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WHAT'S BUBBLING IN THE POT? THE ENEMY'S TORMENT

*Es vus errant Tabur de Canaloine,
un Sarazin, que Dampnesdeus confunde!
Gros out le cors, si out l'eschine curbe,
Langes les denz, si est veluz cum urse.
Ne portet arme fors le bec e les ungles.
Veit Guiëlin, si li est coruz sure,
Baie la gule si li quidad tranglutre,
Tut ensement cume meüre pome.
E cil le fiert de l'espiet en la loigne,
Je l'eüst mort quant sa hanste li fruisse¹.*

Long fangs, sharp claws and excessive hirsutism: these are some of the traits that characterize the stigmatization of the enemy in Old French *chansons de geste*. Perfectly corresponding to such a prototype is the figure of Tabur, the Saracen against which the hero William of Orange strenuously fights in the *Chanson de Guillaume*, a literary work dating back to the first half of the twelfth century loosely inspired by the historical figure of William I of Toulouse (750 ca – 812).

By depicting the enemy, stigmatizing their diversity as a monstrous and terrifying being, Christian authors at the same time celebrate the valour of the heroes capable of annihilating such an adversary: defenceless paladins without blemish and without fear, facing bestialized and monstrous characters.

1 *La chanson de Guillaume*, ed. J. Wathélet-Willem, Paris, Les belles lettres, 1975, v. 3170-3200. See also M. Janet, "Les scènes de cannibalisme aux abords d'Antioche dans les récits de la première croisade. Des chroniques à la chanson de croisade", *Histoire et Roman, Bien dire et bien apprendre*, 22, 2004, p. 179-191; Kemal Al-Din, *Extraits de la chronique d'Alep*, ed. *Recueil des historiens des Croisades. Historiens orientaux*, Paris, t. 1, 1872, p. 583; J. Tattersall, "Anthropophagi and Eaters of Raw Flesh in French Literature of the Crusade Period: Myth, Tradition and Reality", *Medium Aevum*, 57, 1988, p. 240-253.

In the symbolic representation of the other, anthropophagy acts as a divide between barbarism and civilization, between humanity and bestiality. According to Christian authors, a composite horde of abnormal anthropomorphic figures, craving human flesh, populate the extreme boundaries of the world. Monstrous creatures, feral and ferocious races, virulent and voracious hybrids thrive on the edges of civilization. Apocalyptic people, Cynocephali, giants and werewolves are just some of the deformed cannibals imaginatively evoked by literary testimonies, included in medieval bestiaries, reappearing in translations and compendia of ancient works, outlined in glosses, analysed in the texts of theologians, philosophers and apologists, represented in *mappae mundi*, remembered in *mirabilia*² and in periegetic writings, described in travel journals and in erudite compilations.

Cannibalism “needs to be understood as a topic within the dialogue between Europe and the others”, Peter Hulme summarized, referring to the period following the discovery of America³. But “the other”, the different, the cannibal does not always come from distant territories. The devourer of men conceals himself among the distinguished members of the Christian community and does not always correspond to the prototype of the “bad” as crystallised in collective imagination⁴.

2 See C. Kappler, *Monstres, démons et merveilles à la fin du Moyen âge*, Paris, Payot, 1980; J. Le Goff, *L'imaginaire médiéval*, Paris, Gallimard, 1985.

3 P. Hulme, “Introduction: the cannibal scene”, *Cannibalism and the Colonial World*, ed. F. Barker, P. Hulme, M. Iversen, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 4. According to the “uncertain impact” theory, the impact of different cultures always implies a bidirectional influence, even when a more aggressive culture seems to overpower the less dominant one. The stereotypes relating to alterity would then be incorporated in Western imagination after being filtered through the cultural mediation of the communities to which they were attributed (J. H. Elliott, *The Old World and the New, 1492-1650*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1970).

4 A positive claim of anthropophagy appears, for instance, in a fifteenth-century version of the verse romance *Richard Coeur de Lyon* (dating back to the fourteenth century). The work presents an unusual Lionheart whose power and untamed courage stand out not only for his ability in battle, but above all for his anthropophagous inclinations that push him to feast on the bodies of Saracens corpses and then use cannibalism as an intimidating weapon against his enemies. These episodes in the romance have long been debated, starting with the analysis of the scholars Geraldine Heng and Alan Ambrisco. As Heather Blurton's accurate study showed in 2007, the cannibalistic narration in this case is functional to the building of the English identity. See H. Blurton, *Cannibalism in High Medieval English Literature*, New York-Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, 2007, p. 121-131; A. Ambrisco, “Cannibalism and cultural encounters in Richard Coeur de Lion”, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 29, 3, 1999, p. 501-528; G. Heng,

Even the “good” eat, and lavishly.

