diffused, causing those who were there to experience immense pleasure.⁷⁰ Once he was able to break the tomb open and place his hand inside it, the robber merchant Matthew confirmed the presence of a large quantity of the mysterious substance that is often known as *manna*, *myron* or *oleum*.⁷¹ The same information is included in the version written by Nicephorus, who also adds a useful detail probably originating from the legend of St Mark's relics: the perfume which came out from the sepulchre reached the Venetian ships anchored along the coast,⁷² informing them that the tomb had been opened and that the saint approved his departure. When the merchant approached the tomb to collect the bones of St Nicholas, he deeply inhaled the delicate scent ('*aromatum omnium suavitatem*') emanating from them.⁷³ The location where the remains were stored was full of perfume due to the abundance of the fluid. As has been previously noted, the *manna* was also mentioned when the tomb of Sts Festus and Desiderius was opened. In the case of St Maurus, too, an odour is described that was so sweet ('*odor suavissimus*')⁷⁴ that those who dug the tomb could hardly stand it.

67 John of Montecassino, *Translatio corporis et miracula sancti Ioannis episcopi Spoletini*, 5 (p. 31).

68 *Translatio sancti Marci*, XIII.3 (p. 123).

69 *Translatio sancti Marci*, XIII.3 (p. 123).

70 Archdeacon John, *Translatio sancti Nicolai*, p. 97.

71 Jacobus de Voragine refers to it with the word *oleum*: *Legenda aurea*, vol. 1, III.111 (p. 44).

72 Nicephorus, *Translatio sancti Nicolai*, p. 117.

73 Nicephorus, *Translatio sancti Nicolai*, p. 117.

74 James of Venosa, *Vita beati Mauri et sociorum eius*, IV.6 (p. 100).

The translation of St Trofimenā's relics contains a similar hagiographic theme. When her body was removed from the tomb with the intention of transferring it from Minori to Amalfi, an intense fragrance ('*odoris fragrantia*') was diffused all around,⁷⁵ reaching ships near the coastline. As a result of this signal, the sailors disembarked and went to the shore, where Bishop Pietro and his archdeacon were cradling the holy body. In addition, when the martyr's tomb was opened, three valuable ampoules ('*tres operis pretiosi ampullas*')⁷⁶ were found alongside the body. Besides the interpretation of these objects and their number as a symbol of the Trinity, the one located near her head contained a fragrant oil ('*oleum miri odoris*').⁷⁷ The frequent occurrence of small vitreous ampoules near the martyrs' bodies, generally believed to contain their blood, dates back to the excavations of catacombs in modern history.⁷⁸ There are numerous instances of blood being discovered in the tombs of saints;⁷⁹ for instance, Ambrose reported finding intact bones and a great deal of blood ('*ossa omnia integra, sanguinis plurimum*') during the *inventio* of Sts Gervasius and Protasius' bodies,⁸⁰ as well as in the case of Sts Nazarius and Celsus ('*Vidimus [...] sanguinem martyris*').⁸¹ As result of studies begun in the modern era, with the most significant results occurring in the nineteenth and, above all, twentieth centuries, it was determined that they actually contained blood in only a very few cases. As reaffirmed by Massimo Ghilardi, but proved by Giovanni Battista de Rossi,⁸² these *ampullae* originally served as 'balsamari'; that is, containers of balsam that, when filled with soil desiccated by the passage of time, probably produced the effect of a colour similar to that of blood.⁸³

The example of St Trofimenā contains another reference to pleasant smells emanating from incense. When the custodian entered the church where her relics had been enshrined prior to the theft, he witnessed an apparition of the saint burning incense to sanctify her 'home'. Although the text did not describe the fragrance emanating from the incense, it is evident that the ritual space was filled with this scent. Despite the fact that

75 *Historia inventionis ac translationis et miracula sanctae Trophimenae*, 15 (p. 236).

76 *Historia inventionis ac translationis et miracula sanctae Trophimenae*, 15 (p. 236).

77 *Historia inventionis ac translationis et miracula sanctae Trophimenae*, 15 (p. 236).

78 De Rossi, *Sulla questione del vaso di sangue*.

79 Ghilardi, *Sanguine tumulus madet*, pp. 23–26.

80 Ambrose, *Epistolae*, XXII.2 (col. 1020); see also Augustine, *Sermones*, 286.5.4 (col. 1209); 318.1 (cols 1437–1438); Augustine, *Confessionum libri XIII*, IX.7 (col. 770).

81 Paulinus the Deacon, *Vita sancti Ambrosii*, 32 (p. 38).

82 De Rossi, *Sulla questione del vaso di sangue*, 49–54 (pp. xcvi–xcix).

83 See Ghilardi, *Sanguine tumulus madet*, pp. 37–39. More generally, on archaeological activities in the catacombs during the seventeenth century, see Ghilardi, *Saeculum sanctorum*.

incense was not used in the initial centuries of Christianity – or even the fourth and fifth – in order to avoid using a scent that played a central role in the Roman religion, the resort to this aroma rapidly increased during the Early Middle Ages, becoming one of the most important elements of liturgies and devotional practices. The purpose of incense was to sacralise places and pay homage to Christ and his saints.⁸⁴ Moreover, it is one of the three gifts offered by the Magi to the baby Jesus and is mentioned several times in the Old Testament.⁸⁵

St Isidore's translation by Cerbano contains an additional instance of scents and *manna*. When the tomb was opened, a very pleasant fragrance filled the air ('suavissimi odoris fragrantia').⁸⁶ Then, after the corpse began to be moved, drops of a mysterious fragrant liquid ('gratissimus liquor')⁸⁷ dripped from the tomb's marble cover, which the hagiographer compared to the morning dew found on roses. The name used to describe this is *agiasma* (Greek: ἀγίασμα), which means 'blessed water' and, in the tradition of the Eastern churches, signifies a sacred spring. Later, the liquid no longer appeared in this state but was instead desiccated.

According to the cases examined, the perfume of saintly remains possessed two main properties: first, it was extremely pleasant, as evidenced by the instance of Sts Festus and Desiderius, whose scent resembled that of all the flowers combined; and second, it sometimes permeated the air so diffusely that it could reach distant locations, as in the cases of Sts Mark, Nicholas and Trofimena. In this perspective, the odour is not only a miraculous proof of the saints' holiness and their relics' authenticity, but also a way to emphasise their *praesentia*. In fact, when their remains were extracted from their tombs, the locals were made aware of the removal due to the scent that was released.

Various objects mentioned in the texts warrant a comprehensive examination, since the hagiographical sources under scrutiny are valuable for the insights they offer into the material culture of the time. Besides the blood ampoules and clothing that have already been mentioned, there are other items referenced in the texts that are worth examining, the first being the ladder (*scala*) that Gislebertus and Goselinus used to enter the church in Constantinople where St Agatha's body was entombed.⁸⁸ This object is

84 Reinartz, *Past Scents*, pp. 32–35.

85 See Mt 2:11; but also, for example: Ex 30.

86 Cerbano Cerbani, *Translatio mirifici martyris Isidori*, VIII (p. 328).

87 Cerbano Cerbani, *Translatio mirifici martyris Isidori*, VIII (p. 329).

88 *Historia translationis corporis sanctae Agathae*, 4 (p. 643).

also pictured in a panel of Scipione's sculpted choir stall, which contains two different images of stepladders: the first, longer one is leaning against the wall under the window, underlining how the two soldiers entered the building; the second, shorter one is being used by Gislebertus to reach the sarcophagus and take the saint's body (Fig. 14).

The coffin (*capsa, loculus*) or the recipient used to temporarily transfer the relics is another relevant object frequently mentioned after the theft. These were used to enshrine or transport saints' relics and were typically crafted from wood or more valuable materials. While the *passiones* do not mention these objects, focusing instead on the tombs and sarcophagi, the *furta sacra* tales sometimes provide a more in-depth description of them.

The author of the *translatio* of the twelve martyr saints describes the receptacles in which their relics were enshrined as not having been properly cared for by the locals, defining them as squalid and unsuitable ('squalidus et inhonestis loculis');⁸⁹ indeed, the remains were later transferred to more precious containers by Arechis II ('loculisque pretiosis').⁹⁰ The *translatio* of the relics of Sts Margaret and Euprepia also mentions a recipient of great value: when Prior Augustin excavated the floor together with his two relatives to search for the relics, he discovered a precious porphyry vase ('concham porphyriam')⁹¹ decorated with iron and copper, which he later sold after transferring the remains to a wooden vase ('in vase [...] ligneo').⁹² In St Juvenal's translation, the sacred bodies were removed from their sarcophagi (*sarcophaga*) and mausoleums (*mausolea*).⁹³ In St Adam's translation, the case is referred to as a coffin (*loculus*).⁹⁴ The space where St Trofimenas's remains were enshrined in pumice is described as a *locellus*.⁹⁵ Saint Maurus and his companions were also enshrined in a chest (*cassa*) covered with a precious *pallium*.⁹⁶ As in the case of the twelve martyr saints, there is an explicit reference to the need to move them to a more suitable place ('digniore locum requierunt').⁹⁷

Sometimes the recipients prepared to contain the relics are different, as in the case of St Agatha, whose relics were transferred from the sarcophagus

89 *Translatio Beneventum duodecim fratrum*, 3 (p. 143).

90 *Translatio Beneventum duodecim fratrum*, 3 (p. 143).

91 *Translatio sanctae Margaritae in Tusciam*, 3 (p. 41).

92 *Translatio sanctae Margaritae in Tusciam*, 3 (p. 41).

93 *Translatio Iuvenalis et Cassii episcoporum Narniensium Lucam*, 55 (p. 244).

94 *Historia translationis sancti Adami*, 5 (p. 330).

95 *Historia inventionis ac translationis et miracula sanctae Trophimenae*, 15 (p. 236).

96 James of Venosa, *Vita beati Mauri et sociorum eius*, V.1 (p. 100).

97 James of Venosa, *Vita beati Mauri et sociorum eius*, IV.5 (p. 100).

to a basket full of fragrant roses ('in cophino rosis odoriferis').⁹⁸ Scipione di Guido portrayed the object as an open, circular container covered in fabric (Fig. 14).

Similar receptacles are also mentioned in the two related tales of St Mark's and St Isidore of Chios' translations. When it was time to transfer the relics to the ships, the Venetians concealed them respectively in a large basket (*sporta*) lined with cabbage leaves (*cauli*) on which they placed pork meat ('carnes porcinas'),⁹⁹ and in a different type of basket (*calathus*) typically used to collect fruit, herbs or flowers, which was filled with raisins.¹⁰⁰ The mosaics of St Clement's Chapel in the basilica of St Mark in Venice show Bonus and Rusticus carrying the basket onto the ship (Fig. 6), while in the mosaics in St Isidore's chapel the baskets are absent (Fig. 11).

The sensory landscape that has been scrutinised thus far is growing increasingly rich and intricate. Mentions of material culture, encompassing various objects and sarcophagi, contribute to a vivid and descriptive narrative tableau, revealing the hagiographers' keen analytical abilities.

6.3. The natural world

The texts under examination abound with references to the natural world, spanning a wide array of subjects, from animals and plants to weather phenomena and food.¹⁰¹ Although animals play a subordinate role in the thefts of relics, their occurrences in the tales can have a particular significance.¹⁰²

Regarding the *passiones*, animals were typically mentioned as a threat to the integrity of the bodies. When the martyrs were executed, their corpses were abandoned to be eaten by birds and wild beasts. Moreover, as part of their torture, the saints were occasionally exposed to dangerous animals like lions, snakes and bears. In some instances, animals served a good purpose; for example, when a white dove landed on the bodies, signifying heavenly

98 *Historia translationis corporis sanctae Agathae*, 4 (p. 643).

99 *Translatio sancti Marci*, XII.5 (p. 124).

100 Cerbano Cerbani, *Translatio mirifici martyris Isidori*, IX (p. 329).

101 On the relationship between man and nature in the Middle Ages, see Colardelle (ed.), *L'homme et la nature au Moyen Âge*; Bennisar (ed.), *Les catastrophes naturelles dans l'Europe médiévale et modern*; On the environment in the Middle Ages, see Aberth, *An Environmental History of the Middle Ages*; Hoffmann, *An Environmental History of Medieval Europe*; Rao, *I paesaggi dell'Italia medievale*.

102 A useful example of animals in saints' lives can be found in the Life of St Cuthbert: Crane, *Animal Encounters*, pp. 24–41.

assistance. Folkloric devotion developed a sophisticated system of *topoi*, in which wild animals miraculously lost their natural ferocity and became docile. The *Passio sancti Victoris* (BHL 8580), a text presumably composed in Milan in the second quarter of the fifth century, contains a useful example concerning a martyr's body.¹⁰³ According to the tale, Victor was a fellow soldier of Sts Nabor and Felix's, and was martyred in *Laus Pompeia* (Lodi Vecchio) and then transferred and buried in Milan by the city's bishop, Maternus.¹⁰⁴ After sentencing Victor to be beheaded, the emperor had forbidden burial and left his body to be devoured by the wild beasts ('ut a bestiis devoraretur').¹⁰⁵ When he despatched his quaestor to determine whether the martyr's corpse had been consumed by animals and snakes, it was found intact ('invenerunt corpus eius intactum').¹⁰⁶ In addition, two unidentified animals ('duas bestias') were standing guard over the body, one at its head and the other at its feet.¹⁰⁷ Although in normal circumstances the wild beasts would have devoured the martyr's body, in this case they remained nearby to defend it from other creatures. The abandoned bodies of Sts Gordianus and Epimachus, too, according to Clementianus, should have been consumed by dogs, but this did not occur.¹⁰⁸ In these and other instances mentioned in the *passiones*, the hagiographer emphasises how the bodies' *virtus* influenced the context in which they were located, causing the animals' natural behaviour to change as a sign of respect for the martyrs' remains.

In the tale of the translation of St Adam's relics, when his body was removed from the small church of St Paul, in addition to the rain that began to pour to prevent anyone from interfering, the dogs (*canes*) in the vicinity kept silent. The hagiographer noted that they usually howled at night ('latrare solebant in nocte'), but in that circumstance they refrained from doing so out of respect for the holy body.¹⁰⁹ The episode mirrors an important belief, in which the animals recognised the sacredness of the body and the importance of the ritual that was occurring. Moreover, since they are mentioned along with rain, they were probably considered part of nature, and their behaviour was a supernatural response to the translation. In addition, the absence of barking can be seen as a way in which God aided

103 Lanéry, 'Hagiographie d'Italie', pp. 261–264; CSLA (<http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk>) Eo2060.

104 Rimoldi, 'Vittore'.

105 *Passio sancti Victoris*, 6 (p. 287).

106 *Passio sancti Victoris*, 6 (p. 287).

107 *Passio sancti Victoris*, 6 (p. 287).

108 See § 5.2.

109 *Historia translationis sancti Adami*, 6 (p. 330).

the thieves in extracting the saint's remains, by impeding anyone from intervening. In the centuries under consideration, dogs were very common, and in bestiaries they were considered both courageous and kind, even if sometimes a threat to humans. Since one of the functions of dogs was to take care of dwellings, it is plausible that in St Adam's case they were guarding the church or the surrounding area, barking when necessary.¹¹⁰ Hildegard of Bingen emphasises the role of dogs in identifying thieves.¹¹¹

When the merchants from Bari were returning home after stealing St Nicholas' body from Myra, an episode involving an animal occurred. In his *translatio*, Archdeacon John narrates how, while travelling by sea one day, they observed a small bird ('*avicula quedam*')¹¹² flying tamely alongside the ship and around the merchants. All the sailors regarded this happening as odd, not only because of the bird's inexplicable docility, but also because they believed that the mainland was still far away. After some time, the bird disappeared and the merchants interpreted the unusual visit as another sign of the authenticity of St Nicholas' bones. In Nicephorus' version the bird, which perched on the helm of the ship carrying the sacred body, resembled a lark ('*una parva avis allaude simili*').¹¹³ In this instance, too, the creature appeared tame, even alighting on the hand of the sailor at the helm. The bird then began to chirp and touch the barrel containing the remains with its beak. In this account, the hagiographer is more explicit than in other versions of the tale, emphasising that the bird was worshipping St Nicholas and that its twittering resembled a hymn (*laudatio*), while the gentle tapping of the beak was interpreted as a kiss devoutly bestowed upon his body.¹¹⁴ Before vanishing, the creature travelled from one ship to another as though to bless all the merchants on their important journey. This example is part of a broader perspective on miraculous animal behaviour, which emphasises how they could start to exhibit rational conduct when influenced by supernatural powers. The majority of space in medieval bestiaries was devoted to birds, which were frequently examined with great curiosity and attention.¹¹⁵ It is unclear what kind of bird was spotted on the ships: Archdeacon John

110 Pastoureau, *Bestiaires du Moyen Âge*, pp. 123–125. Very relevant is the etymology reported by Isidore of Seville, who links the word *canis* to the verb *canor*, and therefore to its howling: Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, XII.II.25–26 (col. 438).

111 Hildegard of Bingen, *Physica*, VII.20 (pp. 350–351).

112 Archdeacon John, *Translatio sancti Nicolai*, p. 101.

113 Nicephorus, *Translatio sancti Nicolai*, p. 120.

114 '*osculum [...] quod fideliter sancto offerebat corpori*', Nicephorus, *Translatio sancti Nicolai*, p. 120.

115 Pastoureau, *Bestiaires du Moyen Âge*, p. 139.

talked about a small bird (*avicola*), whereas Nicephorus compared it to a lark (*allaude*). The anonymous bestiary of Gubbio, which is included in a fourteenth-century manuscript, contains a sonnet dedicated to the lark and is titled *De la lodola*, in which the author emphasises its delightful singing.¹¹⁶ Hildegard of Bingen described it as a restless bird.¹¹⁷

In addition, the episode suggests that animals and, more broadly, natural elements might serve as heralds of divine messages. The language of nature and particularly of animals is not entirely understood by people, and their behaviour can therefore be interpreted in a variety of ways. The bird's actions were quite unusual, notably its tameness, while the tapping of its beak was interpreted in a particular manner because of the extraordinary situation in which it occurred. The account allows us to consider the possibility that animals could interact with humans through their language and, at the same time, be part of God's plan by expressing devotion to saints' relics.¹¹⁸ Moreover, animals could be regarded from a symbolic and moral perspective, as can be seen from the numerous bestiaries written during the Middle Ages – which underwent significant diffusion during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries – that frequently recover information and sources from ancient texts, such as the second-century *Physiologus*.¹¹⁹

Animals are also mentioned in the *Vita beati Mauri*. After the holy bodies had been removed, they were placed on animals (*animalia*) to be transported to Salento. When they reached Lavello, the place where they were to remain by divine will, the mules (*muli*) could not go any further.¹²⁰

Besides the unusual behaviour of animals mentioned in the thefts of Sts Adam and Nicholas, there are other examples in which animals are described in their natural habitat or as goods. We have already explored the miracle that occurred during the translation of St Januarius' relics from Naples to Benevento, involving a man who lost his horse but was able to retrieve it thanks to a mysterious infant voice. This story emphasises the importance of animals in society: the man, who was probably a soldier from Prince Sico's camp, pleaded with the saint to find his horse because it was the only one he owned and thus represented a valuable possession. The horse was one of the most frequently mentioned animals in the bestiaries, and its duty

116 *Bestiario moralizzato di Gubbio*, pp. 1953–1954.

117 Hildegard of Bingen, *Physica*, VI.44 (p. 314).

118 Shockro, 'Saints and Holy Beasts'.

119 Crane, *Animal Encounters*, pp. 69–100.

120 James of Venosa, *Vita beati Mauri et sociorum eius*, V.5 (p. 101).

was closely related to the cavalry. Furthermore, horses were employed for transporting goods and people, as well as for pulling carts.¹²¹

The hagiographic tales are replete with episodes like this, in which the value of animals as personal goods emerges. Certain instances come from the *Liber miraculorum sancte Fidis*, which is a collection of miracles that occurred in Conques between the eleventh and twelfth centuries.¹²² According to this text, there were several cases of peasants and pilgrims whose animals had died or been lost, compelling them to ask St Faith for their resuscitation or return. Among the examples presented in the *liber* is that of the *miles* Bonusfilius, whose mule (*iumentum*) died abruptly as he was travelling to the shrine of St Faith, on reaching which he began to complain to her about his animal; after some time, the mule, which was about to be skinned, came back to life and rejoined its owner.¹²³ In this case, as well as the one regarding the *miles* Geraldus, the mules, after having been restored to health bore the traces of the scars caused by the skinning procedure ('vetustissimarum cicatricum', 'cutis stigmata').¹²⁴

These stories illustrate how the assistance of saints affected not only human health but also goods and animals.

In some cases, animals may play a role in thievery. The account of the translation of Sts Festus and Desiderius' relics from Pozzuoli to Benevento narrates that, while returning home, the man dispatched by Cyphius was warned by the voices of the two saints ('ut admonitus est sanctorum vocibus')¹²⁵ that someone was searching for their relics. He then stopped near a sepulchre, hid the bodies, and began to graze the oxen ('boves pascere cepit') pulling his wagon.¹²⁶ The person on horseback who was looking for the thief approached and questioned him as to whether he had seen their remains. The man replied that he was merely tending to his cattle ('Boves meos [...] pasco').¹²⁷ The official believed him and departed, allowing the robber to continue his journey to Benevento and the residence of senator Cyphius. Oxen were another animal commonly used for labour, especially to

121 Pastoureau, *Bestiaires du Moyen Âge*, pp. 101–104; Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, XII.I.41–56 (cols 430–432).