Milites Christi, knights, kings, young maidens, citizens, sick people, warriors and even children are promptly transformed into ruthless devourers of human flesh⁵.

This essay is devoted to them, our local cannibals⁶. Not only had there been reports of incidents of cannibalism in Europe, but in some circumstances a clear and open condemnation of such practices

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- Empire of Magic. Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2003; G. Heng, “The Romance of England: *Richard Coeur de Lyon*, Saracens, Jews, and the Politics of Race and Nation”, *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. J. J. Cohen, New York, St. Martin’s Press, 2000, p. 135-171; N. McDonald, “Eating People and the Alimentary Logic of Richard Cœur de Lion”, *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England*, ed. N. McDonald, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2004, p. 124-150.
- 5 Up to about fifteen years ago, cannibalism in the Middle Ages was a research field scarcely explored, to the point that there were no summary monographs on this subject. For some contributions dating back to the last century, see: P. Bonassie, “Consommation d’aliments immondes et cannibalisme de survie dans l’Occident du haut Moyen Âge”, *Annales ESC*, 44-45, 1989, p. 1035-1056; A. Pagden, “Cannibalism and contagion: on the importance of anthropophagy in pre-industrial Europe”, *Quaderni Storici*, 50, 1982, p. 533-550; E. W. Muir, “The Cannibals of Renaissance Italy”, *Syracuse Scholar*, 5, 1984, p. 5-14; S. Bertelli, *Il corpo del re. Sacralità del potere nell’Europa medievale moderna*, Firenze, Ponte alle Grazie, 1990, p. 219-223; R. Villeneuve, *Histoire du cannibalisme. De l’anthropophagie rituelle au sadisme sexuel*, Rosières-en-Haye, Camion, 2016 (first published 1973); M. Camille, “The corpse in the garden: mumia in medieval herbal illustrations”, *Micrologus*, 7, 1999, p. 297-318; Tattersall, “Anthropophagi and Eaters of Raw Flesh”; Ambrisco, “Cannibalism and cultural encounters”; P. Camporesi, *La casa dell’eternità*, Milan, Garzanti, 1987; P. Camporesi, *Il pane selvaggio*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1980; P. Camporesi, *Il sugo della vita: simbolismo e magia del sangue*, Milan, Mondadori, 1988 (first published 1984).
- 6 The study of cannibalism in the Middle Ages has increased considerably since the early years of the twenty-first century. The one listed hereafter is not a comprehensive bibliography, as it mentions only recent contributions supporting the arguments of the present essay: H. Blurton, *Cannibalism in High Medieval English Literature*; M. L. Price, *Consuming Passions. The Uses of Cannibalism in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, New York-London, Routledge, 2003; A. A. Montanari, *Cannibales. Histoire de l’anthropophagie en Occident*, Paris, Arkhê, 2008; A. A. Montanari, *Il ‘fiero pasto’. Antropofagie medievali*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2015; L. Noble, *Medicinal Cannibalism in Early Modern English, Literature and Culture*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011; R. Sugg, *Mummies, Cannibals and Vampires: the History of Corpse Medicine from the Renaissance to the Victorians*, New York-London, Routledge, 2011; V. Vandenberg, *De chair et de sang. Images et pratiques du cannibalisme de l’Antiquité au Moyen âge*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2014; McDonald, “Eating People”; G. Heng, *Empire of Magic*; Janet, “Les scènes de cannibalisme”; G. Mandalà, “Antropofagia nella Sicilia medievale: un tema culturale tra cronaca e rappresentazione”, *Bullettino dell’Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medioevo*, 119, 2017, p. 1-108. On the Classical era, see A. A. Nagy, *Qui a peur du cannibale? Récits antiques d’anthropophages. Aux frontières de l’humanité*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2009.

was missing. On a literary level, anthropophagy was even used as an effective self-representation trope, thanks to the overturning of a deep-seated taboo.

Cannibalistic themes, therefore, were widely exploited in political lexicon. The following pages trace a path aimed at exploring cannibalistic rituals and representations that played a fundamental role in defining alterity on the one hand, and in building the identity of a community on the other. We will focus on the examination of the evidence related to Italian urban areas, given the high concentration of ritual cannibalism testimonies found in the chronicles of the cities of the centre and north of the peninsula from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century⁷.

ITALIAN-STYLE DEVOURING

Sicily has been renowned since ancient times for being a land of man eating Cyclops, a belief that was later transferred to the Arab-Islamic West⁸. But this Italian island is not just a land of mythical devouring giants. In the eleventh century, the Benedictine monk Geoffrey Malaterra, commissioned by Roger I of Altavilla to pass on the history of the Norman conquest of Sicily, gives an account of cannibalism practised by Saracens⁹. He narrates the death of Serlone

7 On the testimonies of cannibalism in violence rituals in Italian cities and on issues related to anthropophagy in the Middle Ages see Montanari, *Il 'fiero pasto'*, p. 55-79; Montanari, *Cannibales*; A. A. Montanari, "Parole et stratégies de communication aux limites de l'humain", *L'homme comme animal politique et parlant dans le contexte politique italien au Moyen Âge*, ed. G. Briguglia, S. Gentili, I. Rosier-Catach, Rome, École française de Rome, forthcoming 2019; A. A. Montanari, "Dalla corona al piatto: l'attitudine antropofaga del tiranno trecentesco", *Tiranni e tirannide nel Trecento italiano*, ed. A. Zorzi and J.-C. Maire-Vigueur, Rome, Viella, 2013, p. 205-231; A. A. Montanari, "'Sempre fu che pesci maggiori mangiano li minori': divorazioni bestiali tra rituale e metafora", *La lotta politica nell'Italia medievale*, Rome, Istituto Storico per il Medioevo, 2010, p. 75-84; A. A. Montanari, "Mangiare il nemico. Pratiche e discorsi di antropofagia nelle città italiane del tardo Medioevo", *Buletino dell'Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medioevo*, 111, 2009, p. 255-274; Bertelli, *Il corpo del re*, p. 219-223.

8 See Mandalà, "Antropofagia".

9 Geoffrey Malaterra, *De rebus gestis Rogerii Calabriae et Siciliae comitis et Roberti Guiscardi ducis fratris eius*, ed. E. Pontieri, in *Rerum italicarum scriptores*, Bologna, Zanichelli, t. 5/1, 1925-1928, p. 54.

II of Altavilla, nephew of Ruggero, represented as a mythical and chivalrous hero in epic tones that echo the genre of the *chanson de geste*. This occurred in 1072 following a Muslim ambush, when the Norman was near Cerami to defend his border territories. The Altavilla, taken by surprise, was overwhelmed by the enemy who, stronger in number, mortally pierced him and then devoured his heart, to assimilate the invaluable courage of the dead. Serlone's head was placed on a stake and paraded through the city's squares, while those of the other corpses were sent as a tribute to the king of Africa, the emir zīrita Tamīm b al-Mu'izz (1062-1108). Only two of the men of the Norman entourage succeeded in saving themselves, passing unnoticed under a pile of tortured bodies.

As often happens, we do not have elements that can confirm the cannibalistic episode. Likewise, it is difficult to evaluate the possible intentions of the aggressors: truthful or not, the commentary on the will to assimilate the heroic virtues of Serlone through the cannibalistic act is certainly beneficial to the heroic celebration of the character.

In truth, as explained by Giuseppe Madalà, from a religious point of view Islam condemns anthropophagy as well as any invasive practice on the human body, based on the Qur'an (5, 3) and the sayings of the Prophet (*hadith*). Among the legal sources, the scholar explains, the agreement is not unambiguous but most of the testimonies call for the death penalty, and the burning of the body of those who practiced cannibalism (the implementation of the norm is attested even during famines, like the one that struck Baghdad in 334/945-956, or Egypt in 597/1201). There is no lack of discordant voices: in the case of necessity some Arab jurists allow the use of anthropophagy when the strategy used to find human flesh does not involve murder.

Even if in the eleventh century Ibn Ḥazm prohibits the consumption of human flesh, according to the Shafi'iti jurists it is legitimate when it comes from bodies of apostates, of infidels in war against Muslims, of criminals, of adulterers or finally of brigands. However, in such cases, lawyers recommend conforming to a moderate consumption of the macabre food, to be eaten exclusively raw¹⁰.

10 Madalà, "Antropofagia", p. 4-5.

But, as we said, Christians also boast their own anthropophagi¹¹. The Italian peninsula turns more than once into the theatre of gruesome events: among the practices of corpse destruction that were typical of urban uprisings, late medieval Italian chronicles report several episodes of cannibalism that are related not so much to the numerous testimonies of nutritional anthropophagy of that period, but rather to the use of aggressive practices and violation of body integrity, common in the late Middle Ages¹². The greatest concentration of testimonies concerning the territories of the northern centre of the peninsula takes place from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century.

The first of a long series of episodes of ritual murders is set in Sicily. We are in Messina, in 1168: the people rise in defence of the fourteen-year-old king William II.