122 On St Faith's miracles, see Sheingorn, *The Book of Sainte Foy*; Ashley and Sheingorn, *Writing Faith*; Papisidero, "O Sancta Haera".

123 *Liber miraculorum sancte Fidis*, I, 3 (pp. 91–92).

124 *Liber miraculorum sancte Fidis*, I, 3.14 (p. 92); 4.13 (p. 93). On this animal, see Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, XII.I.57 (cols 432–433).

125 *Translatio sanctorum Festi et Desiderii*, 3 (p. 86).

126 *Translatio sanctorum Festi et Desiderii*, 3 (p. 86).

127 *Translatio sanctorum Festi et Desiderii*, 3 (p. 86).

pull ploughs in the countryside. They are often mentioned in hagiographies to describe a scene in which oxen would stop the wagon they were drawing at the spot where the relics of saints or a miraculous image desired to remain.¹²⁸ An example of this *topos* is recorded in the *Vita beati Mauri*. When the bodies of the saints arrived in Lavello, the local bishop had the coffin in which they were kept placed on the yoke of two untamed oxen ('duos boves indomitos'),¹²⁹ so that they could decide the exact spot where the church in honour of the saints should be built. The animals, having fulfilled their task, were then released from the yoke and taken back to the pasture. In the episode concerning Cyphius' man, the thief utilises his animals to help him conceal the theft. As with the preceding example, and unlike that of the dogs in the translation of St Adam, this instance does not include signs of supernatural intervention on animals, and the miraculous communication is expressed through the saintly voices heard by the man.

In conclusion, despite the marginality of animals in the tales, their presence is linked to a plurality of meanings: sometimes, they are the vehicles through which the saints' supernatural powers are expressed, as in the case of the dogs in St Adam's translation or the bird in that of St Nicholas. In these instances, animals are merely the agents of a higher will, included in the story to emphasise the sacred body's authenticity and *potentia*. Elsewhere, their significance resides in their economic value, as with the horse 'found' by St Januarius. Finally, it is possible that their narrative function is that of facilitating the theft, as with the oxen in the translation of Sts Festus and Desiderius. In the last two examples, animals are the expression of a certain social dimension, serving as personal goods. Additionally, the presence of animals helps describe the landscape where the theft occurred. For instance, the detail of the dogs barking near St Paul's church not far from Guglionesi is particularly informative. While describing their extraordinary behaviour, the hagiographer paints a vivid image of this rural environment and soundscape.

The examples included in the tales under consideration display different contexts of relationships with animals: in certain cases, such as that of the bird and the dogs, animals are portrayed as free, without any imposition or command from humans; however, in other cases, such as that of the horse, the ox or the mule, animals are subjugated to people and exploited for labour.

128 Pastoureau, *Bestiaires du Moyen Âge*, pp. 107–112; classical antecedents can also be seen, as in the case of the simulacrum of Cybele mentioned above: Ovid, *Fasti*, IV.329–347. On this animal, see also Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, XII.I.28–30 (col. 428).

129 James of Venosa, *Vita beati Mauri et sociorum eius*, VI.1 (p. 101).

These approaches coexist but are also influenced by different animal types that can serve distinct functions.¹³⁰ The animals described in the episodes are a horse and an ox, both tamed beasts; some dogs, probably from the countryside or strays; and a bird, the only wild animal. It is relevant that the devotional behaviour is exhibited by the bird, which lives in the wild without any indication of domestication. The encounter between people and animals is most prominent in the episode and in the *passio* concerning the two beasts that guarded the holy bodies.¹³¹ These instances illustrate animals having the same capacity as humans to understand the importance of sacred relics, a hagiographic *topos* but also a deep-rooted folkloric belief.

The attention given to natural elements extends beyond the involvement of animals and encompasses a diverse array of cultural attributes associated with weather patterns and the natural landscape. We have already referred to the rain that began to fall at the beginning of the procession of St Adam's relics to Guglionesi, described as an extraordinary meteorological phenomenon sent by God ('a Domino in loco illo largita est pluvia')¹³² that enables the thieves to steal the body without anybody noticing. The rain was plentiful and prevented people from leaving their homes for two reasons: first, since it encouraged sleep ('per soporis gravitatem'),¹³³ and second, due to its abundance ('propter pluviae inundationem').¹³⁴ As soon as the thieves were far enough from the church of Petacciato, where the holy body was enshrined, the rain stopped and the sky turned clear ('et ecce facta est tanta aeris serenitas'), and they could no longer see any clouds ('ut nubes aliqua ab ipsis minime videri poterat').¹³⁵ In a comparative perspective we might recall Einhard's *translatio*, in which he relates that on the journey following the theft, it rained so heavily that he and his companions expected to find paths muddied by overflowing rivers; yet, as they resumed their march, they observed that nothing had changed.¹³⁶

St Juvenal's translation contains an additional reference to a supernatural meteorological phenomenon. As Margrave Adalbert's men removed the holy bodies, the sky grew dark and thunder (*tonitrua*) and lightning (*fulgora*) began to occur.¹³⁷ In other tales, the journey home by sea provides the

130 Shockro, 'Saints and Holy Beasts'.

131 Crane, *Animal Encounters*.

132 *Historia translationis sancti Adami*, 6 (p. 330).

133 *Historia translationis sancti Adami*, 6 (p. 330).

134 *Historia translationis sancti Adami*, 6 (p. 330).

135 *Historia translationis sancti Adami*, 6 (p. 330).

136 Einhard, *Translatio sanctorum Marcellini et Petri*, L.12 (p. 58).

137 *Translatio Iuvenalis et Cassii episcoporum Narniensium Lucam*, 58 (p. 244).

opportunity to describe maritime storms, allegedly calmed by the saints' intervention. The first instance is included in St Mark's *translatio*: when the merchants were travelling to Venice, a windstorm (*tempestas*) occurred one night and the ship was violently tossed about; the sailors were saved from harm only thanks to the intervention of the saint, who manifested himself in a dream to the monk Dominic.¹³⁸ The same theme appears in the *translatio* of St Nicholas' relics to Bari, where the voyagers were obstructed by a headwind that rose after the theft of fragments of the saint's body by merchants.¹³⁹ Another example, influenced by the previous one, is included in the *translatio* of St John the Baptist's ashes from Myra to Genoa, during which a sea storm ('*tempestate maris*')¹⁴⁰ was believed to have been caused by the dispersion of the ashes; in fact, once they had been collected up, the wind abated ('*vento cessante*').¹⁴¹

Earthquakes are another feature described in the tales.¹⁴² We have already emphasised their symbolic function, used to underline the saints' approval or rejection of the theft. In addition to this, these episodes are useful because they furnish details about the earthquakes. In the case of St Himerius' translation, the bishops of Cremona and Amelia were astonished by a tremor of the earth ('*totus ille contremuit locus*')¹⁴³ that affected the entire vault where the relics were located. It frightened them (*tremefacti*)¹⁴⁴ not only because it was thought to represent the saint's reaction, but also on account of the dangers posed by the natural occurrence. Arechis II's attempt to move the remains of St Martin of Mount Massico after praying for the saint's permission for the extraction was also accompanied by a severe earthquake ('*subito vehementissimi terrae motus accessu*'),¹⁴⁵ which caused the whole mountain on which the building housing the tomb was situated to appear to collapse ('*ita ut mons ruere videretur*').¹⁴⁶ Later, when the guardian monk tried to steal the saint's relics, another earthquake followed: according to the tale, as he entered the tomb that night a massive seism that resembled the

138 *Translatio sancti Marci evangelistae Venetias*, XV.1 (p. 125).

139 Archdeacon John, *Translatio sancti Nicolai*, p. 119.

140 Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda translationis beatissimi Johannis Baptistae Genuam*, A (p. 232).

141 Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda translationis beatissimi Johannis Baptistae Genuam*, A (p. 232).

142 On earthquakes from a cultural perspective see: Guidoboni and Poirier, *Storia culturale del terremoto*, esp. chapter 6; More generally, on natural disasters, see: Jouanna, Leclant and Zink (eds), *L'homme face aux calamités naturelles*.

143 *Translatio sancti Himerii*, 10 (p. 265).

144 *Translatio sancti Himerii*, 11 (p. 265).

145 *Vita, translatio et miracula sancti Martini Abbatis*, 6 (p. 837).

146 *Vita, translatio et miracula sancti Martini Abbatis*, 6 (p. 837).

destruction of the entire mountain shook the earth.¹⁴⁷ A fleeting earthquake also occurred during the removal of St Juvenal's body ('terra mota est'),¹⁴⁸ as well as in Smirne ('gravi terraemotu') when St Agatha urged Gislebertus and Goselinus to travel to Italy, causing them to be fearful (*perterriti*)¹⁴⁹

Although the earthquakes cited can be interpreted as a supernatural response to the attempted theft, they are described in very different ways: the first is constituted by a simple movement of the earth, which terrified the two bishops but did not cause any damage or awaken the friars; the second and the third were dreadful tremors that were perceived as so dangerous that they could have destroyed the mountain. It is interesting to note that the intensity of the earthquake may vary depending on the type of supernatural response: in the instance of St Himerius, the relics could be transferred and the quake was milder, whereas in the other two cases, the opposition to the translation caused the seism to be terrible and violent. The reflection on the earthquake phenomenon involved many figures over time. Plinius, for example, employed a number of technical terms, such as *tremor* and *terrae motu*, which partially find correspondence in our cases.¹⁵⁰ Ancient sources, including Aristotle, Seneca, Plinius and Ammianus Marcellinus, contain numerous references to earthquakes too.¹⁵¹ The examples in our corpus can be compared to analogous occurrences in Greece or the Roman Empire in which earth tremors were attributed to a divine cause. In his epitome of Trogius' *Historiae Philippicae*, the historian Justin, who lived sometime between the second and fourth centuries, mentions an earthquake that took place during the operations of Brennus, who led the Gauls in the siege of Delphi in the broader context of the military expedition into the Balkans beginning in the fourth century, and particularly in the invasion of Greece in 279 BC. The natural phenomenon that impeded the conquest of the shrine was interpreted as a sign of the divine presence that followed prayers and rituals in the temple.¹⁵² These portents, including those in our corpus, may be considered hagiographic *topoi* used by the authors of texts to celebrate

147 'subito tantus factus est terrae motus, ut montis ruina instare videretur', *Vita, translatio et miracula sancti Martini Abbatis*, 9 (p. 838).

148 *Translatio Iuvenalis et Cassii episcoporum Narniensium Lucam*, 58 (p. 244).

149 *Historia translationis corporis sanctae Agathae*, 6 (p. 644).

150 Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, II.192–200 (vol. 1, pp. 323–330); see also Strabo, *Geographica*, I.3.20 (p. 50).

151 On the reflection as to the nature of earthquakes in Antiquity and their impact, see Bousquet, 'Les séismes de l'Antiquité'.

152 Justin, *Epitoma Historiarum Philippicarum Pompei Trogi*, XXIV.8.9 (p. 200). On Justin's epitome, see Brogna, *Ripensare la storia universale*.

and confirm the actions of saints and gods, as Isabelle Draelants points out in her study of astronomical and seismic phenomena in medieval Belgium.¹⁵³ In addition, despite the abundant evidence of earthquakes mentioned in hagiographies for these purposes, we cannot exclude the possibility that local tremors were sometimes interpreted in this manner, on the basis of a long-standing cultural perspective on this type of phenomenon. There are also references to supernatural earthquakes in the biblical texts, such as the one that alerted Elijah to the presence of God.¹⁵⁴ The most representative of these antecedents is the seism that occurred at the time of Jesus' death, which Matthew refers to (σεισμόν):¹⁵⁵ this event, along with other manifestations, emphasised the significance of what was happening, as did the earthquake (σεισμός) mentioned by him when an angel of God rolled over the tombstone.¹⁵⁶ The New Testament contains additional references to earthquakes – always described using the same Greek term – such as the one that occurred to liberate St Paul and his collaborator Silas from the Philippi prison¹⁵⁷ and those mentioned in Revelation.¹⁵⁸ The interpretation of the earthquakes mentioned in the stories under examination thus corresponds with that of their predecessors in classical antiquity and the biblical world.

Sometimes, the tales describe unusual phenomena that cannot be directly attributed to nature. The column of fire ('quasi columna ignis')¹⁵⁹ witnessed by the inhabitants of Spoleto beside the tomb of Archbishop John is one of the most notable examples, allegedly gleaming with brilliance ('corusco fulgore')¹⁶⁰ and appearing to reach the sky ('usque caelum erecta mirabiliter visa est').¹⁶¹ As previously mentioned, this supernatural apparition must be connected to the other signs that pointed to the holy body's burial site. At the same time, it is evident that the column of fire is reminiscent of the pillar that God sent to guide the chosen people to Palestine.¹⁶² The latter

153 Draelants, *Eclipses, comètes*, pp. 101–108.

154 1Kings 19:11.

155 Mt 27:51 and 54; the other canonical gospels do not mention the earthquake explicitly: Mk 15:38; Lk 23:45.

156 Mt 28:2.

157 Acts 16:26.

158 Rev 6:12; 8:5; 11:13; 19:16, 18.

159 John of Montecassino, *Translatio corporis et miracula sancti Ioannis episcopi Spoletini*, 4 (p. 31).

160 John of Montecassino, *Translatio corporis et miracula sancti Ioannis episcopi Spoletini*, 4 (p. 31).

161 John of Montecassino, *Translatio corporis et miracula sancti Ioannis episcopi Spoletini*, 4 (p. 31).

162 Ex 13:20–22.

led the travellers during the night, while the former indicated where the saint's sepulchre was at night.

Finally, there are references to plants and fruit in the tales under consideration, which are cited only because they are used to conceal the relics. We have already mentioned that the basket containing St Mark's body was filled with cabbage and pork. Likewise, the basket in which St Isidore's corpse was placed was heaped with raisins (*uva passa*).

These two straightforward references provide us with valuable information about the goods exported to Italy at the time. Although it was considered a humble food, cabbage was frequently used in Italian cuisine. The *Liber de coquina*, written at the end of the thirteenth century or the beginning of the fourteenth, began with a section on cabbage recipes, which the author considered particularly simple to prepare.¹⁶³ Moreover, during the Early Middle Ages, despite the fact that Italian nutrition was primarily centred on grains, vegetables and legumes – unlike France, Germany or England – pork was the most important source of meat for all social classes.¹⁶⁴ This was one of the reasons for importing pork, which for our purposes may also be viewed as a literary device to distance Muslims from St Mark's body due to the Quranic prohibition against eating this meat.¹⁶⁵ Regarding the term used by the hagiographer, he writes 'halkanzir' (ar. *al-ḥanzīr*),¹⁶⁶ which is an article-containing form. In the critical apparatus, the editor also includes the form 'c(h)anzir' (ar. *ḥanzīr*), without the article; however, in the chapel of St Clement the word 'kanzir' can be found. As for raisins, they were among the ingredients used by Romans to sweeten dishes, along with honey and dates;¹⁶⁷ numerous late medieval Italian recipe books include them as an ingredient. The translation of St Maurus mentions the precious Falerno wine, known since ancient times ('falernum optimum'),¹⁶⁸ and describes it as a pleasant drink.

It is evident from the aforementioned examples that the portrayal of the natural world in the tales of *furta sacra* is multifaceted. It serves not only as an expression of the geographical contexts in which the tales are set but also reflects the cultural perspectives and knowledge of the hagiographers.

163 Capatti and Montanari, *Italian Cuisine*, p. 35.

164 Capatti and Montanari, *Italian Cuisine*, pp. 64–65; see also Montanari, *Medieval Tastes*, pp. 63–64.

165 Qur'an 2:173; 5:3; 6:145; 16:115.

166 *Translatio sancti Marci*, XIV.1 (p. 124).

167 Capatti and Montanari, *Italian Cuisine*, p. 94.

168 James of Venosa, *Vita beati Mauri et sociorum eius*, IV.2 (p. 100).

6.4. Bodies, clothes and blood

Tales of translation of relics, particularly those that belong to the *furta sacra* genre, can help us understand how people viewed death and corpses over the centuries. Despite the fact that saints' bodies were frequently described as uncorrupted and endowed with supernatural features, there are instances in which they are spoken of merely as corpses composed of bones and with a variety of facial details. In this paragraph, we shall examine, when possible, the consistency and preservation of holy bodies. Additionally, we will consider the covering of bodies, specifically the garments and fabrics used for this purpose. Subsequently, we will deal with the central theme of the human body and, in particular, blood.

The *passiones* taken into consideration often describe the bodies of saints. Despite the tortures and the martyrdom that they had suffered, when recovered by devout matrons, priests and Christian followers their bodies appeared healthy and intact, even if at times headless (in which cases the head was typically left near the corpse). The hagiographers generally use the word *corpus* or its plural *corpore*, the latter when referring to a group of martyrs. The care for the bodies was evidenced after the relics had been rescued, when they were perfumed, anointed and located in a new tomb. The use of fragrances at the moment of burial is well documented in the Bible, as well as in ancient Christianity. In the Hebrew context, after death the corpses were cleansed, sometimes with water and spices, a process that had to be related to the rules regarding purity and was permitted on the shabbat.¹⁶⁹ According to New Testament accounts and the new customs in the contexts in which they resided, such as Rome, Christian burial practices were inherited from the Hebrew context, but with a profound change in meaning.¹⁷⁰ For instance, Christians continued to anoint their dead's bodies, but lost the Hebrew – and Greek and Roman¹⁷¹ – concept of death as contamination, allowing their martyrs' bodies to enter the city walls from the fourth century onwards. The word used to refer to the herbs, spices and perfumes used to anoint martyrs' bodies was 'aromas' (lat. *aromata*;

169 Davies, *Death, Burial and Rebirth*, p. 105.

170 Davies, *Death, Burial and Rebirth*, p. 198.

171 As regards the Roman treatment of corpses, they practised inhumation, then cremation and later – beginning with the time of Trajan (d. 117) – inhumation once more, although it is difficult to determine whether this shift could be attributed to the rise of Christianity. In any case, in Rome cremation and inhumation were not to be viewed as antithetical practices. Christian, Jewish and later Islamic perspectives generally excluded the burning of corpses, thereby preserving the body's integrity (Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, pp. 51–54).

gr. ἀρώματα). The topical example of Jesus' body, which was required to be anointed the day after the shabbat¹⁷² and was also symbolically anointed with nard while he was a guest in Bethany,¹⁷³ played a crucial role in the Christian perspective.

According to the *passio*, when St Agatha was martyred her body was transferred to a new sarcophagus after being anointed and perfumed with these *aromata* ('dum aromatibus condiretur corpus eius').¹⁷⁴ The devout *matrona* Grata did the same with St Alexander's corpse ('cum aromatibus optimo sepelevit').¹⁷⁵ *Aromata*, which in some cases were deemed 'precious',¹⁷⁶ are typically mentioned alongside the linen garments used to enfold the martyrs' bodies, in the same manner as they were used in medieval thefts.

Moreover, while the retrieved saintly bodies looked beautiful and pure, those of their executioners were subjected to disturbance and violation as retribution for their impious crimes against the martyrs of God. The *passio* of St Agatha illustrates this theme: after her death, Catania's pretor Quintinianus was killed by two horses while navigating a river, sustaining a bite from one and a kick from the other, and his body disappeared in the water and could no longer be found ('non est inventum corpus').¹⁷⁷ The hagiographer's emphasis on the loss of the body is significant, particularly when compared to the preceding account of the preservation of Agatha's body. This detail helps explain why the hagiographers were so insistent on martyrs' bodies being recovered, but also demonstrates how dishonourable it was for the bones to be lost.

Hagiographic sources are not always explicit regarding the consistency of the translated relics. Indeed, as pointed out by Giuseppe Gagov (1915–1967),¹⁷⁸ the term *corpus* does not always refer to the whole body, but has frequently been used to indicate body parts or pieces of bone, based on the theological and anthropological notion that even a single body fragment represented the saint's entire power. This view was also held by other ancient authors, such as Victricius of Rouen (ca. 330/340–before 409),¹⁷⁹ Gaudentius Bishop of Brescia¹⁸⁰

172 Mk 16:1; Lk 24:1.

173 Mt 26:6–12; Mc 14:3–8; Jn 13:3–8.

174 *Passio sanctae Agathae*, 13 (p. 623).

175 *Passio sancti Alexandri*, 9 (p. 805).

176 *Passio sanctorum Processi et Martiniani*, 4 (p. 271).

177 *Passio sanctae Agathae*, 14 (p. 624).

178 Gagov, 'Uso e significato del termine "corpus"'.
 179 Victricius, *Liber de laude sanctorum*, X (cols 452–453); see also Grig, *Making Martyrs*, pp. 90–91.

180 Gaudentius of Brescia, *Tractatus*, XVII.339 (cols 963–964).

and Paulinus of Nola (ca. 355–431).¹⁸¹ For example, according to a letter from Theodoret (ca. 393–ca. 458) to Bishop Timotheus, it was frequently impossible to bury the entire bodies of martyrs, rather than just small fragments, identifying the names of the martyrs to whom these belonged.¹⁸² Simultaneously, the description of the saints' bodies is frequently secondary and not included in our texts, unless special circumstances make it necessary to identify which portions of the body were preserved or to provide evidence of the presence of the entire corpse. The same issue emerges in Greek hagiographies from the late antique period, in which the word 'body' (σῶμα) often alternates with 'relic' (λείψανον).¹⁸³ In the section of the research pertaining to the martyrial *passiones*, it is evident that the bodies recovered by Christians or devout matrons are generally intact, although sometimes after death by beheading the heads might end up in a separate place from the bodies. In the *passio* of Sts Processus and Martinianus, Lucina recovered the mutilated bodies of saints ('trunca eorum corpora')¹⁸⁴ who had been decapitated ('decollati sunt').¹⁸⁵ On the basis of the body's integrity or near-integrity, *corpus* is the prevalent word in these texts.

In several of the tales analysed, the hagiographer does not dwell on the consistency of the body, perhaps thus suggesting that it was entire. In the case of St Himerius, the author emphasises that the body was stolen ('corpus furatur') and then displayed to the inhabitants of Cremona ('corpus ostendit').¹⁸⁶ Elsewhere, St Magnus' bones (*ossa*)¹⁸⁷ were discovered and removed from a marble tomb, although the author states immediately afterwards that the body (*corpus*)¹⁸⁸ had been transferred. It is clear that the hagiographers may use both *corpus* and *ossa*¹⁸⁹ in the same text, as in the last case mentioned; this observation not only confirms the genericity of the lexicon employed, as already revealed by Gagov, but also highlights the ambiguity of the terms, including *ossa* and *reliquiae*, which were not necessarily used to indicate body parts but the totality of the bones as well. This observation is echoed in Filippo Ferrari's *Catalogus sanctorum Italiae* (1613), which notes that in many locations, only the bones or ashes

181 Paulinus of Nola, *Carmina*, XX.215–219 (col. 559).

182 Theodoret, *Epistles*, 130, cols 1341–1348: 1348, A.

183 Cronnier, *Les inventions de reliques*, pp. 223–224

184 *Passio sanctorum Processi et Martiniani*, 4 (p. 271).

185 *Passio sanctorum Processi et Martiniani*, 4 (p. 271).

186 *Translatio sancti Himerii*, 14 (p. 265).

187 *Translatio Verulam inde Anagniam*, 35 (p. 708).

188 *Translatio Verulam inde Anagniam*, 36 (p. 708).

189 *Translatio Verulam inde Anagniam*, 36 (p. 708).

of the saint were preserved, despite claims of possessing the saint's entire body.¹⁹⁰

Among the tales of *furta sacra* that have been examined, one of those that most explicitly addresses the saint's body is the translation of St Mark. In the context of the extraction of his body from the sepulchre, the hagiographer mentions the silk chlamys ('clamide serica')¹⁹¹ in which the supine holy body was wrapped (*resupinum*), covered with the seals (*sigilla*) that at the time of his burial were used to certify the body's authenticity and wholeness.¹⁹² The story describes the merchants' attempt to conceal the theft: they turned the body over, removing the cloth without harming the seals, then took the body of St Claudia, which was resting nearby, and dressed it in St Mark's chlamys and seals. Thus, should the Alexandrians have suspected that the saint's body had been stolen, they would not have detected the theft when opening the tomb. The only detail the hagiographer provides about the body is that it was complete and fully clothed, marked with symbols that served to emphasise not only its authenticity (the seals), but its function too (the chlamys). The presence of these elements was essential for its identification.

Later in the tale, there is another brief mention of St Mark's remains. During the journey to Venice, the merchants on one of the ships began to question whether the body that had been stolen from Alexandria was really that of St Mark. The replacement with St Claudia's may have led us to suppose that it was nothing more than a skeleton rather than an uncorrupted body, otherwise the substitution would have been ineffective and the theft would have come to light. At any rate, there were doubts concerning its nature, and the merchants wondered whether it was an ordinary body or that of an Egyptian mummy ('Forsitan alicuius Aegyptii corpus vobis datum est').¹⁹³ The reference to the mummy may be thought to posit the body's integrity: in this perspective, it would not have been a collection of bones, but a whole body, partially consumed by the passage of time, possibly resembling a corpse that had previously been treated and manipulated for purposes of preservation.

Several Western sources mention both the Egyptian practice of mummification and the habit of placing mummified bodies in dwellings.¹⁹⁴ Some information is provided by a cynic teacher from Megara, but also by

190 Ferrari, *Catalogus sanctorum Italiae*, 'Quomodo accipiendum sit corpora sanctorum in diversis locis reperiri'.

191 *Translatio sancti Marci*, XIII.1 (p. 123).

192 On the material aspects of the buried body, see Effros, 'Bodily Objects: Encounters with Material Culture', pp. 184–187.

193 *Translatio sancti Marci*, XIV.5 (p. 125).

194 Wortley, 'The Origins of Christian Veneration of Body-parts', pp. 16–25.

Diodorus Siculus¹⁹⁵ and Cicero.¹⁹⁶ In the Christian context, a very pertinent example is that of Athanasius of Alexandria (d. 373), who was bishop in the same city from which St Mark's body was stolen. In the *Vita Antonii*, he relates St Anthony's last words, with which he urged his fellows to entomb his body and not follow the Egyptian custom of preserving the bodies of important men 'on low beds and to keep them at home'.¹⁹⁷ Despite the possible connection between Athanasius' words and the schism of Melitius of Lycopolis, this passage allows us to postulate that the mummy referenced in the translation of St Mark's relics confirms the widespread presence of this practice in the ninth century.¹⁹⁸ Moreover, as argued by John Wortley, the practice of enshrining the bodies of the deceased in Egyptian homes may have spread to Christianity, providing one of the earliest examples of devotion to martyrs' bodies or their fragments.¹⁹⁹

The visual sources offer valuable insights into the bodies of the saints and how they were preserved and envisioned. In the frescoes of the translations of St Magnus's body, his skull is represented without the upper portion, which is merely sketched on the golden nimbus (Figs 1–2). Neither the *translatio* nor the *passiones* contain this detail. One *passio* (BHL 5168) refers that, after his obtaining permission from the emperor's officials to pray for the last time in his chapel, he was found dead three days later. For this reason, it was decided to cut off his head and make him a martyr ('capite namque a corpore amputato martirem faciunt').²⁰⁰ Despite the reference to the beheading, the *passio* makes no mention of the higher portion of the skull being removed. In the scene from the Anagni crypt depicting the martyrdom of St Magnus, a soldier is portrayed sawing off the upper section of his skull with his sword. This is a curious detail that explains the subsequent scenes, and that must have originated from sources other than the *passio* previously considered.²⁰¹ There are two versions of the text: one in which the saint perished alone in the chapel, and another in which he was decapitated. The inscription included in the fresco bears the word 'beheaded' (*iugulatus*).

195 Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History*, I.91 (pp. 308–313).

196 According to him, the Egyptians kept the dead in their own homes: 'condiunt Aegyptii mortuos et eos servant domi' ('The Egyptians embalm the dead and keep them at home'), Cicero, *Tusculanes disputationes*, I.45 (p. 273).

197 Athanasius, *Vita Antonii*, 90 (quoted in Wortley, 'The Origins of Christian Veneration of Body-parts', p. 17).

198 Hauben, *Studies on the Melitian Schism in Egypt (AD 306–335)*.

199 Wortley, 'The Origins of Christian Veneration of Body-parts', p. 27.

200 *Acta sancti Magni episcopi Tranensis et martyris*, p. 290.

201 For the description of this detail, see Cappelletti, *Gli affreschi della cripta anagnina*, p. 202.

Another miraculously preserved body is described in the translation of St Pardus' remains. According to the sources, when the inhabitants of Larino travelled to Lucera to return Sts Primianus and Firmianus' bodies that had been stolen, they discovered the body of St Pardus, intact except for just one thumb ('corpus intactum, minus tantum uno pollice').²⁰² The detail of the thumb is also described in the *passio* of St Januarius and companions. In a dream, the saint asked the Christians who recovered his body after his martyrdom to make sure they also collected a finger ('digitus manus meae')²⁰³ that, according to the tale, had been severed at the time of his execution: it seems that, when the executioner beheaded him, the blow was so strong that it cut off one of his fingers as well.²⁰⁴

In the instance of St Trofimenia, when Sicard and his men opened the tomb, her body appeared to be completely intact ('sanctam Christi martyrem illibatam').²⁰⁵ In addition, near its head ('ad caput eius')²⁰⁶ and at its feet, three ampoules containing the martyr's blood were found. The integrity of the body is also mentioned in the theft of St Juvenal: the hagiographer states that upon the opening of the tomb, his corpse appeared so well preserved that it seemed still to contain his soul ('integra, acsi fuisset cum anima caro').²⁰⁷ In the case of the theft of St Margaret's remains, the word *corpus* has been employed to describe her bones. At the same time, Prior Augustin seized the head (*caput*) of St Euprepia, which was enshrined with Margaret's remains in a porphyry vase adorned with iron and bronze.²⁰⁸

The tales concerning St Nicholas contain numerous references to his body. According to Archdeacon John, the merchant Matthew first collected up as many of his limbs as he could, and then tried to recover his head too.²⁰⁹ In his version, Nicephorus emphasises that the *manna* in which the relics were partially immersed reached the holy body's navel ('ad umbilicum sancti corporis') upon the opening of the tomb.²¹⁰ Based on this description, it seems that the corpse was intact (*illibatam*),²¹¹ even if it is unclear how

202 *Vita sancti Pardi*, p. 4.

203 *Passio sanctorum Ianuarii et sociorum*, 11 (p. 868).

204 'digitum manus sancti martyris Ianuarii simul cum capite absceidit', *Passio sanctorum Ianuarii et sociorum*, 10 (p. 868).

205 *Historia inventionis ac translationis et miracula sanctae Trophimenae*, 15 (p. 236).

206 *Historia inventionis ac translationis et miracula sanctae Trophimenae*, 15 (p. 236).

207 *Translatio Iuvenalis et Cassii Narniensium*, 56 (p. 244).

208 'concham porphyriam, ferro aereque munitam', *Translatio sanctae Margaritae in Tusciam*, 3 (p. 41).

209 Archdeacon John, *Translatio sancti Nicolai*, p. 97.

210 Nicephorus, *Translatio sancti Nicolai*, p. 117.

211 Nicephorus, *Translatio sancti Nicolai*, p. 117.

it was arranged in the tomb, whether in an upright or supine position. Archdeacon John also provides some references to body parts, including a tooth ('dens unus') that, according to the tale, had been the subject of an attempted theft by a count.²¹² In addition, when travelling to Bari, a sailor named Romuald removed several fragments and two teeth from the sacred body ('duos de dentibus et minutis articulis'),²¹³ which subsequently the saint urged them to return to him. As depicted above, the representations of St Nicholas' body imply that it was intact and undamaged, contradicting the accounts in the hagiographic texts.

The examples provided thus offer a nuanced comprehension of the corporeality of the saints' remains. While the extent of preservation of the body did not necessarily determine its *virtus*, the frequent use of the term *corpus* implies that the concept of conveying the complete transfer of the body was important.

It is also of interest to examine the references to the garments and cloths used to wrap the bodies of the saints. In addition to the already considered chlamys of St Mark, a generic reference is included in the translation of St Adam's relics: when the thieves went to relocate his body, they also stole his sacred robes ('vestimenta sacra').²¹⁴ Moreover, numerous thefts and passions of martyrs mention the linen garments in which the holy bodies were placed after their removal, as in the case of St John of Spoleto. In the second book of Einhard's *translatio*, linen is described as the most common material used to envelop the saints' remains; and when he details the clothes on the bodies of Sts Marcellinus and Peter, he emphasises that those worn by Marcellinus were incredibly thin ('mirae subtilitatis').²¹⁵

As previously mentioned, the late antique *passiones* also mention the use of linen garments to envelop holy bodies. In this case, they are used to properly bury the martyrs' corpses, in order to express respect for them.

The visual representations of thefts reveal an emphasis on the topic of clothing associated with sacred bodies. In the frescoes of Anagni, St Magnus' body is wearing a red chasuble and a white tunic without a *pallium* (Figs 1–2).²¹⁶ His clothes are simple and undecorated, unlike those of the bishop of Veroli, who is robed in a similar chasuble on a yellow-orange dalmatic

212 Archdeacon John, *Translatio sancti Nicolai*, p. 94.

213 Archdeacon John, *Translatio sancti Nicolai*, p. 100.

214 *Historia translationis sancti Adami*, 5 (p. 330).

215 Einhard, *Translatio sanctorum Marcellini et Petri*, II.1 (p. 64).

216 The clothes worn by St Magnus are very similar to those worn by the two male figures close to St Agnes included in the apsal mosaic of the basilica of St Agnes Outside the Walls (Sant'Agnese fuori le mura), realised between 625 and 638 (Miller, *Clothing the Clergy*, figure 2).

with green-blue sleeves, while the deacon (or cleric) who accompanies him, carrying the pail of holy water, also dons a yellow-orange dalmatic; the greatest contrast is with the richness of the precious chasuble worn by the bishop of Anagni, whose deacon and clergyman are also wearing priceless garments.²¹⁷ The saint does not have a hat, whereas the two bishops of Veroli and Anagni have white hats with two cloth strips at the back.

In the mosaics of St Clement's chapel, St Mark's body in the sepulchre is covered in a long cloth, whereas in the scene of the voyage by sea, when he appears to save the Venetian merchants, he is wearing the episcopal clothes with the *pallium* (Fig. 6), which is used to emphasise his *praesentia* based on the authority of his episcopate status.²¹⁸ The *pallium* was used as an ecclesiastical vestment beginning in the sixth century, when it was regarded as a symbol of the bishop's special authority.²¹⁹ Initially, it was worn with one flap on the front left of the body and the other behind the back, as seen in the image of Bishop Maximus in the mosaics of St Vital in Ravenna.²²⁰ However, in our example, the frontal flap is located in the middle of the body, forming a Y.

In the mosaic on the Door of St Alipius, the body is depicted wrapped in a red cloth with golden decorations (Fig. 8), likely the episcopal garments, as suggested by the probable presence of a *pallium*. A similar strategy has been used in relation to St Isidore, whose cycle was developed at the same time as that of the Door of St Alipius: initially, his body is dressed in red clothes, very similar to those of St Mark, and is then represented in the coffin covered by a cloth of the same colour.

Occasionally, the tales under discussion contain references to aesthetic elements, as in the story of St Agatha's translation. During the journey, Gislebertus and Goselinus arrived in Corinth where they stayed a while, delaying their arrival in Catania. One night, in a dream, the martyr urged Gislebertus and his companion to resume their travels. According to the hagiographer, her beauty was worthy of admiration ('*admirandae venustatis*')²²¹ and her hair was loose ('*crinibus dissolutis*').²²² This last detail should not be interpreted as a sign of her anger at the two thieves for their tardiness, but rather as a

On the clothes of the clergy and their depiction, see also Kaftal (ed.), *Iconography of the Saints in Tuscan Painting*, pp. xxii–xxiii.

217 Miller, *Clothing the Clergy*, p. 54.

218 On the *pallium* see Norris, *Church Vestments*, pp. 56–86.

219 Miller, *Clothing the Clergy*, p. 29.

220 Miller, *Clothing the Clergy*, p. 38.

221 *Historia translationis corporis sanctae Agathae*, 7 (p. 644).

222 *Historia translationis corporis sanctae Agathae*, 7 (p. 644).

manner in which the hagiographer describes her beauty. During the Middle Ages, virgins and widows wore their hair down, so this image proposed in the *translatio* emphasises her virginal status.²²³ This condition is also evident in the panels of Scipione di Guido's wooden choir, composed on the basis of the hagiographic texts, in which the saint is generally represented with her hair down during her lifetime and with her entire body visible during the translation (Fig. 14). This is especially evident in the panel *The saint appears to Gislebertus inviting him to leave Corinth* (Fig. 16), which reproduces the corresponding passage from the text.

Having examined the body and its coverings, it is now pertinent to shift our focus to the subject of blood, a topic that often emerges in discussions of martyrs and thus cannot be regarded as a secondary issue. Since their time, it has played a crucial role in the devotion to saints, especially in the numerous *passiones* compiled in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. It was sometimes recovered along with the martyrs' bodies or flowed out from their remains many years after their deaths. For instance, the presence of blood is attested in the cult of St Euphemia of Chalcedon, who began to perform prodigies after the miraculous discovery of her body. According to Evagrius Scholasticus, when a sponge was lowered into her sepulchre and then retrieved, the iron bar to which it was attached was filled with liquid and clotted blood.²²⁴ In the *passiones* considered before, there are references to the blood collected along with the martyrs' bodies and placed in the tomb constructed for them. For example, in the *passio* of St Susanna, her body was collected by Diocletian's wife together with the blood she had shed ('et sanguinem, quem effuderat in eodem loco').²²⁵

Blood is one of the most relevant topics in *furta sacra* tales as well. It frequently flows miraculously from relics, signifying the presence of saints and condemning the theft or violation of their holy rest. In all cases, the theft or even just the attempt to steal their remains was considered tantamount to a second martyrdom, causing them great suffering.

A useful example is contained in the account of St Trofimenae's translation. According to the sources, when the bishop and the archdeacon removed her remains from the tomb, people began to take bits of them as relics. Blood then started to drip from the body and fall to the ground ('guttatim sanguis eius fluebat terra').²²⁶ The hagiographer interpreted the event as a

223 Hopwood Griffiths, 'Self and Society', p. 43; Bartlett, 'Symbolic Meanings of Hair', p. 54.

224 Evagrius Scholasticus, *Historia ecclesiastica*, II.3 (p. 64).

225 *Passio sanctae Susannae*, 6 (p. 632).

226 *Historia inventionis ac translationis et miracula sanctae Trophimenae*, 16 (p. 236).

second martyrdom, caused by the decision to extract the remains. As had happened during her martyrdom, when Trofimenia was struck by her father because of her conversion to Christianity, the wound on her throat began to bleed and numerous terrified people hurried to examine the prodigious phenomenon. This episode represents a response of saints when their rest was interrupted without authorisation. The ampoules allegedly containing blood have already been discussed above.

Blood symbolises a saint's disapproval at being translated, as in the instance of St Juvenal of Narni. When the soldiers of the margrave of Tuscany entered the crypt and extracted his body, supernatural signs occurred (thunder, lightning, earthquake, etc.), after which the holy body was seen on its knees in an expression of intense pain, and started to bleed ('sanguis exinde flueret').²²⁷ His bones seemed to be fractured due to weariness.²²⁸ The bishops and priests who were present witnessed the supernatural occurrence and collected the precious blood from the ground.²²⁹ In this instance, St Juvenal expressed his pain at the violation of his resting-place by means of blood. The fact that the flowing of this vital fluid is part of a broader rhetorical language is designed to emphasise the notion that the saints were alive and had their own perception. Indeed, according to numerous Biblical passages, blood was regarded as the crucial component of human and animal life²³⁰ as well as the expression of redemption and salvation.²³¹

In Einhard's tale, evidence of blood is abundant. On the journey to his monastery, the bodies of the stolen saints began to issue a liquid similar to blood ('umore sanguineo'),²³² which continued to drip for seven days and which had a salty taste comparable to that of tears, the lightness of water and the hue of blood.²³³ The story also contains several miracles in which blood plays a crucial role.²³⁴

The cases of Sts Trofimenia and Juvenal are precious because they are among those in which the hagiographer does not belong to the communities

227 *Translatio Iuvenalis et Cassii episcoporum Narniensium Lucam*, 9 (p. 981).

228 'Erant enim ilia eius fracta quasi prae lassitudine', *Translatio Iuvenalis et Cassii episcoporum Narniensium Lucam*, 9 (p. 981).

229 *Translatio Iuvenalis et Cassii episcoporum Narniensium Lucam*, 9 (p. 981).

230 Gen 9:4; Lev 17:10–14.

231 Mt 26:27–28; Rev 7:14.

232 Einhard, *Translatio sanctorum Marcellini et Petri*, I.20 (p. 54).

233 'Constat enim umorem illum saporis fuisse subsalsi, ad lacrimarum videlicet qualitatem et tenuitatem quidem aquae, colorem autem veri sanguinis habuisse', Einhard, *Translatio sanctorum Marcellini et Petri*, I.20 (p. 54).

234 Einhard, *Translatio sanctorum Marcellini et Petri*, III.4–5 (p. 90), 6 (p. 94), 12 (p. 106).

from which the relics were stolen; namely, Benevento and Lucca. Based on this consideration, there is a direct relationship between the phenomenon of the bleeding corpses and the negative response to the translation. Since the theft was a historical occurrence that the hagiographers could not conceal because of its presence in the collective memory, blood was the only way to indicate that the saints were firmly opposed to their relocation to another place. It is conceivable that miraculous bleeding was part of a wider cultural phenomenon, which the hagiographers may have incorporated into their texts.

In any case, in the Early and Central Middle Ages, blood had a much smaller role than it did in later centuries, particularly the thirteenth, and this trend continued into the early modern period, when phenomena such as stigmatisation, bleeding wounds, and devotion to the blood of Christ become more significant.²³⁵ In the period under discussion, blood is merely an indication that we are in the presence of a living body despite the fact that the body is technically dead, and it is only seldom associated directly with the blood of Christ.