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- 11 During the pilgrimage for the conquest of the Holy Land which is usually called “First Crusade” (but that no one at that time would have defined in this way), episodes of anthropophagy are documented in Ma’arrat al-Nu’man and in Antioch. On chronicle and literary testimonies of cannibalistic episodes reported during the First Crusade, see Janet, “Les scènes de cannibalisme”; Tattersall, “Anthropophagi and Eaters of Raw Flesh”; H. Blurton, *Cannibalism in High Medieval English Literature*; V. Vandenberg, “‘Fames facta est ut homo hominem comederet’: l’Occident médiéval face au cannibalisme de survie (v^e-xi^e siècle)”, *Revue belge de philologie et d’histoire*, 86, 2, 2008, p. 1-45; L. A. M. Sumberg, “The ‘Tafurs’ and the First Crusade”, *Medieval Studies*, 21, 1959, p. 224-246. For the primary sources of these episodes, see Fulcher of Chartres, *Historia Hierosolymitana*, ed. *Recueil des historiens des Croisades. Historiens occidentaux*, Paris, t. 3, 1866, p. 352; Raymond of Aguilers, *Historia Francorum*, ed. *Recueil des historiens des Croisades. Historiens occidentaux*, Paris, t. 3, 1866, p. 271; *Epistulae et chartae ad historiam primi belli sacri spectantes*, ed. H. Hagenmeyer, New York, Olms, 1973 (reprint 1901), p. 170; Raoul of Caen, *Gesta Tancredi in expeditione Hierosolymitana*, ed. *Recueil des historiens des Croisades. Historiens occidentaux*, Paris, t. 3, 1866, p. 675; Robert the Monk, *Historia Iberosolimitana*, ed. *Recueil des historiens des Croisades. Historiens occidentaux*, Paris, t. 3, 1866, p. 850; Baldric of Dol, *Historia Jerosolimitana*, ed. *Recueil des historiens des Croisades. Historiens occidentaux*, Paris, t. 4, 1879, p. 86.
- 12 See Bertelli, *Il corpo del re*, p. 219-223; A. Zorzi, “Le esecuzioni delle condanne a morte a Firenze nel tardo Medioevo tra repressione penale e cerimoniale pubblico”, *Simbolo e realtà della vita urbana nel tardo Medioevo*, Viterbo, Vecchiarelli, 1989, p. 153-253; A. Zorzi, “Rituali di violenza, cerimoniali penali, rappresentazioni della giustizia nelle città italiane centro-settentrionali (secoli XIII-XV)”, *Le forme della propaganda politica nel Due e Trecento*, ed. P. Cammarosano, Rome, École française de Rome, 1994, p. 398-425; A. Zorzi, *L’amministrazione della giustizia penale nella repubblica fiorentina. Aspetti e problemi*, Florence, Olschki, 1988. On the judicial use of violence, see the essays collected in the volume *Pratiques sociales et politiques judiciaires dans les villes de l’Occident à la fin du Moyen Âge*, ed. J. Chiffolleau, C. Gauvard and A. Zorzi, Rome, École française de Rome, 2007, and C. Gauvard, *Violence et ordre public au Moyen Âge*, Paris, Picard, 2005.

Oddone Quarrel, canon of Chartres, favourite and compatriot of Stefano of Perche, who was the chancellor placed in office by the reigning Margaret of Navarre, unleashed the fury of the people of Messina by imposing heavy taxes. Quarrel, placed backwards on a donkey, dragged through the streets of the city, beaten and insulted, exhales his last breath while some insurgents pierce his skull with a knife, giving vent to their “implacable hatred” by licking “the blood attached to the iron¹³”.

Another violent aggression, reported in 1313 by Albertino Mussato in *Ecerinis*, a tragedy written to narrate the life, the deeds and the tragic death of Ezzelino III da Romano (1194-1259), blurs the line between historical memory and legend.

Mussato, describing the extermination of Ezzelino's family in Marca Trevigiana, tells of profaned corpses, girls burned alive under the eyes of their own fathers and slain infants: a child is slaughtered by beating his head until the brains spurt out, another young nephew of Ezzelino is murdered by a man armed with a sword who places his head on a long pole while another man bites into his liver¹⁴.

In 1305, there was an episode connected to the suspected murder of John I, the last Marquis of Montferrat descendant of the House of Aleramici, only male heir of William VII of Montferrat. The episode is narrated in the *De Gestis Civium Astensium* by Guglielmo Ventura who, although coeval to the story, was not a direct witness to the fact. The text narrates how Giovanni I of Aleramici, after the surrender of the city of Asti in 1303, fell seriously ill in January 1305. A few days later he died heirless, after having entrusted the management of his land to the *comune* of Pavia. His personal physician, Maestro Emanuele of Vercelli, was charged with his sudden death. The accusation, according to Guglielmo, was unfounded. Yet, as soon as the funeral rites were

13 U. Falcando, *Il libro del regno di Sicilia*, Cosenza, Pellegrini, 1990, p. 135. See G. M. Cantarella, *Principi e corti. L'Europa del XII secolo*, Turin, Einaudi, 1997, p. 29-33; G. M. Cantarella, *La Sicilia e i Normanni. Le fonti del mito*, Bologna, Pàtron, 1988, p. 49. A similar cannibalistic lynching occurred in Constantinople in 1185, according to the *Estoire de Éracle Empereur et la Conquete de la Terre d'Outremer*, translation of a *continuatio* of the *Historia* by William of Tyre, the Andronikos I Komnenos was torn apart during a bloody dethronement ritual and his flesh devoured to the last shred (*Recueil des historiens des Croisades. Historiens occidentaux*, Paris, t. 2, 1859, p. 21); see also Giovanni Boccaccio, *De casibus virorum illustrium*, ed. P. G. Ricci and V. Zaccaria, Milan, Mondadori, 1983, IX: 9, p. 793-798.