The examination of the texts concerning the body, clothing and blood not only provides insights into the rhetorical-narrative strategies employed by the hagiographers, but also describes a complex system of beliefs.

235 See, for example, some reflections by Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, pp. 439–443.

7. Dreams, Rituals and Spaces

Abstract: The seventh chapter addresses two themes: the oneiric and the ritual. It begins by examining the role of dreams and visions in the tales of sacred theft as well as in the recovery of martyrs' bodies in the *passiones*. Special attention is given to a comparative analysis of the ritual of *evocatio deorum*, an ancient practice used to 'summon' the deities of a besieged city and transfer their protection and simulacra to the besieging city. The chapter then explores the main ritual stages of the translation, starting with the procession of the saints' bodies after the theft, their arrival in the new city, and finally their deposition in the new church. It concludes with a reflection on the spatial context in which these translations occur.

Keywords: *evocatio deorum*; Antiquity; procession; deposition; visions; relics' authenticity

7.1. Dreams and visions

Dreams have an essential role in hagiography and medieval culture. They were frequently considered an important means of divine communication.¹ According to Macrobius and Calcidius,² dreams may be regarded from a variety of perspectives; namely, as positive (*oraculum*, *visio* and *somnium*), negative (*visum*), or as something natural and physiological (*insomnium*).³ Tertullianus, too, identified three typologies of dreams: those originating

1 On dreams in the Middle Ages, see Saintyves, *En marge de la Légende dorée*, pp. 3–116; Krüger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*; Schmitt, 'The Liminality and Centrality of Dreams'; Le Goff and Truong, *Une histoire du corps au Moyen Âge*, pp. 65–73; Klaniczay, 'Dream Healing and Visions'; Corbellari and Tilliette (eds), *Le Rêve medieval*; Keskiäho, *Dreams and Visions in the Early Middle Ages*; Keskiäho, 'Dreams and the Discoveries of Relics'. See also Orselli, 'Di alcuni modi e tramite della comunicazione col sacro'.

2 Krüger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, pp. 58–59.

3 Macrobius, *Commentarii in somnium Scipionis*, I:3 (pp. 9–13).

from our daily lives; those that have a devilish origin; and those that come from God.⁴ In addition, Augustine had a clear point of view on dreams (*visio spiritualis*, *visio corporalis* and *visio intellectualis*), and Gregory I used the word *revelatio* to mean a divine revelation.⁵ He specifically discusses the subject in the fourth book of his *Dialogi*, where he lists six distinct types of dreams based on their origins: two could be related to one's physiological condition (i.e., having just eaten or having an empty stomach), while others might originate from illusions, a combination of reflections and illusions, revelations, or reflections and revelations together.⁶ The first two typologies, Gregory continues, are well known to us all through our experiences, while the remaining four can be understood thanks to the Scriptures. In the final part of the paragraph, after providing an example of each of them, Pope Gregory emphasises the difficulty of distinguishing their origins – hence, their nature – as saints are able to do.⁷

The tales of thefts of relics are full of dreams, which are mainly used to reveal to the thieves where the saints' bodies were enshrined or to request their transfer to another place.⁸ Dreams were typically included at the beginning of the story with the aim of indicating the supernatural mission in which the robbers were involved. All those described in the sources are, according to Gregory's classification of dreams, *revelationes*, that is, supernatural communications from saints or angels concerning the upcoming theft.

This specific cultural device is also included in the ancient Roman and Hittite practice of *evocatio deorum*, which entailed the 'summoning' of the gods from the city to be conquered. Even though this aspect will be analysed in depth in the following paragraph, it is helpful to note that in these cases, the Romans received specific requests from gods who wished to be relocated from the city that was under siege to Rome. This occurred in two ways. The first instance was that of the 'talking statues',

4 Salisbury, *The Blood of Martyrs*, p. 49.

5 Krüger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, p. 47.

6 'Aliquando namque somnia ventris plenitudine vel inanitate, aliquando vero inlusione, aliquando cogitatione simul et inlusione, aliquando revelatione, aliquando autem cogitatione simul et revelatione generantur', Gregory I, *Dialogi*, 2, IV.50.2 (p. 322).

7 Gregory I, *Dialogi*, IV.50.6 (p. 324). See also Hildegard of Bingen's approach to dreams: *Causae et curae*, II.165 (p. 122).

8 This *topos* is also included in many tales composed beyond the Alps, for instance, in the *Translatio beati Vincentii*, in which the monk Ildebert from the monastery of Conques heard a voice asking him to steal the relics of the saint from Valencia, and describing how the sepulchre was in a state of abandon (Geary, *Furta sacra*, pp. 61–62, 135–138). By contrast, it is possible to cite the case mentioned by Cicero of Sophocles' dream, in which Hercules revealed to him who had stolen a golden cup from his temple: Cicero, *De divinatione*, I.54 (pp. 58–59).

and dates back to the Augustan period and theatrical performances.⁹ An example from before this period is that of Cybele. When in 204 BC King Attalus refused to give the Romans her simulacrum, a black stone, the goddess herself expressed her desire to be transferred.¹⁰ Another talking statue was that of Juno Regina ('Queen'), who answered requests for translation by nodding or speaking.¹¹ Dreams represented the second way of communication. According to the Sibylline books, when the god Asclepius wished to be moved to the Tiber Island in Rome, he appeared in a dream to the Roman who was dispatched to transfer him. The following day, the god travelled to Rome disguised as a snake on board a Roman ship.¹² These few examples contribute to demonstrate that requests for translation to different locations had already been documented in the past.

Dreams were included in many *passiones* with the aim of preparing future martyrs for the pains, tortures, and martyrdom that they would endure in the days to come.¹³ Saints also appeared in dreams to solicit devout matrons to go and recover their bodies. In the *Passio sancti Sebastiani*, matron Lucina had a dream ('apparuit in somno')¹⁴ in which St Sebastian urged her to remove his body from the place where it had been abandoned by his executioners. The pious matron agreed and went to get it in the middle of the night ('medio noctis').¹⁵ The fact that the action took place at night demonstrates a deliberate attempt to describe a secretive, furtive procedure. This hagiographic *topos* is sometimes associated with the miraculous discovery of relics (*inventio*) that occurred when nobody knew where the bodies of the saints had been discarded. In the examples under consideration, there are no attempts to interpret the dream in order to determine the nature of the vision. Generally, saints appearing in dreams were considered supernatural

9 Ferri, *Tutela segreta*, pp. 53–54; on the statues, see Canetti (ed.), *Statue*.

10 "Ipsa peti volui, nec sit mora; mitte volentem. / Dignus Roma locus, quo deus omnis eat". / Ille soni terrore pavens "Proficiscere," dixit. / "Nostra eris: in Phrygios Roma refertur avos." / Protinus innumerae caedunt pineta secures / illa, quibus fugiens Phryx pius usus erat' ("Twas my own will that they should send for me. Tarry not: let me go, it is my wish. Rome is a place meet to be the resort of every god." Quaking with terror at the words [Attalus] said, "Go forth. Thou wilt still be ours. Rome traces its origin to Phrygian ancestors." Straightway unnumbered axes fell those pinewoods which had supplied the pious Phrygian with timber in his flight'), Ovid, *Fasti*, IV.269–274 (pp. 208–209).

11 Ferri, *Tutela segreta*, p. 55.

12 Ferri, *Tutela segreta*, p. 54.

13 Salisbury, *The Blood of Martyrs*, pp. 51–54.

14 *Passio sancti Sebastiani*, 40–41 (p. 476).

15 *Passio sancti Sebastiani*, 44 (p. 476).

manifestations.¹⁶ The *passio* of Sts Marcellinus, Peter and Tiburtius, whose relics were collected by two pious women, Lucilla – probably Lucina – and Firmina, defined as relatives of Tiburtius, also contains a supernatural apparition in a dream ('apparuit eis in visu'),¹⁷ directing them to the location where they would discover the saintly bodies.

Regarding medieval thefts, we can begin with the example of St Januarius. Before the translation, a Neapolitan woman had a dream in which the saint disclosed that he wished to move to Benevento.¹⁸ His words disclose two motivations: first, the need to go to Benevento because it was his home, the place where he had served as bishop throughout his life. This aspect was also used by the inhabitants of Benevento to justify the theft. In addition, the saint described various *periuria*, or false oaths, that had occurred at his tomb, possibly referring to sacrilegious behaviours or rites. Although the dream is often a rhetorical device whose purpose is to legitimate thievery, the references to the two motivations allow us to consider it the preliminary phase in the translation and the official communication of the saint's imminent departure. It is relevant to note that the recipient of the dream was not one of the thieves, but a local woman. This underlines the role of the female gender as the privileged recipient of such supernatural messages, but also the folkloric aspect of dreams in general.

The idea that the saints could ask someone to take them back home is again included in St Agatha's translation. According to the tale, the soldier Gislebertus had three dreams ('per nocturnam visionem') in which the saint instructed him to return her body to Catania.¹⁹ Her request was clear: he and his companion soldier were to enter the church stealthily and remove her secretly. Agatha did not emphasise a specific reason for her departure; rather, she stressed the need to return to Catania, where she had been martyred ('ubi [...] fuerat coronata martyrio').²⁰ The dream recurred three times – a number which also commonly appears in the Bible and, later, in folkloric tales, such as fables – perhaps because Gislebertus did not properly

16 See also Cronnier, *Les inventions de reliques*, pp. 197–199.

17 *Passio sanctorum Marcellini et Petri*, 12 (p. 169).

18 'En migro de loco isto [...] Beneventum, plebs enim mea est', *Translatio sanctorum Ianuarii, Festi et Desiderii*, 1 (pp. 136, 138).

19 *Historia translationis corporis sanctae Agathae*, 3 (p. 643). The triple solicitation by dream recalls the similar episode of the priest Lucian, who, in 415, was guided to the discovery of the bodies of St Stephen, Nicodemus and Gamaliel (Vanderlinden, 'Revelatio Sancti Stephani (BHG 7850–6)', I.1–II.6 (pp. 191–194).

20 *Historia translationis corporis sanctae Agathae*, 3 (p. 643).

contemplate her request after the first dream.²¹ Hagiographers persevered in employing a specific language for supernatural communications, which may consist of dreams or of manifestations through the human body (by means of healing or sickness) and in nature (earthquakes, storms, etc.). Moreover, Gislebertus had further dreams. After they arrived in Smyrna, Agatha appeared to him with her hair down ('*crinibus dissolutis*')²² and expressed her desire to travel immediately to Taranto. The recipient of the dreams was always Gislebertus, whereas his fellow soldier Goselinus did not receive any supernatural communication.

In several cases, including those of St Agatha and St Januarius, the verb used to introduce the saints' arrival is 'to appear' (*apparuit*), which implies the unexpectedness of their materialisation.

Except for one instance in St Agatha's translation, there are no reflections on the veracity of the dreams in the tales. In this case, the hagiographer emphasises that Gislebertus' vision (*visio*), although it seemed incredible, must be tied to God's will.²³

In addition to specific requests to return home, tales of theft included several other instances. One of the most relevant is that of the pious Benedict, who was urged by two angelical visions to remove the relics of St Adam from a country church near Guglionesi. In his first dream, the angel described the church and the precise location of the tomb.²⁴ In the second half of his message, he revealed that Benedict would then have to complete his mission by carrying St Adam's relics from that modest church to Guglionesi. The angel also disclosed the reason for the removal, which was God's desire to increase the saint's reputation for holiness. To emphasise the non-fictitious nature of the vision and the fact that Benedict had really seen an angel, the hagiographer referred to the dream as a 'clear vision' ('*clara quaedam Angelica visio*').²⁵ There is some information about Benedict's response to the dreams: on awakening, the devout man profoundly contemplated the vision that he had experienced, pondering over the saint he had never heard of before. Since, however, he did not immediately go to the small church, he experienced a second vision, requesting him to accomplish the mission or the task he had previously been solicited to perform. He awoke during the night and prayed deeply, before going to the church and later to the

21 The theme of recurring dreams – generally two or, more frequently, three – derives from an ancient Biblical model (Cronnier, *Les inventions de reliques*, p. 196).

22 *Historia translationis corporis sanctae Agathae*, 7 (p. 644).

23 *Historia translationis corporis sanctae Agathae*, 7 (p. 644).

24 *Historia translationis sancti Adami*, 1 (p. 329).

25 *Historia translationis sancti Adami*, 1 (p. 329).

archpriest of his town. As in the instance of St Januarius, the dream was received by an ordinary person rather than by whoever actually stole the relics. Benedict was a pious individual who regularly attended saints' feasts out of devotion; for this reason, he was regarded as a privileged channel for heavenly communication. The tale of St Adam is the only one in the corpus under consideration in which the translation was made possible thanks to the appearance of an angel.

An example of a dream designed to prevent a theft is included in the tale of St Martin of Mount Massico. When the guardian of the tomb tried to open it to retrieve the relics, the abbot of St Vincenzo al Volturno dreamed that the saint ('Sanctus [...] in somnis apparuit')²⁶ was asking him what kind of person had been placed in charge of guarding his holy remains, which prompted him to travel to the monastery to verify the situation.

In another instance, a dream was used by the saint to indicate to someone how to recover his relics (*inventio*), although they were subsequently stolen by thieves. This occurred in the case of St Bartholomew's remains, which had been dispersed by the Saracens. One night, the monk Theodore had a dream ('beatum Bartholomeum apostolum videt in somnis')²⁷ in which the saint instructed him on how to locate his remains: he would see them glowing like fires in the dark.

In addition to the cases in which dreams and visions serve as the starting point for theft, there are other examples of divine communications. One is that of St Mark, which occurred when his relics had already been stolen by Venetian merchants. During the return journey, he appeared in a vision to a monk named Domenic ('venit beatus Marcus in somnis Dominico monacho'),²⁸ who was instructed to lower the sails because the shore was near. The vision was intended to reassure the travellers that there was no peril of shipwreck.

Among the visions occurring after a saint's translation, there is the example of St Trofimenia, who appeared to the custodian monk in the church of Minori after her relics had been transferred to Benevento. The man entered the church grieving and weeping ('contristatus, flens, et eiulans') over her absence,²⁹ then saw her ('vidit beatissimam Virginem')³⁰ while he was suffusing the church with an incense burner. She told him that the

26 *Vita, translatio et miracula sancti Martini Abbatis*, 9 (p. 838).

27 *Translatio sancti Bartholomei*, p. 338.

28 *Translatio sancti Marci*, XV.1 (p. 125).

29 *Historia inventionis ac translationis et miracula sanctae Trophimenae*, 30–31 (p. 239).

30 *Historia inventionis ac translationis et miracula sanctae Trophimenae*, 30–31 (p. 239).

population of Minori had to continue to believe that she was really there, at the site where she had arrived after her martyrdom. In addition, the saint encouraged the perpetuation of masses and liturgies, notwithstanding the absence of her bones. She asked him why she was no longer revered as before and when the monk answered that it was because her relics were missing, she stressed the fact that the people should worship her because she was present in spirit since her tomb was in that place ('spiritu hic me esse, etsi corpore non sim vobiscum').³¹ This episode, which can be defined as an apparition and not a dream, demonstrates the local desire to restore St Trofimenae's worship. The saint, by showing herself in the church as a clear sign of her *praesentia*, demonstrated that she was the owner of that space.³²

Sometimes, visions may be the way through which God or saints punish unbelieving people. According to a tradition dating back to Late Antiquity, miracles were used by saints to repress any disrespect towards them, demonstrating their power and capacity to defend themselves and their domains and goods from outside assaults.³³ This is also the case of St Trofimenae, who was moved from Minori to Amalfi by Bishop Peter I to prevent her relics from being stolen by the prince of Benevento. She did not appreciate this translation, and for this reason appeared to the bishop ('videt in visione'), along with other virgin saints, wearing a red cape ('rubicundo pallio');³⁴ she proceeded to threaten him, asking why he had dared to open her tomb and extract her body ('Cur, episcope, meum temere tumulum ausus es violare').³⁵ At the same time, as punishment for that action – which was also the primary cause of the theft of her relics – she announced his imminent death and that his corpse would be removed from the tomb and devoured by dogs.³⁶ The bishop awoke in horror and ordered his mausoleum to be constructed, and not long after died from a terrible fever ('crudelissima febris').³⁷ When Sicard's armies seized the city, his tomb was excavated and his corpse, which was already in the decomposition phase ('iam foetidum'),³⁸ was discovered by some dogs that extracted and consumed it. The dream, in this instance, takes on the guise of a cautionary tale, followed by a miraculous punitive intervention against the prelate.

31 *Historia inventionis ac translationis et miracula sanctae Trophimenaе*, 30–31 (p. 239).

32 Bozóky, *Le Moyen Âge miraculeux*, p. 23.

33 See § 1.1 n. 49.

34 *Historia inventionis ac translationis et miracula sanctae Trophimenaе*, 17 (p. 236).

35 *Historia inventionis ac translationis et miracula sanctae Trophimenaе*, 17 (pp. 236–237).

36 *Historia inventionis ac translationis et miracula sanctae Trophimenaе*, 17 (p. 237).

37 *Historia inventionis ac translationis et miracula sanctae Trophimenaе*, 18 (p. 237).

38 *Historia inventionis ac translationis et miracula sanctae Trophimenaе*, 18 (p. 237).

The final dream that needs to be analysed, narrated in Leo of Ostia's *Chronicon*, is that which Arechis II had after the theft of the twelve martyr saints. While the prince was praying at night ('in oratione pernoctandi') in the church of St Sophia,³⁹ he suddenly beheld the twelve martyrs bowing their heads in greeting ('pariter inclinatis amicabilem vultibus salutavisse').⁴⁰ In addition to this gesture they spoke to him, revealing their identities and stating that they were the saints whose relics he had been able to recover from various places, reuniting them under the same altar:

Nos sumus, o princeps, quos tua devotio per diversa repertos loca summo huc studio detulit, ac studiosius delatos recondidit.

*We are, o prince, those whom your devotion brought here from various places with great zeal, and whom you carefully gathered and reverently laid to rest.*⁴¹

Besides its clear rhetorical purpose, which is to demonstrate that Arechis was an inspired man worthy of receiving celestial visions, the episode includes the supernatural manifestation of saints and their approval of the theft.⁴²

It is important to note that the dreams considered do not require interpretation by anyone else because the dreamers have the ability to interpret their own dreams. A different approach to the meaning of dreams is included in hagiographic tales that narrate prophetic dreams. In such cases, their meaning is often decoded by specialists, generally clergy, or sometimes other women.⁴³

Dreams and visions are modes of communication between the divine and the human that are well-documented in the *furta sacra* and are part of the broader cultural horizon of Christianity and religions in general.⁴⁴ The examples provided are aligned with this perspective.

39 Leo of Ostia, *Chronicon*, 2 (p. 587).

40 Leo of Ostia, *Chronicon*, pp. 586–587.

41 Leo of Ostia, *Chronicon*, p. 587; see also *Translatio duodecim martyrum*, p. 576; and *Sermo in vigiliis sanctorum duodecim fratrum*, p. 70.

42 Arechis is also the protagonist of another visionary episode which, according to legend, took place before he became prince: while reciting the *Miserere*, he saw his sword swing convulsively, a sign later interpreted as predestination for the principality (Di Muro, 'Usò politico delle reliquie', p. 383).

43 See the case of the dreams of the mothers of future saints as an illustrative example, Papisidero, 'Le madri di fronte ai sogni'.

44 Several dreams used to solicitate thefts also in Einhard, *Translatio sanctorum Marcellini et Petri*, l.9 (p. 52), 11 (pp. 54 and 56)

7.2. The *evocatio* and the opening of the tomb

The most important ritual associated with the theft of relics is the opening of the tomb. In the *passiones'* accounts of the taking of martyrs' bodies, there are no tombs from which their abandoned corpses had to be extracted. The only tombs mentioned are where Christians or devout matrons placed their bodies after their recovery. We can concentrate instead on medieval thefts. At this crucial moment, the thieves would ask the saints for their permission to be removed from their current 'home', a ritual that could be compared to the ancient Roman and Hittite practice of *evocatio deorum*, that is, summoning the gods, which we have mentioned before.⁴⁵ The ancient rite was performed during sieges and battles to appeal to the gods venerated in the city to be conquered, asking them to leave that place and follow the conquerors. In this way, the Romans and Hittites tried to deprive the cities under attack of their supernatural protection in order to ensure the conquest. After capturing the town, the soldiers generally took the statues or simulacrum enshrined in the temples and carried them home. In the case of the Romans, upon their return home they constructed a new temple in honour of the new deity, where they placed the miraculous images that had been stolen. According to Pliny the Elder, the ritual of *evocatio deorum* was performed by priests towards the gods to be pleased. He relates information contained in Valerius Flaccus according to which, during a siege, the Roman priests would invoke the god who protected that city.⁴⁶ The deity's actual name was a closely guarded secret (*occultatum*)⁴⁷ to prevent the ritual of evocation from being used, in its turn, against Rome itself. There is no certainty about the identity of this unnameable deity but Macrobius, on the basis of different sources, declared that it might be Jupiter, Lua, Angerona – who had a finger on her mouth – or Ops.⁴⁸ Servius refers to the secret name of Rome and the fact that it has not been disclosed in his Commentaries on Aeneid ('urbis [...] verum nomen nemo vel in sacris enuntiat'). Basing himself on Varro and other sources, he writes of a plebeian tribune named Valerius Soranus who was executed for daring

45 On the *evocatio deorum* see: Basanoff, *Evocatio*; Le Gall, 'Evocatio'; Gustafsson, *Evocatio deorum*; Bruun, 'Evocatio deorum'. For an introduction to this phenomenon, observed in comparison with the Roman one, see Ferri, *Tutela segreta*, pp. 71–100.