14 Albertino Mussato, *Ecerinide*, ed. L. Padrin, Bologna, Zanichelli, 1900, v. 560-564, p. 61-62.

performed, the Ministers of the deceased Marquis murdered Emanuele of Vercelli without a trial, stabbing him to death with numerous strokes, and many among them ate his flesh¹⁵.

Six years later, in Brescia, an anthropophagous meal, eaten in a different way and with a different purpose, is reported.

The year was 1311 and Henry VII of Luxembourg, after crossing the Alps at the head of his army, was besieging the rebel city of Brescia. According to the *Varignana Chronicle* of the *Corpus Chronicorum Bononiensium*, the Brescians defended themselves bravely by roasting and devouring their slew enemies. The imperial soldiers were not far behind: when they captured Tebaldo Brusato, the core of the resistance, they wrapped him in a cowhide and dragged him around the city walls, then they beheaded and quartered him, and exposed his remains at the four corners of the city. The besieged, in revenge for the outrage to the noble Brusato, captured a nephew of the Emperor, who was “roasted and eaten by the Bresciani¹⁶”.

Let us now return to Sicily, with a story told in Michele da Piazza’s chronicle. We are in Geraci, the year is 1337. The city was disputed between the Ventimiglia and Chiaromonte families. Following a new dispute with the Palizzi, allies of the Chiaromonte and supported by the new sovereign Pietro II, Francesco Ventimiglia had been branded as traitor and besieged in Geraci. When Francesco died, murdered or perhaps killed in an accident while attempting to escape, the inhabitants of Geraci sheared his fingers, gauged his eyes out, pulled his teeth off by hitting them with a stone and cut his beard off with the flesh. His body was then cut into pieces and, the chronicler adds, some “ate his liver¹⁷”.

In 1343, in Florence a revolt broke out against Walter of Brienne, duke of Athens and lord of the city. This episode of anthropophagy is described in the chronicle by Giovanni Villani, a contemporary of

15 Guglielmo Ventura, *De gestis civium Astensium et plurium aliorum (1260-1325)*, ed. C. Combetti, Torino, 1848, col. 747-748 (l. D1-6). Unfortunately, only the late editions of the *De gestis civium Astensium*, with numerous interpolations, are available now, and none of those written earlier than the sixteenth century; the analysis that follows refers to the edition of the *Monumenta historiae patriae*, taken from the two copies of the chronicle held in the state archives of Turin.

16 *Corpus Chronicorum Bononiensium (Cronaca B-Varignana)*, ed. A. Sorbelli, in *Rerum Italicarum scriptores*, Bologna, t. 18/1b, 1938, p. 320.

17 Michele da Piazza, *Cronaca 1336-1361*, ed. A. Giuffrida, Palermo-São Paulo, Renzo Mazzone Editore-ILA Palma, 1980, p. 59.

the narrated events, and in the one by Marchionne di Coppo Stefani, who lived a generation later and was in part inspired by the work of his predecessor. Useful information can also be found in the so-called “Pistoia’s Stories”¹⁸.

On July 26, 1343, the insurgents barricaded Brienne in his palace, forcing his followers to flee. To appease the fury of the rebels, the duke handed them over Guglielmo di Assisi, a public administrator, and his son. The two unfortunate men were killed on the spot and dismembered “into small pieces”. Some insurgents brandished pikes with shreds of their spoils, while others, more daring, devoured their flesh with “fury”¹⁹.

A similar event occurred in 1368 in Montepulciano. Giacomo del Pecora, tyrant of the city, the only despot remaining after the expulsion of his brother Niccolò, barricaded himself inside the city under siege. On February 4, the besiegers penetrated the city with the support of the people of Montepulciano and captured Giacomo. The chronicler Donato di Neri narrates that the following day the people of Montepulciano freed the tyrant to kill him: the insurgents “cut him to pieces and ate his limbs”²⁰.

In 1385, the insurrection against Niccolò II d’Este was not as successful: on September 3, 1385, the people of Ferrara, exasperated by the heavy taxation, revolted against Tommaso da Tortona, who was responsible for the tax policy. This episode of anthropophagy is mentioned in the *Chronicon Estense* and in the *Chronicon Regiense*. Both texts tell that the Marquis resolved to exchange his salvation for the life of his vicar. Tommaso, beaten with whips and sticks, hit with blades, wounded with hooks, stoned and cut with axes, was dragged from the square to the stake on which the rioters had burned the records of duties and taxes. There, they extracted his liver and heart to devour them. Other remains were hung on pikes and sticks and paraded through the city. Some of the gruesome trophies were exposed in plain sight at the port

18 Giovanni Villani, *Nuova cronica*, ed. G. Porta, Parma, Fondazione Pietro Bembo-Guanda, 1991, p. 291-342; Marchionne di Coppo Stefani, *Cronaca fiorentina*, ed. N. Rodolico, in *Rerum Italicarum scriptores*, Città di Castello, Coi tipi dell’editore S. Lapi, t. 30/1, 1913, p. 192-209; *Storie pistoresi*, ed. S. Adrasto Barbi, in *Rerum Italicarum scriptores*, Città di Castello, t. 11/5, 1903, p. 175-192. One of the first to be interested in this episode of anthropophagy was Edward Muir (“The Cannibals of Renaissance Italy”).

19 Villani, *Nuova cronica*, p. 339. See Marchionne di Coppo Stefani, *Cronaca fiorentina*, p. 209.

20 *Cronaca senese di Donato di Neri e di suo figlio Neri*, ed. A. Lisini and F. Iacometti, in *Rerum Italicarum scriptores*, Bologna, t. 15/6b, 1936, p. 569-685, at p. 627.

as a warning. In the end, the little that remained of the body was set on fire together with books and documents²¹.

Almost a century passes before there is another account of an episode of anthropophagy, for which it is necessary to move to Milan in the year 1476. This is the murder of Gian Galeazzo Maria Sforza, stabbed by Giovanni Andrea Lampugnani and his accomplices while he was going to Saint Stephen mass.

The attacker did not have a better fate: Lampugnani stumbled while trying to run despite his lameness, fell to the ground and was killed by the duke's coachman. His body was immediately subjected to execration, dragged to his house and hung out from the window by one foot, and later dragged again through the city until the following day. The chronicle of Gabriele Fontana adds that some citizens bit up his heart, liver and hand²².

In Forlì, in 1488, the bodies of the conspirators who murdered Girolamo Riario, lord of Imola and Forlì, were also butchered. Leone Cobelli, a direct witness who sided with the lords of Forlì, provides a detailed narration of the incident. The Countess Caterina Sforza, once she regained control of the city, applied strong measures of justice against the persecutors of her late husband. The father of the Orsi brothers, heads of the conspiracy, was captured and killed in place of his fugitive sons: tied to a board with his head left outside, he was hung on the tail of a horse and dragged three times around the square. His corpse was then quartered, and his entrails scattered on the ground.

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- 21 *Chronicon Estense*, ed. L. A. Muratori, in *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, Milan, t. 15, 1929, coll. 297-548, at col. 510 b-c; Sagacius et Petrus de Gazata, *Chronicon Regiense*, ed. L. A. Muratori, in *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, Milan, t. 18, 1931, col. 5-98, at col. 91. *The Chronicon Estense* and the *Chronicon Regiense* are the only two sources to report the act of anthropophagy, but useful and interesting information on the episode is also found in other testimonies: *Corpus Chronicorum Bononiensium*, p. 374; Conforto da Costoza, *Frammenti di storia vicentina*, ed. C. Steiner, in *Rerum Italicarum scriptores*, Città di Castello, t. 13/1, p. 32-33; G. Gatari e B. Gatari, *Cronaca carrarese*, ed. A. Medin and G. Tolomei, in *Rerum Italicarum scriptores*, Bologna, t. 17/1, 1931, p. 237. See J. E. Law, "Popular unrest in Ferrara in 1385", *The Renaissance in Ferrara and Its European Horizons*, ed. J. Salmons and W. Moretti, Cardiff-Ravenna, University of Wales Press-Edizioni del Girasole, 1984, p. 41-60.
- 22 Gabriele Fontana, *De vita et obitu Galeatii Mariae Sfortiae Vicecomitis Mediolani ducis Quinti*, Milan, 1477. On the popular unrest see F. M. Vaglianti, "Anatomia di una congiura. Sulle tracce dell'assassino del duca Galeazzo Maria Sforza tra storia e scienza", *Atti dell'Istituto Lombardo. Accademia di scienze e di lettere di Milano*, 136, 2, 2002, p. 237-273; B. Bellotti, *Storia di una congiura*, Milan, Dall'Oglio, 1950.

Cobelli says that a soldier raged on the mutilated corpse and extracted the heart to bite it²³.

New episodes are reported at the beginning of the sixteenth century.

In Perugia, a fratricidal conspiracy passed into history as “the red wedding” of July 14, 1500. The massacre is narrated by Pompeo Pellini, born in Perugia in 1523 and supporter of the Baglioni family.