46 'a Romanis sacerdotibus evocari deum, cuius in tutela id oppidum esset', Pliny, *Naturalis historia*, XXVIII.18 (vol. 8, pp. 14–15).

47 Pliny, *Naturalis historia*, XXVIII.18 (vol. 8, pp. 14–15).

48 Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, III.9.4 (p. 184).

to speak the city's name.⁴⁹ Returning to this topic in the commentary on the second book of Virgil's work, Servius reaffirms the need to conceal the name of Rome's tutelary deity, relating that in the Capitol there was an inscription on a clypeus that provided only a generic reference to their identity, not even specifying the gender ('genio Urbis Romae, sive mas sive femina')⁵⁰ and quoting also the word of the pontiffs who referred to this deity as Jupiter or whatever name should be used to address them ('Iupiter optime maxime, sive quo alio nomine te appellari volueris'),⁵¹ emphasising the desire to follow them, whoever they were ('sequimur te, sancte deorum, quisquis es').⁵²

Livy describes the rite executed by Furius Camillus to convince Juno Regina to follow him after the conquest of Veii, in 396 BC.⁵³ After taking the auspices, he left the pavilion and ordered the soldiers to make the necessary preparations. He then prayed to Apollo Pitius ('Pythice Apollo')⁵⁴ for his protection, and also to Juno Regina, who had left Veii ('quae nunc Veios colis'),⁵⁵ imploring her to follow him and his soldiers to Rome, which would soon become her town, with a temple befitting her majesty. Some Roman soldiers washed and purified their bodies after the victory in order to carry the statue of the god. Livy emphasises that one of them, either out of divine inspiration or as a joke, asked the simulacrum whether she wished to go to Rome ('visne Romam ire, Iuno?'),⁵⁶ at which the other soldiers claimed that she nodded or verbally consented to her transfer. The author then emphasises that the Romans were able to transport the simulacrum, which proved especially light ('levem ac facilem tralatu fuisse'),⁵⁷ confirming her consent to the transfer, based on the very common *topos* attested in the Christian *translationes* and that we have discussed in a number of ways previously. The same episode is also narrated by Plutarch in the *Life of Camillus*,⁵⁸ according to whom Furius Camillus offered a sacrifice to the deity to beg her to accompany them to Rome: the legend describes the statue's assent, which partially corroborates what Livy wrote; the author

49 Servius, *Commentarii in Vergilii Aeneidos libros*, I.277 (p. 149).

50 Servius, *Commentarii in Vergilii Aeneidos libros*, II.351 (p. 416).

51 Servius, *Commentarii in Vergilii Aeneidos libros*, II.351 (p. 416).

52 Servius, *Commentarii in Vergilii Aeneidos libros*, II.351 (p. 416).

53 Livy, *Ab urbe condita*, V.21.1–4 (p. 348); 22.3–7 (p. 350).

54 Livy, *Ab urbe condita*, V.21.2 (p. 348).

55 Livy, *Ab urbe condita*, V.21.3 (p. 348).

56 Livy, *Ab urbe condita*, V.22.5 (p. 350).

57 Livy, *Ab urbe condita*, V.22.6 (p. 350).

58 Plutarch, *Camillus*, VI (pp. 108–109).

notes Livy's mention that its reaction was triggered by the solicitations of Camillus' men. Plutarch mentions instances of statues that allegedly emit drops of sweat, moan, nod and shut their eyes in order to substantiate the plausibility of such phenomena, which, according to him, are sometimes the result of excessive credulity.⁵⁹

Other evocations of Juno also occurred in Carthage in 146 BC and 75 BC. for the conquest of *Isaura Vetus* in Cilicia. The ancient rite was performed by pronouncing a specific prayer (*carmen evocationis*),⁶⁰ which is recorded in Macrobius' *Saturnalia*.⁶¹ Since the conquerors did not always know the identity of the gods venerated in the city under siege, their names were replaced in the *carmen* by the generic expression 'god or goddess' ('sive deus sive dea'), to whom they promised the construction of temples and the celebration of public games and sacrifices.⁶² According to the sources, the *evocatio deorum* was used to persuade the gods of a city not only to follow the conquerors, but also to remain neutral or aid the siege. In other words, the city that had to be conquered needed to be desacralised to avoid divine opposition.⁶³

As is evident, the main traits of this ancient rite are strikingly comparable to those employed in the *furta sacra* tradition. Clearly, there is no historical continuity between the two phenomena, but just a functional and morphological similarity, as stated by Luigi Canetti.⁶⁴ The opening of the tomb is the crucial moment when these similarities emerge. When Bishop Liutprand of Cremona and the bishop of Amelia entered the church, they started to pray to St Himerius with the aim of obtaining his favour and his acceptance of the transfer.⁶⁵ After their prayers, which may be compared to the *carmen evocationis*, an earthquake occurred ('totus ille contremuit locus')⁶⁶ as an indication of a supernatural reaction to the request. Another instance is Arechis II's attempt to translate the relics of St Martin of Mount Massico. After receiving ecclesiastical permission and fasting for three days, he went barefoot to the saint's tomb and beseeched

59 Plutarch, *Camillus*, VI (pp. 108–109).

60 Ferri, *Tutela segreta*, p. 33.

61 Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, III.9.7–11 (pp. 185–186).

62 Ferri, *Tutela segreta*, p. 38.

63 Ferri, *Tutela segreta*, p. 42.

64 Canetti, 'Mnemosoria e archeologia rituale', p. 137; see also Pedroni, 'Santa Sofia e la ricerca di reliquie', pp. 133–134.

65 'Prostrati namque in oratione diutius, multis vacabant votis et precibus, quo suis sancti faverent petitionibus', *Translatio sancti Himerii*, 8–9 (p. 265). See Ferri, *Tutela segreta*, p. 97.

66 *Translatio sancti Himerii*, 10–11 (p. 265).

him to permit the translation without any opposition.⁶⁷ Everyone bowed down to the ground, requesting the same thing.⁶⁸ Their prayers were met with the manifestation of an earthquake, as had happened with Himerius, but in this case with a different meaning: the terrible tremors were seen as a sign of the saint's opposition to the translation, so they were forced to return home in dejection.⁶⁹

Other examples of this rite are included in the Venetian tradition surrounding the theft of St Nicholas' relics. When the merchants arrived at the tomb, they began to pray ('concede [...]') that they might be worthy of removing his body.⁷⁰ Later, the prayer took on the tone of a request for the saint to change his dwelling and follow them to Venice: 'Venice, your daughter, invites you and longs to see you'.⁷¹ They intended to implore him to leave Myra and move to Italy, where he would be properly welcomed as the patron saint. Bishop Enrico Contarini later repeated the prayer ('dignare tuam Venetiam et Occidentem visitare')⁷² to reinforce the petition. Regarding the Venetian hagiography, a similar plea was also made by the monk Peter to St Stephen for his departure, emphasising the presence in Venice of other saints, such as St Mark.⁷³ The monk, along with the guardian, prayed to the saint during the night, with the aim of obtaining his approval of the removal.⁷⁴ It is clear that the ritual of *evocatio* is part of the Venetian tradition of *furta sacra* since it is also mentioned in the legend of St Isidore of Chios. The thief, Cerbano Cerbani, implored the saint to permit him to enter his tomb ('ad hanc sacram ita tui corporis urnam accedam'),⁷⁵ but not to allow him to touch his sepulchre if this was not his will.⁷⁶

The *Vita beati Mauri* also contains a reference to an action similar to *evocatio*. The Archdeacon Giraldus, having learned of the whereabouts of the relics of the saint and his companions, began to pray and to cry ('se prostravit et suam orationem complevit cum lacrimis non modicis

67 *Vita, translatio et miracula sancti Martini Abbatis*, 6 (p. 837).

68 'Omnes etiam [...], ad terram prostrati, sanctum Martinum ut transferri se permetteret suppliciter implorabant', *Vita, translatio et miracula sancti Martini Abbatis*, 6 (p. 837).

69 *Vita, translatio et miracula sancti Martini Abbatis*, 6 (p. 837).

70 *Historia de translatione monachi anonimi Littorensis*, 10 (p. 260).

71 'Venetia, filia tua, te invitat, te videre desiderat', *Historia de translatione monachi anonimi Littorensis*, 10 (p. 260).

72 *Historia de translatione monachi anonimi Littorensis*, 13 (p. 262).

73 *De translatione sancti prothomartyris Stephani*, p. 102.

74 *De translatione sancti prothomartyris Stephani*, p. 103.

75 *Translatio mirifici martyris Isidori*, V (p. 326).

76 *Translatio mirifici martyris Isidori*, VII (p. 328).

suamque faciem rigando').⁷⁷ After making the custodian drink a great deal, he returned to the relics and cried again, asking God to transfer the bodies. The answer to these prayers came in the form of a heavenly voice ('vocem celsificam').⁷⁸

Einhard's translation of Sts Marcellinus and Peter contains an example of the prayers recited prior to the theft. According to the tale, before the thieves entered the basilica of St Tiburtius they prayed in front of the church's entrance for success.⁷⁹ These examples emphasise and demonstrate how important it was to approach saints beforehand in order to get their permission to depart. The emotional and devotional dimension of the request emerges once more in St Stephen's *translatio*, when monk Peter lay on the floor weeping and praying ('iacens in terra per longum horarum spatium').⁸⁰

Based on these examples, the ritual associated with the opening of saints' tombs and the ancient *evocatio deorum* appear to be similar in many aspects, such as the purpose of the rite, the request for the transfer from one place to another, the requirement of the supernatural helpers' approval of their transfer to a new location, and the promises of better worship. The *topos* of lightness is well attested in both traditions, indicating that the origin of the miraculously small weight ascribed to holy bodies in the Early Middle Ages may be traced back to Antiquity. One example is that of St Januarius' body, which was so light during the procession to Benevento that the bearers could walk remarkably fast. According to the hagiographer, who claimed to be an eyewitness, they reported that it was as though they were not carrying anything ('nichil portantes'),⁸¹ as if they felt no weight ('sine pondere'),⁸² similarly to Livy's description of the transfer of Juno Regina.

The comparison of *evocatio deorum* and *furta sacra* also confirms a phenomenological continuity in the response to requests for supernatural aid. While the statue of Juno Regina assented to the Romans' request to relocate it, as did, according to legend, a number of sacred simulacrums in Antiquity, the saints might also affirm or deny their translation by, for example, causing a brief seism or aiding the relocation procedures. The mere fact that the translation proved possible was generally to be interpreted as a sign of saintly approbation.

77 James of Venosa, *Vita beati Mauri et sociorum eius*, III.4–5 (p. 100).

78 James of Venosa, *Vita beati Mauri et sociorum eius*, IV.5 (p. 100).

79 Einhard, *Translatio sanctorum Marcellini et Petri*, I.5 (p. 44).

80 *De translatione sancti prothomartyris Stephani*, p. 101.

81 *Translatio sanctorum Ianuarii, Festi et Desiderii*, 6 (p. 146).

82 *Translatio sanctorum Ianuarii, Festi et Desiderii*, 6 (p. 146).

7.3. The rituals of translation, the urban context and the relics' authenticity

All that remains is to turn our attention to the ritual of transfer of the relics after the opening of the tomb, which generally includes the journey with the procession (*occurrus*), the entry into the new place of worship (*adventus*), and the depositing of the remains in the church (*depositio*). Most of these rituals have an urban background. The authenticity of the relics is also a theme that tends to emerge strongly at this stage of the narrative.

The procession carrying the relics (*occurrus*) is a concrete and symbolic march with the purpose of delivering the stolen saints to their new abodes. During this phase, several miracles might occur, including those that happened during the procession of St Januarius or the voyages by sea in St Mark's and St Nicholas' stories. The journey was considered a crucial moment of the theft, during which the saints gave proof of their consent to the translation and the authenticity of their remains. Chants, candles, prayers and tears characterised the procession, which ended with the arrival at the gateway to the city. Here the saints were met with rituals designed to prepare them for their official entrance, during which they had to agree to serve as the new patron saints.

An example that could help us comprehend the importance of this ritual phase is included in a version of the *Life* of St Pardus. A comparison between the two *vitae*, one written by the Deacon Radoynus and a presumably earlier version (lacking certain episodes) composed by an anonymous hagiographer, reveals several significant differences, such as the inclusion in the former of various miracles, a more elaborate style, and the description of the rituals performed on arrival in Larino.⁸³ More specifically, in Radoynus' text, the bearers of the relics (*vectores*) were unable to enter the town, probably because the body, according to a very diffuse hagiographic *topos*, had become extremely heavy. Numerous inhabitants immediately prostrated themselves in front of the relics, praying earnestly and begging the saint to accept his new home, enter the city and serve as their protector and tutor ('protectorem et defensorem; [...] gubernatorem'),⁸⁴ until the saint accepted the citizen's pleas and allowed his body to be moved again and placed in the church. The ritual is quite similar to that performed by Arechis II during the translation of St Mercurius' relics after their miraculously discovery

83 Regarding the revision of hagiographic writings, see Gouillet, *Écriture et réécriture hagiographiques*.

84 Radoynus, *Vita sancti Pardi*, 10 (pp. 369–370).

(*inventio*) in a place not far from Benevento: since the cart transporting them had abruptly halted, the prince had to don sackcloth while invoking the soldier saint to enter the town and become one of its patrons.⁸⁵ Both cases recall Ovid's account in the *Fasti* of the arrival of the simulacrum of Cybele in Rome in 204 BC. The ship carrying it is said to have run aground at the mouth of the Tiber, near Ostia, and no effort was made to move it. A Vestal named Claudia Quinta had to intervene and, in a demonstration of her unquestionable virginity, she tied her own belt to the bow of the ship and succeeded in pulling the vessel free with little effort.⁸⁶

The translation of St Magnus' relics contains another useful example. After arriving in Veroli, the remains were discarded by the Saracen Prince Muca, and the inhabitants of Anagni decided to purchase and relocate them to their city. During the procession, not far from Veroli, the bearers suddenly could not proceed, probably because the relics had become inexplicably heavy. All the people present began to pray (*preces*) and promise (*vota*) that should St Magnus consent to enter their city, a new tomb would be constructed for him in Anagni, while they would also repair his sepulchre in Veroli.⁸⁷ The request was accepted by the saint ('Annuit beatus Pontifex')⁸⁸ and the relics were able to enter the town. Another version of the legend contains some additional details: while in the first tale the relics were simply immovable, in the second the body of the saint inexplicably rotated, causing the bearers to tumble to the ground.⁸⁹ Many of them tried in vain to lift the sacred body, but only after making their pledges were they able to carry it without difficulty and proceed towards Anagni.

At the entrance to the town, the relics of the saints were welcomed. An interesting illustration of the rituals and the joy displayed in such circumstances comes from the Beneventan examples. On crossing the threshold (*adventus*), there was typically a public acclamation honouring the saints. This phase signified the acquisition of the new patron saints: from this point forward, they had a new home. The arrival of St Januarius' body was celebrated not only as the return of the townfolks' ancient bishop, but also as a moment of salvation comparable to Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem. The quote included in the legend and that recalls the verses of Psalm 118, which are recited on Easter Sunday to commemorate Jesus' entry into Jerusalem

85 On this ritual, see Papasidero, 'I furta delle reliquie dei ss. Primiano e Firmiano'.

86 Ovid, *Fasti*, IV.295–326 (pp. 210–213).

87 'non solum ibi tumulum extructuros, sed et Berulae etiam illius sepulcrum restauraturos esse', *Translatio Verulam inde Anagniam*, 45 (p. 710).

88 *Translatio Verulam inde Anagniam*, 45 (p. 710).

89 *Translatio Verulam inde Anagniam*, 40 (p. 709).

on a donkey,⁹⁰ is 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord'.⁹¹ A similar reference is found in the *Life* of St Maurus, when the thieves, on their return to Lavello, passed through various places and were blessed by the people ('Beati estis, qui sanctorum martyrum Mauri et sociorum eius corpora vobiscum ducitis').⁹²

The entrance of the saints in Benevento is described as a joyous occasion on which people of all social classes united to welcome the new patron saints. Lights and hymns ('cum lampadibus et ymnis')⁹³ were part of the holy bodies' reception ceremony. A similar case is that of the twelve martyr saints, welcomed at the city wall by numerous people. In this instance, too, the words used to greet them derive from the gospel ('benedicti sancti martyres, qui venerunt in nomine Domini').⁹⁴

Starting in the Early Middle Ages, patronage acquired a prominent role. The cases of Benevento demonstrate the importance given to the necessity for a supernatural protector to defend the city. Even if in many cases the principal patron saints were the local bishops, who could defend (*patrocinium*) the cities as well as they had effectively done during their lifetimes,⁹⁵ the politics of Benevento reveal an effort to acquire relics of saints from southern Italy and the East, such as St Mercurius, an aspect that deeply changes the perspective on patronage and must be tied to the Lombard approach to the cult of saints.

The deposition (*depositio*) is the last rite described by the sources. It is the moment when the relics, after entering the city and being welcomed by the inhabitants, were placed in a church, chapel or crypt to be preserved eternally. The translation of St Januarius is a good example. At the conclusion of the tale, Bishop Orso opened the tomb of Sts Festus and Desiderius, two of his companions, to reunite their remains with those of Januarius. On the tomb's being opened, a pleasant odour came out and all the relics were placed on the same altar. Prince Sico then placed a crown of pure gold ('coronam auro optimo')⁹⁶ on the altar, emphasising the interweaving of political and ecclesiastical powers.

90 Mt 21:9; Mk 11:9; Lk 19:38; Jn 12:13. The liturgies performed in the fourth century in Jerusalem on the Sunday preceding the Easter week are described in Egeria, *Journey to the Holy Land*, 31.1–4 (p. 74).

91 'Benedictus, qui venit in nomine Domini', *Translatio sanctorum Ianuarii, Festi et Desiderii*, 7 (p. 146).

92 James of Venosa, *Vita beati Mauri et sociorum eius*, V.2 (pp. 100–101).

93 *Translatio sanctorum Ianuarii, Festi et Desiderii*, 7 (p. 146).

94 *Translatio Beneventum duodecim fratrum*, 4 (p. 143); Lk 13,35.

95 Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 17.

96 *Translatio sanctorum Ianuarii, Festi et Desiderii*, 9 (p. 150).

The rituals performed in Benevento after the arrival of the stolen relics are among the most relevant in the corpus of sources under consideration. Despite the hagiographical elaboration, the participation and emotional involvement of the town can be linked to the Roman – and Byzantine – rites for the *adventus* of the emperors,⁹⁷ or the ceremonies performed in the Eastern part of the Empire to celebrate the discovery and translation of relics in the presence of the city's authorities, as described in late antique hagiographic sources.⁹⁸ The arrival of the emperor in a city was regarded by the locals as a profound moment of protection and blessing. According to Sabine MacCormack, the imperial advent in its divine meaning could be related to Apollo's divine arrival as described in the third Homeric Hymn.⁹⁹ In fact, the perception of the emperor as a present deity ('*deus praesens*')¹⁰⁰ is one of the most relevant continuities between ancient advents and early medieval arrivals of saints. The *adventus* of Diocletian and Maximian in Milan in 291 could be considered an example of the 'supernatural' connotation ascribed to their visit to the imperial capital.¹⁰¹ Additionally, as previously mentioned, the topic of the emperor's advent and the evangelical episode of Jesus' entrance to Jerusalem began to influence each other, as can be seen from some early Christian sarcophagi – such as that of Junius Bassus – in which the figure of Jesus and the scenes in general are similar to the emperor's *adventus*;¹⁰² somehow, even the donkey that he was riding took on the appearance of a horse.¹⁰³

Occasionally, the last phase of the *translatio* includes the public exhibition of the relics (*ostensio*). When Bishop Liutprand returned to Cremona, he celebrated Mass after displaying the remains of St Himerius ('*beatissimi Hymerii corpus ostendit*').¹⁰⁴ Bishop Oldericus started the construction of a crypt to honour him just a few years later. Another example is included in the *translatio* of St Agatha. Bishop Maurice enshrined her remains in the cathedral following a procession with numerous barefooted people. The precise moment of her deposition was accompanied by the occurrence

97 MacCormack, *Adventus*, pp. 17–89.

98 Cronnier, *Les inventions de reliques*, pp. 239–251.

99 Homer, *Hymns*, III.440–445 (pp. 354–357); MacCormack, *Adventus*, p. 18.

100 MacCormack, *Adventus*, pp. 22–23.

101 MacCormack, *Adventus*, p. 24.

102 MacCormack, *Adventus*, pp. 64–66.

103 MacCormack, *Adventus*, p. 65.

104 *Translatio sancti Himerii*, 17 (p. 266).

of miracles, which the holy body subsequently continued to perform over time, as a sign of its authenticity and efficacy.¹⁰⁵

The thefts of relics, more than other kinds of translations, were full of rites performed to acquire the saints' permission to be transferred from one place to another, thus becoming the patrons of their new communities. The instant of the opening of the tomb was that in which the saints had to be invoked to consent to their being stolen. Moreover, the subsequent phases of translation demonstrate a constant ritual connection with the saints to maintain their approval. The ceremonial steps, including the *occurrus*, the *adventus*, the *ostensio* and the *depositio*, were elaborated to make the power of the saints visible, portraying them as powerful intercessors (*potentia*) who were able to confirm their presence (*praesentia*).¹⁰⁶

As mentioned above, it is important to reflect on the role of urban spaces in these stories. In the brief accounts of translations included in the *passiones*, there are only a few references to the cities, which at times is discerned in contraposition to the mention of the small estates owned by the pious matrons (*praediola*), and which were probably small pieces of land in which the relics were gathered and given a proper resting place. This is the case with St Agnes,¹⁰⁷ St Alexander,¹⁰⁸ Sts Marius, Martha and sons,¹⁰⁹ etc. The locations where the relics were abandoned were typically woods or suburban areas, where the bodies might be more easily consumed by beasts, while the cities – Rome, Catania or Spoleto – which were generally the main locations of the martyrs' passions, do not emerge, but remain in the background.