In view of the family gathering for the marriage of Astorre Baglioni with Lavinia Colonna, Carlo di Oddo Baglioni conceived, together with his brother-in-law Girolamo della Penna, the atrocious plot to exterminate all the members of his family by killing Guido and Ridolfo Baglioni together with all their children. The conspirators invaded the palace after the festivities. Filippo di Braccio together with various followers was assigned to the wedding alcove, where he killed Astorre still lying on the bridal bed. Filippo di Braccio then extracted the heart of the deceased from his chest to bite it fiercely and then left his naked body in the middle of the street. Giampaolo Baglioni, who had managed to escape and to obtain external help, later overwhelmed the rebels and regained control of the city government²⁴.

Pellini reports a second event occurring in the same year in Acquasparta, near Todi, in which the same Giampaolo who had escaped the massacre of his family was involved. The episode is described in an even more exhaustive way in a contemporary chronicle attributed to Francesco Maturanzio and in the *Historia de Altobello*, an anonymous composition written in verses in the early sixteenth century and handed down in a sixteenth-century incunabulum preserved in the Colombina library in Seville²⁵. On July 16, 1500, an army under the orders of Vitellozzo Vitelli, Giampaolo Baglioni, Giulio and Paolo Orsini supported by

23 Leone Cobelli, *Cronache Forlivesi dalla fondazione della città all'anno 1489*, ed. G. Carducci and E. Frati, Bologna, Regia tipografia, 1874, p. 338.

24 Pompeo Pellini, *Della Historia di Perugia*, ed. L. Faina, Perugia, Deputazione di storia patria per l'Umbria, 1970, p. 121-135.

25 Francesco Maturanzio, “Cronaca della città di Perugia dal 1492 al 1503”, *Cronache e storie inedite della città di Perugia dal 1150 al 1563*, ed. F. Bonaini, A. Fabretti and F.-L. Polidori, Florence, G.P. Vieuvsseux, 1851, p. 149-150; Pellini, *Della Historia di Perugia*, p. 137; *La Historia de Altobello e signor Lodovico de Todi nelli 1500*, ed. F. Canali and E. Lucci, Todi, Res Tudertinae, 2014, p. 36-37. Pompeo Pellini's chronicle is not a direct source; for what concerns the one by Maturanzio, the attribution to the famous humanist is considered quite doubtful by historiography. What is most interesting for our analysis is that the author declares to be contemporary to the events, circumstance confirmed by linguistic analyses (see A. Fabretti's preface in Maturanzio, *Cronache*, p. x).

the Pope, besieged Acquasparta to “free” Todi and the surrounding territories from the dominion of Altobello di Chiaravalle and Girolamo da Canale. When the city of Acquasparta was stormed, Altobello was intercepted while trying to escape. Along the way to the prison, an angry mob snatched the prisoner from the guards: “every man came to kill him” to the point that the executioners “in their frenzy, hurt each other”. The remains of the “tyrant” were devoured with such fury that “nothing was left of his miserable and unfortunate body”.

The following year in Pistoia, new bloody events arose, triggered by a feud between factions and handed down in *Storia dei suoi tempi* by Piero Vaglianti, a contemporary of the events narrated but not a direct witness. In 1501, the struggle between the opposing consortia of the Chancellors and the Panciatichi turned to the worst for the latter. After taking refuge in Serravalle, the Panciatichi were betrayed by some members of their faction and torn to pieces: “there were those who had their hearts ripped out and bit to pieces²⁶”.

From the early sixteenth century onwards, further records of episodes like this are more rarely found in the chronicles, but they do not disappear: in the last quarter of the century, reports of a new gory insurrection are received from Naples. The revolt, described in Thomas Costo’s writings, broke out in 1585, following the decision of the Elected Representatives to increase the price of bread, which worsened the situation of this city in Campania, burdened by the crisis that had hit all the Mediterranean countries since the second decade of the sixteenth century. The crisis was also affected by the progressive reduction in the popular representation of the government of the lower bourgeois strata, artisans and plebeians, and by the devaluation of the role of officers such as the Elected Representative of the people, guarantors of the welfare of large sections of the population.

It is in fact the Elected Representative who pays the highest price for urban anger when, on May 9, the crowd rises up: Giovan Vincenzo Starace is dragged to a public assembly in the monastery of Sant’Agostino, where his election had once taken place. Here, after a failed attempt to escape the rioters, availing himself of the sacredness of the place, Starace was attacked with “knives, spits, sticks, and with stones” and “cruelly”

26 Piero Vaglianti, *Storia dei suoi tempi. 1492-1514*, ed. G. Berti, M. Luzzati and E. Tongiorgi, Pisa, Nistri-Lischi, 1982, p. 133-134.

killed²⁷. His body was then stripped, castrated, mutilated and dragged upside down through the city streets. Eventually

they all rushed over that unhappy body like wild beasts, and tore it into many pieces, someone cutting off a hand, someone a foot and a piece of a leg, someone the arms, someone the ears, someone the nose, someone a limb and others something else. They then ripped out his guts, the heart and the other limbs. When all the limbs were ripped into small pieces, they divided them and put them on top of sticks, on the tips of swords and other weapons²⁸.