The context that is revealed from the accounts of theft of relics is quite different. The translation of relics concludes with their arrival in the new community which, in the Italian cases, is generally a new city. If on the one hand this feature might be linked to the spread of Christianity in urban areas, the urban dimension of the phenomenon is unique to Italy and is tied to the increasing social and political significance of cities and urban environments over time. The growing importance of maritime cities, such as Venice, Bari, Genoa, and later Amalfi, as well as the experience of the *comuni* starting in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, confirm that urban

105 On the 'use' of miracles by the hagiographers, see Boesch Gajano, 'La tipologia dei miracoli nell'agiografia altomedievale'; Boesch Gajano, 'Uso e abuso del miracolo nella cultura altomedievale'.

106 Canetti, 'Culti, credenze santità', p. 99.

107 *Passio sanctae Agnetis*, 13 (p. 717).

108 *Passio sancti Alexandri*, 9 (p. 805).

109 *Passio sanctorum Marii, Marthae et filiorum*, 19 (p. 583).

life played a crucial role in the dynamics of the translation of relics. Cities and cults of saints influenced one another, and the rituals described in the sources upon the arrival of relics in the cities are merely an illustration of this aspect.¹¹⁰ The cities are typically described as the location where new saints could be welcomed as patrons. Only a few of the rituals depicted in the tales under consideration took place in monasteries or non-urban settings. In this perspective, the Italian thefts of relics appear profoundly influenced by the urban dimension of religion, wherein civic and ecclesiastical authorities influenced the manner in which saints were venerated.

As highlighted in the section on the visual representation of thefts, cities play an essential role in describing the landscape where the theft occurred or where the relics arrived. In the mosaic cycle of St Clement's chapel in the basilica of St Mark, both Venice and especially Alexandria are represented symbolically by means of certain edifices (Fig. 6). These architectural structures, whose style is clearly influenced by Byzantine art, are a way to summarise the entire city in a few details. In the frescoes of the Anagni crypt, where the body of St Magnus is transferred from Fondi to Veroli and then to Anagni, a similar reference to the urban context emerges. Fondi and Veroli, the most relevant cases for us because of their direct relationship with the theft, are represented as fortified towns, distinguished by the presence of civic walls and, within those, a variety of buildings representing houses and churches, with a particular emphasis on the two powers embedded within them, the civic and the religious (Fig. 1). Both cities are defined by their entrances, which are depicted as brown spaces with no shading. The town of Veroli is also distinguished by the presence of a geographical detail; namely, a rocky elevation pictured in front of the walls, which probably refers to the fact that it stands on a relief of the Ernici mountains, around 600 metres above sea level. The frescoes of Anagni are an excellent illustration of the significance of the *adventus* rituals, one of the most crucial phases of the theft. In the depiction, the entire populace stands at the entrance to the town, awaiting the arrival of the holy body. Rituals of *adventus* are also well illustrated in Venice; for example, in the aforementioned Door of St Alipius, whose lunette depicts the procession with St Mark's body to Venice or, perhaps, the miraculous *inventio* of 1094 (Fig. 8). On the contrary, the location where Cerbano and his soldiers transported St Isidore's body is simply portrayed as a church (Fig. 11).

110 On this topic, see Lätzer-Lasar and Urciuoli (eds), *Urban Religion in Late Antiquity*. More generally, on spaces in Late Antiquity, see Machado, Munnery and Sweetman (eds), *Lived Spaces in Late Antiquity*.

The last relevant topic that needs to be briefly addressed, particularly in relation to the establishment of the new cult after the *adventus*, is that of the authenticity of relics. Indeed, following all the rituals of translation and the placing of relics in the city, their authenticity had to be verified. In some of the sources we have analysed, there are references to the way in which the thieves or others attempted to define whether they were authentic or fake: when St Mark's body, on its return journey, was mistaken by some merchants for an Egyptian mummy, the saint began to perform miracles to confirm its authenticity. The transalpine tradition of *furta sacra* also contains some references to the ordeal that the relics endured to prove their authenticity. In the ninth-century *Historia translationis ad coenobium Altvillarense* written by monk Altmann from the monastery of Hautvilliers, a group of monks were sent to the basilica of Sts Marcellinus and Peter to verify the presence of St Helena's relics,¹¹¹ which had been stolen from Rome in 841 or 842. In a text written by monk Notcher of Hautvilliers at the end of the eleventh century, this evidence was reinforced by another ritual that took place at the monastery, which consisted in the thieves-monks having to enter a recipient filled with extremely hot water to demonstrate their integrity regarding the translation of the relics.¹¹² A proof of the authenticity of relics is also included in Einhard's *translatio*: when the thieves opened the tomb of St Marcellinus, they saw an inscription on a marble table ('*tabulamque marmoream*')¹¹³ set close to the martyr's head that clarified his identity.

In the *miracula* related to the theft of St Nicholas from Myra to Venice there is an analogous case. According to one of them, a small group on its way to Jerusalem stopped in Myra with the aim of confirming whether the saint's body was still there. The locals' assertions regarding the theft and the presence of *tituli* on the arches containing the relics were two indications that the event had actually occurred.¹¹⁴ The *translatio* of St John the Baptist's ashes contains another example more comparable to that of St Helena: legend states that, on reception of the relics, the inhabitants of Genoa planned to return to Myra after visiting Jerusalem in order to verify whether his relics had really been stolen ('*plenam inquirerent veritatem*'),¹¹⁵ seeking confirmation from the monks themselves. It is relevant to note that,

111 On this theft see, Geary, *Furta sacra*, pp. 54–55, 152.

112 AASS, *Augusti*, 3, p. 603, no. 20.

113 Einhard, *Translatio sanctorum Marcellini et Petri*, I.4 (p. 42).

114 *Historia de translatione monachi anonimi Littorensis*, XI (pp. 290–292).

115 Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda translationis beatissimi Johannis Baptistae Genuam*, E (p. 232).

initially, the monks were terrified of them and attempted to flee ('*manus eorum fugere cupientes*').¹¹⁶

On this subject, it could be useful to consider an interesting perspective on worship and authenticity of relics, which gained increasing importance in the eleventh century. In the *De pignoribus sanctorum*, Guibert of Nogent (1055–1124) presented numerous reflections on the cult of relics, including doubts about excessive devotion to them and the possibility that they might be fragmented and transferred to so many locations that it would be difficult to verify their authenticity. In his opinion, the tombs of saints had to be protected from opening and body transfer to avoid the risk of the 'multiplication' of their bodies or losing awareness of where they were.¹¹⁷ His perspective on relics sought to purge the cult of saints of several features that could be attributed to popular devotion rather than theological reasons. In fact, certain aspects of devotion were primarily associated with pilgrimages, processions and religious practices performed by uneducated or illiterate people (*illitterati*) or women (*mulierculae*). Such a perspective evokes, among other things, the criticisms and remark – particularly of Protestant origin – that can be observed with the advent of modernity regarding the authenticity of relics and their veneration.

The final stages of translation thus conclude the rituals conducted to transfer a cult from one location to another. The civic dimension, which is undoubtedly predominant in the *furta* of the peninsula, provides the context and landscape in which the translation unfolds. Once the saints have established control (*patrocinium*) over their new town, they can demonstrate their benevolence and the authenticity of the relics: the time of miracles has begun.

116 Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda translationis beatissimi Johannis Baptistae Genuam*, B (p. 233).

117 Platelle, 'Guibert de Nogent', pp. 117–118.

Conclusions

Thefts of Relics: A Never-Ending Story

Abstract: The final section provides an overview of the phenomenon of *furta sacra* in Italy between Late Antiquity and the Central Middle Ages. It references cases of relic theft in the Late Middle Ages and examines the reasons behind the decline, though not the total disappearance, of the practice and its narratives. Factors contributing to this decline include the growing importance of the cult of the Virgin Mary and the shift in the nature of miraculous objects designated to protect cities.

Keywords: *furta sacra*; thefts of relics; early modern history; Marian cult; Marian images; saints' relics

The sources considered in this volume illustrate certain features of *furta sacra* in the geographical area of Italy, which characterised this multiform environment from Late Antiquity to the Central Middle Ages. In the entire corpus of thefts that we have explored, the distinction between 'history' and 'fiction' is particularly relevant.¹ In general, the presence of *topoi*, which were meant to give a supernatural dimension to the theft of holy remains, does not negate the historicity of the event, but rather highlights the strategy employed by the hagiographers to develop a complex 'hagiographic system' that was ultimately used to celebrate the new patron saint. Indeed, hagiographic texts played a crucial role from Late Antiquity, when the *passiones* contributed to the development of cults and became a key genre in the dissemination of devotion and relics. The 'fertility of the narrative form', to use a phrase by Lucy Grig, emerged and continued to serve as a pillar of 'popular' devotion to saints.²

1 See, for example, the similar topic of the *inventiones*: Cronnier, *Les inventions de reliques*, p. 399.

2 Grig, *Making Martyrs*, p. 104.

A comparison with the cases occurring north of the Alps can help clarify both the differences and continuity between our tales. According to Patrick Geary, in the territories that correspond to present-day France or Germany – as well as England and Ireland – monasteries played a leading role. *Translationes* were composed there, especially between the eighth and tenth centuries, to celebrate the arrival of relics obtained as gifts or stolen from a variety of locations, most notably Rome. Although there were various instances related to different contexts, the phenomenon had a profound monastic character, due in part to the significance of pilgrimage routes and the need to garner religious authority in the form of holy relics in order to protect borders and territories. From this perspective, the Italian context was drastically different. Even if some instances in our corpus took place in monasteries, it is evident that urban environments and their dynamics played a crucial role. The main examples are Venice and Benevento, two extremely distinct towns and contexts. Venice, starting with the translation of St Mark's relics, was one of the most relevant locations in which the *furta sacra* tradition flourished over the years, with thefts characterised by varying political goals. In southern Italy, throughout the eighth and ninth centuries, the princes of Benevento demonstrated a clear political and sacral plan, in which a number of robberies were effected to define the city's leadership role in different places, including the territories of the duchy itself and Naples.

Who the saints were that were stolen over the centuries is a crucial point. Numerous examples, such as St Mark and St Bartholomew, attest to the desire to transfer the relics of apostles so as to emphasise the authority of the places to which they were transferred; namely, Venice and Benevento. At the same time, some thefts were linked to the plan to reclaim the bodies of saints that had previously been seized. This was the case of St Januarius and St Agatha, whose acquisitions from Naples and Constantinople were considered their 'returning home'.

A reflection on the ratio between female and male saints may be useful. Leaving aside the ancient *passiones*, only four cases in our corpus refer to female saints (Sts Agatha, Euprepia, Fausta and Margaret). This lack of female thefts may have a variety of causes: the fact that the relics of apostles and evangelists were considered more valuable; the existence of a significant number of male martyrs; the fact that some holy bodies were those of priests, deacons, bishops and popes; a decline in female saints after the early period of martyrs in favour of clergymen.

At the moment, it is also possible to give some coordinates to the phenomenon of theft and its evolution over the years. The transfer of relics that

occurred in Late Antiquity to preserve the bodies of saints can be regarded as the ‘archaeology of thefts’. There is no historical connection between late antique ‘thefts’ and medieval *furta sacra*, although it is evident how the phenomena might be linked, especially from literary, lexical and mythopoeic perspectives. A similar discourse could hold true for the phenomenological relationship between the *evocatio deorum* and *furta sacra*. The theft of Sts Festus and Desiderius appears to be one of the oldest in Italy – or one of the most representative examples of the connection between medieval theft and late antique burial – even if it was the theft of St Mark that affected a number of stories in this genre. The contexts of sieges and wars, together with inadequate worship, were frequently used to justify translations of relics by force during the Early Middle Ages, as seen by the numerous thefts reported by the sources. The subsequent centuries – namely, the Central Middle Ages – saw the phenomenon and its rhetorical-narrative functions consolidated. During this time, a clear emphasis was placed on the secrecy of action, leading us to believe that the consent of the saints was needed to accomplish their transfer. In these centuries, hence, the saints themselves assumed an increasing role in the theft, having the ability to either aid or oppose the event.

The tales analysed have also shown a highly complex system of rituals. Although they were included in all medieval translations, the *furta sacra* tradition emphasises some of them, such as the rituals performed at the opening of the tomb, the supernatural signs associated with the approval or denial of the transfer of the holy remains, the ceremonies at the arrival of the relics in the city. In addition, the study revealed an elaborate anthropological experience in which sounds, scents, natural elements, animals and emotions occupy a place. All chapters dealt directly or indirectly with the body, the focal point of all interest, playing a key role in the tales, as well as in the visual narrations.

After the period we chose to consider, there are other interesting examples. The twelfth century was characterised by further thefts, such as that of Pope St Stephen (BHL 7847), whose relics were transferred from Rome to the monastery of Santa Maria di Colonna in 1160.³ This tale contains all the traits of the *furta sacra* genre attested beyond the Alps, describing a thief-monk who stole the relics he had been appointed to guard. Another example is that of St Christine of Bolsena (BHL 1760),⁴ whose relics were transferred from Sepino in central Italy to Palermo thanks to the count of Molise, Ugo II (1128–1160), who sent them in secret to the archbishop of the city.⁵

3 *Historia translationis sancti Stephani pontificis et martyris in Apuliam.*

4 *Translatio corporis sanctae Christinae virginis et martyris.*

5 On this theft, see Papasidero, *Translatio sanctitatis*, pp. 34–35, 164.

One of the main poles of Italian *furta sacra*, the city of Venice, continued to steal relics, justifying the acquisition of numerous sacred bodies through robbery during the Fourth Crusade.⁶ In 1204, it welcomed the relics of the Old Testament prophet St Simeon.⁷ Some years later, in 1214 or 1215, according to the *translatio* that chronicled the arrival of the remains of St John the Merciful, another holy body arrived in Venice. It had been stolen from Constantinople by Roboaldo, prior of the Venetian monastery of St Daniel.⁸ The *Translatio sancte Barbare* (BHL 922) relates the 1258 transfer of St Barbara's relics from Constantinople to Venice by Raffaele Basilio, a monk who brought them to the church of St Maria delle Croci.⁹

A few years previously, in 1208, one of the most prominent marine cities in southern Italy, Amalfi, was said to have stolen the relics of the apostle Andrew, which had been transferred from Constantinople by Cardinal Pietro Capuano. A new church was appositely constructed to house them. The *Translatio corporis beati Andreae* (BHL 434) is an additional example of the importance of the Fourth Crusade to the history of *furta sacra*.¹⁰ Thanks to the opening of the Mediterranean Sea to the east in the twelfth century, crusaders were able to transport many holy bodies and relics to their respective kingdoms. As a result of its major role in the Crusades, Italy collected numerous holy relics in a sort of transfer of sacralisation from the East to the West. Enrico Morini referred to *translatio imperii*, an endeavour to transfer the power and authority of the Byzantine Empire along with the saints' corpses.¹¹

Thefts of relics remained at the centre of local dynamics, as evidenced by the case of St Roger of Cannae, whose relics were transferred from Cannae to Barletta by a group of laymen and clerics, together with other precious liturgical objects. This theft occurred in 1276, and we know about it thanks to a letter written on 17 April 1276 by Pope Innocent V and sent to the bishop of Minervino pertaining to Bishop Teobaldo of Cannae's denunciation of the event, and two notarial acts (BHL 7286) composed in 1277 that deal with the restitution of some of the relics.¹²

6 Angold, *The Fourth Crusade*, pp. 219–267.

7 Chiesa, 'Ladri di reliquie a Costantinopoli'. On these thefts, see Papasidero, *Translatio sanctitatis*, pp. 46, 164–165.

8 Pietro Calò, *Translatio sancti Ioannis Alexandrini*.

9 Pietro Calò, *Translatio sancte Barbare*.

10 Severino and D'Amato (eds), 'La *Translatio corporis beati Andreae apostoli de Constantinopoli Amalphim*'; Clavierie, 'Les acteurs du commerce des reliques'; Papasidero, *Translatio sanctitatis*, pp. 65–68.

11 Morini, 'Il levante della santità'.

12 On this theft, see Manfredonia, 'Agiografia latina del Mezzogiorno', p. 49; Rivera Magos, 'Canne, Nazareth, Barletta'; Papasidero, *Translatio sanctitatis*, pp. 154, 167.

The thefts of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were among the most relevant in the history of *furta sacra*, notwithstanding the absence of new hagiographical explanations for the arrival of these relics. In fact, this century exhibited mainly the reuse of previously established narrative methods of the genre, such as the nocturnal entry into the tomb, the complicity of the guardians, and the perils and miracles during the sea voyage. All these elements had been elaborated in many tales considered before, such as the accounts relating to St Mark's relics or those of St Nicholas.

The East was one of the last unexplored and fascinating regions from which relics were brought to the West and Italy. While in the Early Middle Ages most relics came mainly from the peninsula, starting from the year 1000 the East began to serve as a 'reservoir of holiness'. The body of St Nicholas, which is supposed to have been taken by the merchants of Bari and Venice, is a clear example of how this approach was already in use in the eleventh century. At the same time, the renowned case of St Mark in the ninth century allows us to comprehend how the phenomenon was linked to the sea and the need to transport holy remains from distant locations, for instance Alexandria, where Muslims posed a threat.

The thirteenth century probably represented the final peak of the *furta sacra* phenomenon, at least as we know it in the centuries spanning the Early Middle Ages. Subsequently, the phenomenon did not cease but rather declined, with several factors contributing to its dropping off, although the example of St John of Matha mentioned before shows its persistence. The increasing relevance of images to the detriment of relics is one of the first factors that must be considered. According to André Vauchez and other scholars, starting in the eleventh century and especially in those immediately following, images, frescoes and depictions of saints became more diffuse than in previous times, not only in churches but also in private homes.¹³ Moreover, canonisation processes demonstrated the diffusion of miracles performed by saints at a distance; that is, even if the person requesting healing did not visit the church where their relics were enshrined.¹⁴ The combination of these two features must be seen as a mechanism through which relics came to play a less crucial role than in the preceding centuries.

Additionally, during the Late Middle Ages and especially the early modern period, images and sculptures – often because of miracles which caused them to bleed or weep – acquired increasing importance, becoming some

13 The theme of the different functions of relics and images appears as early as Late Antique Christianity. On this subject, see Jensen, 'Icons as Relics, Relics as Icons'.

14 Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, pp. 444–453.

of the principal recipients of devotion. Thus, while relics continued to hold a central role in Catholic devotion, other competing elements with equally miraculous powers emerged.¹⁵

We may assume the increasing significance of Marian devotion in the Later Middle Ages to have been one of the most relevant factors in this process. Unlike the relics of saints, which had to be stolen from the place where they had been buried or venerated for a long time, Marian 'relics' typically consisted of alleged fragments of her clothing or body but above all of her miraculous images. Numerous shrines in the West owe their origin to the miraculous discovery of statues or depictions, which became the main objects of veneration.¹⁶ However, the phenomenon of miraculous statues is not only linked to the cult of the Virgin Mary. The reliquaries that contained the remains of saints, very diffuse from the early modern period, for example in Sicily, are very relevant evidence of this,¹⁷ although there are important high medieval instances, such as the so-called Majesty of St Faith in Conques, a golden reliquary-statue that contained her head.

Simultaneously, the increasing phenomenon of Marian apparitions, which acquired more importance in the early modern period, contributed to the transfer of the miraculous *virtus* from the relics of saints to the devotion to Mary. Stealing a miraculous Marian image, as well as authoring a legend recounting such a story, might be viewed as exceedingly hazardous. While it was not possible to demonstrate whether relics were preserved or stolen, it was different for images. Moreover, focusing on the pictures already worshipped in a location – or those crafted in response to a supernatural occurrence – could be the best way to consolidate the new devotion. Indeed, while the body of a saint could be unique, conversely, any Marian image affected by extraordinary phenomena could become an object of veneration and spark devotional and pilgrimage practices around it.

Finally, starting from the eleventh century but especially during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the canonisation process, which is the procedure whereby the pope declares a deceased person to be a saint, was

15 Sansterre, '“Virtus” des saints, images et reliques'; Sansterre, 'La substitution des images aux reliques'.

16 On this topic, see Sansterre, 'Pouvoir thaumaturgique des statues mariales'; Sansterre, 'Unicité du prototype et individualité de l'image'.

17 Papisidero, *Miracula et beneficia*, pp. 30–40. For information on how relics were kept or made visible in reliquaries in Late Antiquity, see Wiśniewski, *The Beginnings of the Cult of Relics*, pp. 144–158.

established to transfer control over new saints to the papacy.¹⁸ It is possible that this procedure through which new saints were ‘fabricated’ by the Catholic Church could influence the *furta sacra* phenomenon, encouraging communities to focus on new local saints recognised by the pope, rather than resort to stealing relics or fabricating legends.

At the same time, simple theft for personal use remained widespread, for instance, in the case of St Davino, an Armenian pilgrim who died in 1050 and whose relics were enshrined in the church of St Michele al Foro in Lucca. According to the *Acta sancti Davini* (BHL 2114), a priest from the church attempted to remove one of his fingers, a fact that probably occurred in the eleventh or twelfth century.¹⁹ Cases such as these certainly did not cease in the medieval centuries but persisted over time, extending into the present day, although the reasons for theft were often quite different.²⁰

At the conclusion of this volume, it may be important to mention the potential future development of this research. If the phenomenon of theft of relics has been studied in relation to Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, when it played a central role in hagiography and the history of culture, there is a lack of similar attention to the way in which relics – or miraculous images – were transferred without permission in modern history or later, although some research has been conducted.²¹ Moreover, the relationship between stories of theft and their visual representations requires deeper attention in order to reveal how the language of theft was transmitted to visual culture. This work contains some examples of ‘visual thievery’, but a systematic investigation and gathering of sources is required. Based on the results that have emerged until now, it might be important to further develop this topic with the elaboration of a ‘global’ history of *furta sacra* – from a cross-cultural and interdisciplinary perspective – which could consider broader historical and geographical contexts and in which Antiquity and pre-Christianity might be more deeply analysed to better understand relations, influences and, when possible and supported by sources, continuities.²²

18 Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, pp. 33–57.

19 *Acta sancti Davini peregrini Lucae*, 11 (p. 324); Papasidero, *Translatio sanctitatis*, p. 128.

20 See, for example, Della Costa, ‘La folla criminale: Celano (1923)’.

21 See, for example, Harris, *The Stolen Bones of St. John of Matha*.

22 See, for example, Girón-Negrón, ‘*Commo a cuerpo santo*’; Marjanović-Dušanić, ‘Relics, miracles and *furta sacra*’.

Appendix

The following is a list of the narratives of theft examined in this volume, excluding those included in the Passions of martyrs. For each case, the name of the saint, a brief summary of the narrative, the date of the event, and references are provided.

Adam of Guglionesi, abbot. On 3 June 1102, a devout man named Benedetto, prompted by three angelic visions, with the assistance of the archpriest of his church, stole the saint's relics from the church of St Paolo of Petacciato and transported them to Guglionesi. *Historia translationis sancti Adami*, in AASS, *Iunii*, 1, pp. 329–330. BHL 68.

Agatha, martyr. The soldiers Gislibertus and Goselinus, following a divine sign, stole her relics from Constantinople, where they had been since their translation by George Maniakes in 1040. In 1126, after a long journey, they were handed over to the monks Luca and Holdomanus, who brought them to Bishop Maurice in Catania. *Historia translationis corporis sanctae Agathae virginis et martyrs Constantinopoli Catanam*, in AASS, *Februarii*, 1, pp. 642–648. BHL 139.

Appianus, monk. Perhaps around the tenth century, some inhabitants from Pavia travelled to Comacchio to purchase salt, and while there stole the relics of the saint. However, on returning to their ship, they found themselves unable to sail. Subsequently, the ship was miraculously towed to the church of St Maurus, where the sacred relics were placed. *Vita sancti Apiani monachi*, in AASS, *Martii*, 1, pp. 318–321: 10 (p. 320). BHL 619.

Bartholomew, apostle and martyr. In 838, the Prince of Benevento, Sicard, seized the relics of the saint, which had been miraculously recovered by the monk Theodore after having been desecrated and dispersed by the Saracens. After a brief pause in Salerno, he deposited them in the cathedral of Benevento. Martinus, *Translatio sancti Bartholomei*, in Borgia, *Memorie istoriche della pontificia città di Benevento*, 1, pp. 333–348; *Translatio corporis sancti Bartholomei apostoli in Gallias*, in Anastasius Bibliothecarius, *Sermo Theodori Studitae de sancto Bartholomeo apostolo*, pp. 3–8; *Translatio corporis sancti Bartholomei apostoli Beneventum et miracula*, in Anastasius Bibliothecarius, *Sermo Theodori Studitae de sancto Bartholomeo apostolo*, pp. 10–17. *Sermo Theodori Studitae de sancto Bartholomeo apostolo*, in Anastasius Bibliothecarius, *Sermo Theodori Studitae de sancto Bartholomeo apostolo*, pp. 23–39; BHL 1006; 1008–1011.

Felinus and Gratian, martyrs. In 963, Amitto, Count of Stazzona and Seprio, a general in the army of Emperor Otto I, acquired from the Bishop of Perugia the transfer of the relics of the saints, which were then transported to Arona. *Translatio sanctorum Gratiniani et Felini Aronam*, in AASS, *Iunii*, 1, pp. 23–24, no. 5. BHL 3634.

Festus and Desiderius, martyrs. Around the fifth century, Ciphius, a noble ‘pagan’ senator from Benevento, dispatched a trusted individual to steal the relics of the two martyrs in the hope of curing his wife’s infertility. The messenger succeeded in obtaining the relics and delivering them to the senator, who then arranged for them to be placed in a suitable location. Subsequently, he commissioned the construction of a basilica. *Translatio sanctorum Festi et Desiderii*, in AASS, *Septembris*, 6, pp. 869–870. BHL 4118, 4123.

Januarius, bishop and martyr. In 831, during the siege of Naples, the Prince of Benevento, Sico, orchestrated the theft of the saint’s relics. *Translatio sanctorum Ianuarii, Festi et Desiderii*, in Iadanza, *Principi, vescovi e reliquie a Benevento*, pp. 137–166; also in AASS, *Septembris*, 6, pp. 888–890. BHL 4140.

John of Spoleto, bishop. Around 980 (or 975), Gunderada, abbess of the monastery of St Euphemia in Spoleto, clandestinely removed the relics of the saint with the help of some nuns and a priest. *Translatio corporis et miracula sancti Ioannis episcopi Spoletini*, in AASS, *Septembris*, 6, pp. 30–31: 1 (p. 30). BHL 4437.

John the Baptist. In 1098 or 1099, merchants from Genoa seized the ashes of the saint from Myra and transported them to their city. Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda translationis beatissimi Johannis Baptistae Genuam*, in *Recueil des historiens des Croisades. Historiens occidentaux*, 5, Paris 1895, pp. 229–235. BHL 4308.

Juvenal, martyr; Cassius, bishop; Fausta. At the beginning of the tenth century, during the siege of Narni, Margrave Adalbert II of Tuscany appropriated the relics of the saints and deposited them in the basilica of St Frediano in Lucca. Subsequently, Narni obtained the return of the relics of St Juvenal. *Translatio Iuvenalis et Cassii episcoporum Narniensium Lucam*, in D’Angelo, *Narni e i suoi santi*, pp. 238–248. BHL 4615–4615a.

Himerius, bishop. Around 965, the Bishop of Cremona, Liutprand, appealed to the Bishop of Amelia to send him the relics of the saint; in return, he

would intercede with Otto I to pardon certain actions of the prelate of Amelia. Under cover of darkness, the relics were clandestinely taken and subsequently transported to Cremona. *Translatio sancti Himerii*, in D'Angelo and Lucci, *Amelia e i suoi santi*, pp. 264–268. BHL 3957.

Isidore of Chios, martyr. Between 1124 and 1125, during a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and following various political and diplomatic challenges, Cerbano Cerbani, a figure of prominence at the court of Constantinople, stole the relics of the saint in Chios. With the assistance of the Venetian fleet, these were then transported to Venice, where they were housed in a chapel in the basilica of St Mark. Cerbano Cerbani, *Translatio mirifici martyris Isidori a Chio insula in civitatem Venetam*, in *Recueil des historiens des Croisades*, 5, pp. 321–334.

Leucius, martyr (?). Around the sixth century, after the devastation of Brindisi during the Greek-Gothic war, some religious individuals from Trani appropriated the abandoned relics of the saint. *De translationibus sancti Leucii*, in AASS, *Ianuarii*, 1, pp. 672–673; nos 1–3. BHL 4898.

Magnus, bishop. In the late ninth century, the tribune Plato relocated the saint's relics from Fondi, where they had been neglected, to the church of St Andrew in Veroli. Towards the latter part of the eleventh century, during the Saracen incursions, the relics were redeemed by the residents of Anagni. *Translatio Verulam inde Anagniam*, in AASS, *Augusti*, 3, pp. 708–710. BHL 5175.

Mark, evangelist. In 828, two Venetian merchants, Bonus from Malamocco and Rusticus from Torcello, colluding with the custodians of the tomb, successfully extracted the saint's relics and transported them to Venice. Initially housed in the Doge's Palace, they were later enshrined in the basilica constructed for this very purpose. *Translatio sancti Marci evangelistae Venetias*, in *Hagiographica*, 17 (2010), pp. 112–129. BHL 5283–5284.

Mark, Bishop of Atina. Around the middle of the eleventh century, a nun secretly stole a fragment of the saint's body but was forced to return it because she was seized with fear and had difficulty moving. *Translatio sancti Marci episcopi Atinensis*, in AASS, *Aprilis*, 3, pp. 563–566. BHL 5299.

Margaret of Antioch of Pisidia and Euprepia, martyrs. In 908, following Antioch of Pisidia's defeat by Prince Andronicus, the prior of the church of

Sts Margaret and Euprepia, Augustin, clandestinely carried the relics with him to Pavia. However, during the journey to Italy, he fell ill and passed away at the monastery of St Pietro in Valle Perlata, near Montefiascone, where the relics remained housed. *Translatio sanctae Margaritae in Tusciam*, in AASS, *Iulii*, 5, pp. 41–44. BHL 5311.

Martin of Mount Massico, hermit. Between 1011 and 1045, Hilarius, the abbot of St Vincenzo al Volturno, entrusted the tomb of the saint to a monk who attempted to pilfer the relics. However, a powerful earthquake thwarted the theft, prompting the abbot to promptly punish the custodian. *Vita, translatio et miracula sancti Martini abbatis*, in AASS, *Octobris*, 10, pp. 835–840: 9 (p. 838). BHL 5604.

Maurus, martyr, and companions. Towards the middle of the eleventh century, the bodies of the saint and his companions were stolen by the Archdeacon Giralduus, who transferred them from Gallipoli to Lavello. James of Venosa, *Vita beati Mauri et sociorum eius*, in Colomba, ‘La “Vita sancti Mauri” di Giacomo da Venosa’, pp. 98–103. BHL 5791f.

Metrone, penitent. Around 960, the body of the saint, previously kept in the church of St Vitalis on the outskirts of Verona, was stolen by the citizens of a neighbouring village, possibly due to neglect on the part of the inhabitants of the city. *De translatione sancti Metronis*, in RATHERIUS VERONENSIS, *Opera omnia*, ed. Reid, pp. 11–29. BHL 5942.

Nicholas, bishop.

1) In 1087, some merchants from Bari stole the saint’s relics from the church where they were housed in Myra and transported them to Bari. John Archdeacon, *Translatio sancti Nicolai*, in Silvestro, *Santi, reliquie e sacri furti*, pp. 92–102; Nicephorus, *Translatio sancti Nicolai*, in Silvestro, *Santi, reliquie e sacri furti*, pp. 113–124. BHL 6190–6199, 6179–6189.

2) Around 1100, Venetian merchants took the relics of the saint, along with those of his uncle, also named Nicholas, and of St Theodore. On their return to Venice, the relics were enshrined in the monastery of St Nicolò al Lido. *Historia de translatione monachi anonimi Littorensis*, in *Recueil des historiens des Croisades*, 5, pp. 253–292. BHL 6200.

Primianus and Firmianus, martyrs; Pardus, bishop. In 842, seizing the opportunity presented by the abandonment of Larino, some residents of Lesina absconded with the relics of Sts Primianus and Firmianus. On

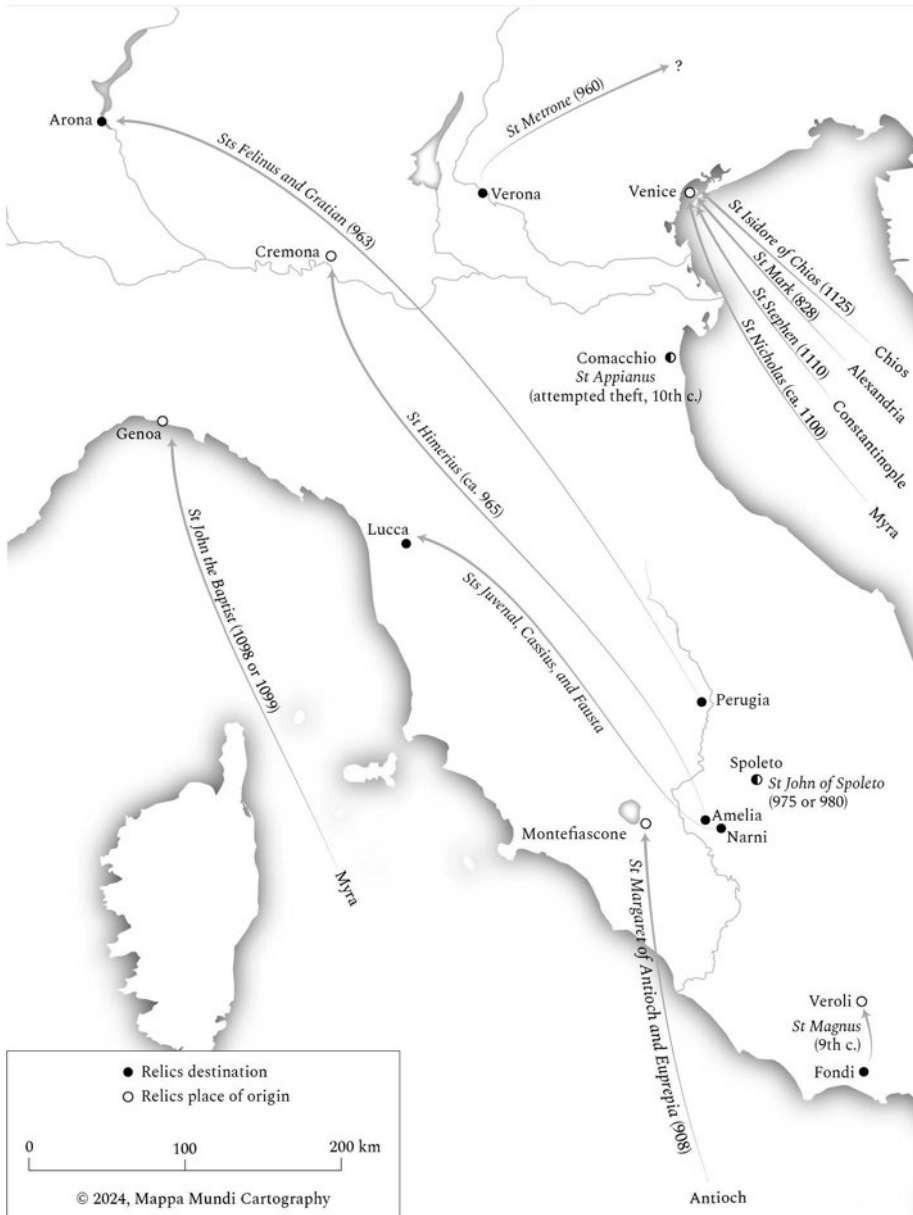
learning of the theft, armed inhabitants of Larino journeyed to Lucera, once inhabited by the people of Lesina before Constant II's assault, and retrieved the relics of St Pardus, bringing them back with them. *Vita sancti Pardi episcopi et confessoris auctore anonimo*, in Pollidori, *Vita et antiqua monimenta sancti Pardi episcopi*, pp. 1–5; Radoynus, *Vita sancti Pardi*, in AASS, *Maii*, 6, pp. 369–370. BHL 6465.

Stephan, protomartyr. In 1110, with the assistance of the custodian, the Venetian monk Peter purloined the relics of the saint from Constantinople. On his return to Venice, the relics were enshrined in the monastery of St George. *De translatione sancti prothomartyris Stephani de Constantinopoli in Venetias*, in Corner, *Ecclesiae Venetae antiquis monumentis*, 8, pp. 96–110. BHL 7891–7893.

Trofimena, martyr. The relics of the saint were moved from Minori to Amalfi to safeguard them from the territorial ambitions of Sicard, Prince of Benevento. However, during the siege of Amalfi in 838, the relics were taken and relocated to the Cathedral of Benevento. *Historia inventionis ac translationis et miracula sanctae Trophimenaе*, in AASS, *Iulii*, 2, pp. 233–240. BHL 8316–8318.

Twelve brothers, martyrs. In 760, the Duke of Benevento, Arechis II, forcibly removed the relics of the saints, which were kept in four different locations: Potenza, Venosa, *Velinianum* and *Sentianum*. He then relocated them to the sanctuary of St Sophia in Benevento. *Translatio duodecim martyrum*, in MGH, *Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum*, pp. 574–576; *Sermo in vigiliis sanctorum duodecim Fratrum*, in Giovardi, *Acta passionis et translationis sanctorum martyrum Mercurii ac XII fratrum*, pp. 69–71, also in AASS, *Septembris*, 1, p. 137, no. 36; *Translatio corporum Beneventum*, in AASS, *Septembris*, 1, pp. 142–144. BHL 2300–2302.

Maps of the Thefts of Relics



Map 1 Thefts of relics in central and northern Italy, © Mappamundi Cartography.



Map 2 Thefts of relics in southern Italy, © Mappamundi Cartography.

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Index

- Abachum, saint 58–59
Achilleus, saint 58, 63–64, 69
Acutius, saint 71, 81–82
Adalbert, archpriest 163
Adalbert, Margrave of Tuscany 97–98, 155, 157, 207, 254
Adam, saint 16, 96, 108, 132–134, 148, 155, 157, 163, 188, 192, 200, 202–204, 206–207, 218, 227–228, 253
Adauctus, saint 66
Adrumeto 79
Adventor, saint 55
Agapitus, saint 64
Agatha, saint 31, 45, 51, 65, 105, 108, 142–146, 148, 159, 163–165, 180–184, 194, 199–201, 209, 213, 219, 226–227, 239, 246, 253
Agnes, saint 52–53, 159, 218, 240
Aio, Archbishop of Benevento and Siponto 83, 85
Albert, Bishop of Anagni 166
Alexander, pope 60
Alexander, saint 94, 213, 240
Alexander III, pope 131
Alexander Severus, emperor 62–63
Alexandria 33, 77, 87–92, 125, 128, 131, 136, 141, 152, 156, 162, 170, 172, 197, 215–216, 241, 249
Alexios I Komnenos, emperor 137
Alfano I, Archbishop of Salerno 80
Amalfi 39, 84–86, 152, 160, 198, 229, 240, 248, 257
Ambrose, saint 31, 52, 58, 198
Amelia 111–112, 149, 161, 191, 194, 208, 233, 254–255
Amitto, Count of Stazzona and Seprio 113–114, 161, 254
Ammianus Marcellinus 209
‘Amru ibn al-‘Āṣ 91
Anagni 16, 46, 99–100, 166–168, 216, 218–219, 237, 241, 255
Anastasia, saint 60, 105
Anastasius Bibliothecarius 83, 85, 253
Anatolia, devout woman 59
Anatolia, saint 69
Andrake, port 122
Andrew, saint 39, 100, 248
Andrew of Fleury 20
Andronicus, prince 104, 255
Angerius, monk 146
Anthimus, saint 65–66
Anthony, saint 216
Antoninus Pius, emperor 67
Apollo 232, 239
Apollonia, devout woman 60
Appia, *via* 53, 56, 62, 64
Appianus, saint 37, 101–103, 118–119, 160, 253
Apulia 77, 94–95, 99, 141
Aquilaia 51, 69–70, 89–91, 168–169
Ardeatina, *via* 63
Arechis II, Duke and Prince of Benevento 31, 68, 76, 78–81, 84, 93, 119–120, 155, 157, 200, 208, 230, 233, 236, 257
Aristotle 209
Arnobius the Younger 56, 62
Arnolf II, Archbishop of Milan 114
Arnolf of Soissons 101
Arnolf of Velate, Bishop of Cremona 112
Arona 46, 113–114, 161, 254
Assizes of Ariano 25
Athanasius, Patriarch of Alexandria 216
Atina 46, 120, 161, 194, 255
Audifax, saint 58–59
Augustin, prior 104, 148, 150, 156, 161, 200, 217, 256
Augustine of Hippo 24, 33, 73, 101, 189, 198, 224
Aurelia, *via* 56, 63
Aurelian, emperor 60
Autun 151
Barbara, saint 46, 146, 193, 248
Bari 16, 46, 106, 108, 121–132, 134, 137, 149, 155–157, 163, 180, 197, 203, 208, 218, 240, 249, 256
Barletta 248
Bartholomew, saint 46, 76, 83–86, 141, 149, 155, 196, 228, 246, 253
Bellini, Gentile 173, 175
Benedict, devout man 96, 132–133, 148, 157, 163, 227–228
Benedict, saint 20, 26, 44
Benedict IV, pope 98
Benedict XIV, pope 34
Benevento 16, 31, 38–39, 46, 54, 68, 70–74, 76, 78–87, 93, 95, 98, 106, 108–109, 121, 128, 133, 146, 149, 152, 155, 160, 188, 190, 193–196, 204–205, 222, 226, 228–229, 235, 237–239, 246, 253–254, 257
Berengar I, King of Italy 104
Bergamo 60
Bernard, monk 91
Bernard of Angers 30
Berta, abbess 116
Bethlehem 20
Bobbio 32
Bohemond of Taranto 125
Bologna 185
Bonus from Malamocco, merchant 88, 148, 255
Bonusfilius, soldier 205
Bordeaux 31
Brennus 209
Brescia 110, 213

- Brindisi 46, 77, 92, 104, 154, 255
 Bucoli 87–88, 156
- Caecilia, saint 62
 Caesarius, Bishop of Arles 24
 Calabria 92, 144
 Calcidius 223
 Calepodius, saint 62–63
 Callistus, cemetery of 53, 62, 64
 Callistus, pope 20, 41, 57, 62–63
 Calogerus, saint 59
 Calvin, John 32–33
 Campania 76, 99, 118
 Canosa 77
 Capuano, Pietro, cardinal 248
 Caracalla, emperor 67
 Carthage 31, 233
 Cassius, saint 76, 97, 254
 Carinola 119
 Catania 16, 31, 46, 51–52, 65, 108, 142–146,
 180–184, 194, 213, 219, 226, 240, 253
 Celsus, saint 198
 Cerbano Cerbani 140–142, 177, 179, 199, 234,
 241, 255
 Charlemagne 31, 78, 93
 Charles the Bald 31
 Christine of Bolsena, saint 247
 Chrysogonus, saint 60
 Cicero 193, 216, 224
 Civitavecchia 53
 Claudia, saint 88, 156, 215, 237
 Claudius II, emperor 58–59
 Columbanus, saint 32
 Comacchio 46, 101–103, 253
 Compostela 30
 Conques 30, 155–156, 205, 224, 250
 Constantine, emperor 20, 23, 52, 90, 151
 Constantinople 14, 89, 108, 136–140, 142–145,
 163, 181, 183, 199, 246, 248, 253, 255, 257
 Constans II, emperor 31, 94–95
 Contarini, Domenico, doge 169
 Contarini, Enrico, Bishop of Castello 126–127,
 234
 Corinth 144, 183–184, 219–220
 Cornelia, *via* 57–58
 Cornelius, pope 53, 56
 Corronero, Juan, Bishop of Catania 180
 Cremona 42, 46, 111–112, 148–149, 161, 191, 193,
 208, 214, 233, 239, 254–255
 Crescentianus, saint 63
 Crusades 14, 38, 43, 126, 129, 131, 138, 140,
 145–146, 248
 Cybele 206, 225, 237
 Cyphius, senator 71–74, 190, 205–206
 Cyprus 20
 Cyriacus, saint 57, 63
- Damasus I, pope 52
 Davino, saint 251
- Decius, emperor 47–48, 53, 59, 65, 69, 99, 113,
 139, 143
 Degna, saint 103
 Desiderius, saint 46, 69–73, 81–82, 190,
 196–197, 199, 205–206, 238, 247, 254
 Deusdona, deacon 24, 36, 43, 157
 Diocletian, emperor 23, 30, 48, 56, 58–59,
 66–67, 71, 79, 82, 220, 239
 Diodorus Siculus 216
 Domitian, emperor 52, 63
 Domitilla, catacombs of 64
 Dora, river 55
- Efrem, monk 122
 Egypt 87, 90–91, 149, 152, 195
 Einhard 19, 24, 36, 38, 59, 93, 151, 164, 207, 218,
 221, 230, 235, 242
 Elia, abbot of St Benedict 123, 125
 Elias of Enna, saint 92
 Elijah, Patriarch of *Aquileia Nova* 90
 Elijah, prophet 210
 Emerentiana, saint 53, 159
 Epimachus, saint 66, 153, 191, 202
 Eugenia, saint 54
 Eumenia, saint 103
 Euphemia of Calcedon, saint 116, 118, 220
 Euplus, saint 51–52, 65
 Euprepia, saint 103–105, 148, 150, 156, 161, 200,
 217, 246, 255–256
 Eusebius, Patriarch of Antioch (?) 104
 Eusebius, saint 53–54
 Eusebius, saint martyred with Hippolytus 64
 Eusebius of Caesarea 23, 50
 Eutyches, saint 71, 81–82
 Eventius, saint 60
- Fabian, saint 53
 Faith, saint 30, 105, 155, 205, 250
 Fausta, saint 76, 97, 246, 254
 Febronia, saint 85
 Felicissimus, saint 64
 Felicola, saint 63
 Felinus, saint 16, 107, 113, 156, 254
 Felix, cleric 24, 43
 Felix, pope 64
 Felix, saint with Adauctus 66
 Felix, saint with Nabor 31, 58, 202
 Ferrari, Filippo 33, 214
 Festus, saint 46, 69–74, 81–82, 190, 196–197,
 199, 205–206, 238, 247, 254
 Firmianus, saint 44, 76, 94–96, 99, 125, 132,
 154, 160, 217, 256
 Florian, saint 185
 Fortunatus, saint 90
 Frederick II, emperor 145
 Furius Camillus 232
- Gabinus, priest 59
 Gallienus, emperor 48, 57

- Gallipoli 46, 134–135, 256
 Gargano, mount 79
 Gariperga, abbess 79
 Gaudentius, Bishop of Brescia 51, 213
 Gebhard, Bishop of Constance 42
 Genoa 46, 129–132, 208, 240, 242, 254
 Geraldus, soldier 205
 Gervasus, saint 65, 198
 Giovanni da Modena 185
 Giraldus, archdeacon 135–136, 163, 234, 256
 Gislebertus, soldier 144–145, 148, 164, 181–184, 194, 199–200, 209, 219–220, 226–227
 Gisulf II, Duke of Benevento 78
 Gordianus, saint 66, 153, 191, 202
 Goselinus, soldier 144–145, 148, 164, 182–184, 199, 209, 219, 227, 253
 Gradenigo, Giovanni, doge 177
 Gradenigo, Giovanni, Patriarch of Grado 137
 Grado 89–91, 137, 173
 Grata, devout woman 60, 213
 Gratian, saint 16, 107, 113–114, 156, 254
 Gregory, Bishop of Tours 24, 32, 116, 139
 Gregory, priest 53–54
 Gregory I, pope 22, 42, 77, 97, 118, 192, 224
 Grimoald III, Prince of Benevento 81
 Grimoald IV, Prince of Benevento 81, 84
 Guglionesi 16, 46, 96, 108, 132–134, 155, 188, 192, 206–207, 227, 253
 Gunderada, abbess 42, 116–117, 148, 154, 156, 161, 191, 197, 254
- Hārūn ar-Rashīd, caliph 121
 Helena, saint 20, 44, 90, 105, 242
 Henry VI, emperor 145
 Heraclius, emperor 90
 Hermagoras, saint 90–91
 Hilarion, saint 20
 Hilarius of Matera, abbot 119, 256
 Himerius, saint 16, 42, 107–108, 111–114, 118, 142, 148, 150, 161, 191, 194, 208–209, 214, 233–234, 239, 254–255
 Hippolytus, saint 64
 Honoré de Sainte-Marie 33–34
- Ilaria, saint 103, 140–141
 Innocent II, pope 131
 Innocent IV, pope 131
 Innocent V, pope 248
 Irene, devout woman 56
 Isidore of Chios, saint 45–46, 108, 116, 139, 156, 177–178, 201, 234, 255
- James, saint 30, 141
 James Interciscus, saint 185
 James of Venosa, monk 134–135, 163, 256
 Januarius, saint 31, 45–46, 54, 70–73, 76, 81–82, 84, 125, 146, 160, 189, 195–196, 204, 206, 217, 226–228, 235–238, 246, 254
 Jerome 20, 22, 99
- Jesus 32, 51, 61–62, 83, 136, 142, 190, 199, 210, 213, 237, 239
 John, archdeacon 122, 124, 129, 156, 162, 164, 203, 210, 217–218, 256
 John, saint 116
 John II, pope 23
 John II Komnenos, emperor 140, 144
 John II “Sincello”, Bishop of Trani 77
 John XV, pope 42
 John of Matha, saint 34, 249
 John of Montecassino, monk 115–116, 118, 148, 161
 John of Spoleto, saint 16, 42, 45, 107, 114–116, 118, 148, 154, 156, 161, 190–191, 197, 218, 254
 John, priest 57, 63, 67
 John the Baptist, saint 45, 107, 120, 129–131, 152, 190, 208, 242, 254
 John the Deacon 70, 91
 John the Merciful, saint 46, 248
 Julian ‘the Apostate’, emperor 48, 66
 Juno 225, 232–233, 235
 Juvenal of Narni, saint 16, 45, 76, 96–97, 151, 155, 157, 200, 207, 209, 217, 221, 254
- Kyiv 122
- Lambertini, Prospero, *see* Benedict XIV
 Lanfredo, abbot 114
 Larino 16, 46, 93–96, 125, 168–169, 217, 236, 256–257
 Laurence, saint 84, 130–131
Laus Pompeia 58, 202
 Lavello 46, 134–135, 204, 206, 238, 256
 Latium 99, 120
 Leo II, Bishop of Atina 120
 Leo IV, pope 100
 Leo V, emperor 91
 Leo of Ostia 157, 230
 Leonard, saint 139
 Lesina 16, 46, 75, 93–96, 132, 256–257
 Leucius, saint 75–77, 92, 154, 255
 Lewinna, saint 105
 Liutprand, Bishop of Cremona 42, 111–112, 148–149, 233, 239, 254
 Lucca 46, 76, 97–98, 151, 155, 222, 251, 254
 Lucera 46, 93–95, 217, 257
 Lucina, devout woman 53, 55–57, 60, 63, 67, 154, 214, 225–226
 Lupus Protospatharius 122
- Maastricht 194
 Maccabees 49
 Macrobius 223, 231, 233
 Magi 199
 Magnus, saint 16, 99–101, 154, 166–167, 172, 214, 216, 218, 237, 241, 255
 Maianus, saint 156
 Maniakes, George 143–144, 253
 Mantua 90, 110

- Marcellinus, saint 19–20, 24, 34, 36, 44, 57, 93,
 157, 194, 209, 218, 226, 235, 242
 Marcellus, pope 53, 57, 63
 Marcianus, saint 82, 139
 Marcus Aurelius, emperor 67
 Margaret of Antioch of Pisidia, saint 16,
 103–105, 148, 150, 156, 161, 200, 217, 246,
 255–256
 Marius, saint 58–59, 63, 240
 Mark, Bishop of Aeca 80
 Mark, Bishop of Atina 120, 161, 194, 255
 Mark, saint 16, 19, 33–34, 37, 45–46, 76, 85,
 87–93, 103, 106, 113, 125, 127, 129–130, 132,
 136–137, 140–141, 148–149, 152, 156, 160, 162,
 164, 168–179, 197, 199, 201, 208, 211, 215–216,
 218–219, 228, 234, 236, 241–242, 246–247,
 249, 255
 Martha, saint 58, 63, 240
 Martin, Bishop of Tours 31, 70
 Martin, hermit of Mount Massico 118–120,
 149–150, 161, 189, 194, 208, 228, 233, 256
 Martin, monk 83, 253
 Martin V, pope 114
 Martinianus, saint 56, 214
 Mārūta, Bishop of Maypherkat 83
 Mary Magdalene, saint 61, 105
 Maurice, Bishop of Catania 144–145, 181, 183,
 239, 253
 Maurus, saint 63, 102, 134–135, 197, 200, 211,
 238, 256
 Maximian, emperor 48, 59, 67, 239
 Melfi 143
 Mercurius, saint 31, 81, 236, 238
 Messina 144–145, 181, 183
 Metrone, saint 16, 45, 107–110, 150, 256
 Michael Attaleiates 143
 Michael Psellos 143
 Michiel, Domenico, doge 140, 142, 177, 179
 Milan 31, 51, 58, 114, 202, 239
 Minori 46, 85–86, 109, 160, 194, 198, 228–229,
 257
 Montecassino 44, 79, 115–116, 118, 122, 161
 Montefiascone 46, 104–105, 256
 Muslims 88, 91–92, 125, 128–129, 141, 143, 149,
 156, 173, 211, 249
 Myra 108, 120–132, 134, 142, 156, 162, 191, 197,
 203, 208, 234, 242, 254, 256
 Myrope, devout woman 139–141

 Nabor, saint 31, 58, 202
 Naples 70, 72, 81–82, 84–86, 204, 246, 254
 Narni 16, 46, 76, 96–98, 108, 151, 155, 221, 254
 Nazarius, saint 198
 Nereus, saint 58
 Nero, emperor 47
 Nicephorus, monk 122–125, 157, 162, 179, 197,
 203–204, 256
 Nicholas, saint 16, 34, 37, 39, 45–46, 92, 103,
 108, 120–132, 137–138, 141, 149–150, 152,
 155–156, 162–164, 173, 179–181, 191, 197, 199,
 203–204, 206, 208, 217–218, 234, 236, 242,
 249, 256
 Nicomedes, priest 63
 Novatian 53
 Numerian, emperor 134

 Octavilla, devout woman 59
 Octavius, saint 55
 Oldericus, Bishop of Cremona 112, 239
 Ops, god 231
 Ordelaaffo Falier, doge 137, 169
 Orderic Vitalis 122, 143
 Oriculus, saint 37
 Orosius, priest 53–54
 Orso, Bishop of Benevento 72–73, 83–84, 196,
 238
 Ostiense, *via* 66
 Otto I, emperor 37, 111, 113, 115, 254–255
 Otto II, emperor 113, 115
 Ovid 237

 Palermo 247
 Palestine 20, 90, 210
 Pancratius, saint 59
 Pandolf, Bishop of Anagni 166
 Pandolf I Ironhead, Count of Capua 117
 Papia, saint 63
 Pardus, saint 44, 76, 94–95, 125, 155, 160,
 168–169, 217, 236, 256–257
 Parthenius, saint 59
 Particiaco, Giustiniano, doge 90
 Paul, saint 56, 58, 136, 210
 Paul the Deacon 89, 101
 Paulinus I, Patriarch of Aquileia 90
 Paulinus of Nola 214
 Perugia 46, 113–114, 156, 254
 Petacciato 132, 207, 253
 Peter, saint 20, 22, 56, 143
 Peter, saint together with Marcellinus 34, 36,
 44, 57, 93, 194, 218, 226, 235, 242
 Peter, Bishop of Salerno 166
 Peter, monk 137, 150, 234–235, 257
 Peter I, Bishop of Amalfi 85, 193, 229
 Peter the Deacon 119
 Petronilla, saint 63
 Pliny the Elder 231
 Pliny the Younger 48
 Plutarch 232–233
 Pontianus, saint 67
 Poppo, Patriarch of Aquileia 168
 Potenza 79, 257
 Primianus, saint 44, 76, 94–96, 99, 125, 132,
 154, 160, 217, 256
 Processus, saint 56, 214
 Proculus, saint 71, 81–82
 Protasius, saint 65, 198

 Radelchis I, Prince of Benevento 85
 Ratherius, Bishop of Verona 108–110, 150, 164,
 256

- Rebiba, Giandomenico, Bishop of Catania 180
 Redento, Bishop of Trani 99
 Regiswind, saint 105
 Rialto 90, 128
 Roffredo I, Bishop of Benevento 86
 Roger I, Count of Sicily 145
 Roger II, Count of Sicily 25, 125, 145
 Roger of Cannae, saint 248
 Rome 26, 34, 36, 41–42, 44, 46, 48–49, 51,
 53–54, 56–58, 60–61, 65, 98, 100–101, 104,
 113, 123, 134, 138, 146, 151, 195, 212, 224–225,
 231–232, 237, 240, 242, 246–247
 Rometta 143
 Rufina, saint 57
 Rusticus from Torcello, merchant 88, 148, 156,
 170, 173, 175–176, 201, 255

 Salaria Vetus, *via* 65
 Salaria Nova, *via* 57
 Salerno 80–81, 83, 166, 253
 Saracens 76, 83–85, 94–95, 100, 113, 117, 121,
 143, 154–155, 166–167, 228, 237, 253, 255
 Saturninus, saint 63
 Savina, devout woman 58, 154
 Scipione di Guido 180, 182–184, 200–201, 220
 Sebastian, saint 53, 56, 62, 225
 Seconda, saint 57
 Seneca 209
Sentianum 79–80, 257
 Sergius, saint 31
 Sergius III, pope 98, 104
 Servius 231–232
 Severina, Aurelian's wife 60
 Sicard, Bishop of Cremona 112
 Sicard, Prince of Benevento 76, 81–83, 85–86,
 93, 109, 155, 157, 217, 229, 253, 257
 Sicily 84–85, 143, 145–146, 250
 Sico, Prince of Benevento 72, 76, 81–82, 84, 93,
 149, 155, 157, 189, 195, 204, 238
 Silvo, Domenico, doge 127
 Simeon, saint 248
 Sisinnius, saint 63
 Sixtus, saint 64
 Smyrna 144, 183, 227
 Solutor, saint 55
 Sossius, saint 71, 81–82
 Speciosa, saint 105
 Spoleto 16, 42, 45–46, 51, 67, 78, 107, 114–118,
 148, 154, 161, 190–191, 210, 218, 240, 254
 Stauracius, monk 88, 149, 172–173
 Stephen, pope 41, 64–65, 247
 Stephen, saint 45–46, 108, 123, 136–139, 150,
 163, 190, 234
 Susanna, saint 59, 220
 Sutri 101, 104
 Syracuse 143, 145

 Tellurius, saint 94
 Teobaldo of Canina, Bishop of Minervino 248
 Theodor, saint 126, 141, 163, 172, 256
 Theodor, Bishop of Metz 37
 Theodora, empress 144
 Theodore, monk 83, 228, 253
 Theodore, priest 88, 149
 Theodore the Studita 83
 Theodoret 214
 Theodoric, King of the Ostrogoths 23
 Theodoric II 23
 Theodosius, emperor 23
 Theodulus, saint 60
 Tiburtius, saint 36, 44, 226, 235
 Tora 69
 Totila, King of the Ostrogoths 115, 117
 Trajan, emperor 48, 63, 212
 Trani 46, 77–78, 99, 155, 255
 Trofimina, saint 45–46, 76, 85–87, 98, 109,
 151–152, 193–194, 198–200, 217, 220–221,
 228–229, 257
 Trogus 209
 Turin 51, 55
 Twelve brothers, saints 46, 52, 68, 76, 79, 84,
 94, 154–155, 157, 188, 194, 200, 230, 238, 257

 Ugo II, Count of Sepino 247
 Urban, saint 62
 Urban II, pope 125–126
 Urban V, pope 105
 Ursula, saint 105
 Ursus, Archbishop of Bari 121, 125
 Ursus, Bishop of Olivolo-Castello 171

 Valerian, emperor 48, 57, 64–65
 Valerius Flaccus 231
 Varro 231
 Veii 232
Velinianum 79, 257
 Venantius Fortunatus 70
 Venice 16, 37, 45–46, 75, 87–93, 106, 108, 121,
 124, 126–132, 136–142, 145–146, 149, 160,
 162–164, 168, 170–175, 177–178, 190, 201, 208,
 215, 234, 240–242, 246, 248–249, 255–257
 Verdun 41
 Veroli 46, 99–101, 166–167, 218–219, 237, 241,
 255
 Verona 46, 107, 109–110, 256
 Vicenza 69
 Victor, saint 58, 202
 Victricius of Rouen 213
 Virgil 232
 Vincent, saint 33, 224
 Vittoria, saint 69

 William of Malmesbury 144

With the emergence of the cult of saints, their remains assumed a central role, becoming sources of miraculous events and healings. According to the accounts of their martyrdom, the bodies were initially removed immediately after death to protect them from destruction by the elements or animals. In the centuries that followed, particularly after the cessation of persecution, the possession of saints' relics came to signify prestige for a church, monastery, or city. The phenomenon of relic theft (*furta sacra*) – attested throughout the whole medieval Europe – is therefore closely linked to the need to document and legitimise such thefts, thereby establishing the right of a specific religious or urban community to claim possession of a saint's remains. Justifications, legitimations, ordeals and supernatural interventions are intricately woven into the narratives of hagiographers across the centuries. This book adopts an interdisciplinary approach to reconstruct the cultural history of relic theft within the specific context of Italy, from Late Antiquity through to the Central Middle Ages.

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