The rioters paraded with the “abominable relics” of Starace around the city, showing them off “as trophies” and saying they wanted to cook them in different ways and then eat them, some instead “were biting them raw and sucking the blood inhumanely²⁹”.

“SAVE ME FROM THE LION’S MOUTH”

The socio-political conjunctures that frame the anthropophagous disasters are variegated: tyrannicides; conspiracies and “revolts”; punishment of the lord’s attacker; clashes between factions; fights against enemies outside the city and private revenges³⁰. The victim’s body can be consumed entirely or only partially, raw or cooked: in these cases, only some organs of high symbolic importance are extracted and eaten, such as the heart, devoured or sometimes only bitten³¹.

27 Tommaso Costo, *Giunta di tre libri al compendio dell’istoria del regno di Napoli [...] nei quali si contiene tanto di notevole [...] è accaduto dal principio dell’anno 1563 insino al fine dell’ottantasei*, Venice, Barezzi, 1588, p. 135.

28 *Ibid.* My translation.

29 *Ibid.*

30 On the ambiguous concept of “revolt” see J.-C. Maire-Vigueur, *Le rivolte cittadine contro i “tiranni”, Rivolte urbane e rivolte contadine nell’Europa del Trecento. Un confronto*, ed. M. Bourin, G. Cherubini and G. Pinto, Firenze University Press, 2008, p. 351-380; on urban conflicts and the expulsion of tyrants, see J.-C. Maire-Vigueur, “La cacciata del tiranno”, *Tiranni e tirannide*, p. 142-169; J.-C. Maire-Vigueur, *Cavalieri e cittadini: Guerra, conflitti e società nell’Italia comunale*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2010.

31 On the devouring of the heart, see A. A. Montanari, *Il fero pasto*, p. 77-93; A. A. Montanari, *Cannibales; Il cuore, Micrologus*, 11, 2003. On the separate burial for the heart, see G. Ricci,

In all cases, devouring of the body is part of a complex ritual of violence: the enemy is humiliated through a series of posthumous abuses expressing contempt and outrage. These acts are meant to dishonour the spoil of the antagonist and are the post-mortem continuation of the torment inflicted before the execution.

The ritual includes gruesome variations: undressing, infamous processions along the city streets, insults, humiliations, wounds, beatings, burns, dragging the body when still alive and then post-mortem, exhumation of the body, massacre of the corpse, abandonment, destruction or exposure of the whole body or of its pieces.

Circumstances of political crisis make “non-standard” practices possible and require a “scapegoat³²”. The concept of “crisis” is however not sufficient to explain the dynamics of the anthropophagy rituals that took place during city riots. Very concrete political interests are concealed behind those that are presented as spontaneous crowd uprisings: the chroniclers who wrote the testimonies that passed down these events were personally involved in the same balances of power they describe. This raises the problem of the relation between *res* and *narrata*; in other words, the complex relation between a rite and its narrative.

Undoubtedly, the unhappy but undisputed protagonist of the scene is precisely the victim: the anthropophagi rituals revolve around his figure and the political responsibilities attributed to it. The victim is singled out as the one who attacked the common good, guilty of destabilizing the right power or guilty of the misgovernment of the city and of the oppression of its citizens: the worst crime, because it is done not towards an individual but towards the community. The dynamics and the modalities of the ritual itself are linked to its past, since, according to a parallelism typical of the penal ceremonial, the torture inflicted on the accused recalls the wrongs he perpetrated in life: in Florence, Messer Simone da Norcia, man of the duke of Athens, was beheaded because he had abused the use of such punishment; in Forlì, Marco Socciacarro, guilty of having thrown out of a window the corpse of the Riario, was in turn thrown out of the same window, and landed on the same place where his victim had fallen, and so on.

Il principe e la morte. Corpo, cuore, effigie nel Rinascimento, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1998, p. 87-118;

R. Lewinsohn, *Storia universale del cuore*, Milano, Sugar, 1960.

32 R. Girard, *Le bouc émissaire*, Paris, Grasset, 1982.

The penalty must therefore be public, terrible and exemplary. It is not relevant if those who pay are the real culprits: the victim is chosen not so much for his actual responsibilities, but above all because he is representative of the crime. The staging of the culprit's punishment is of greater importance than its material execution, which in case of the absence of the condemned person is even performed in effigy, through the sacrifice of a close relative or collaborator of the culprit, or through the destruction of an image representing him.

This is the case of the violent lynching of Guglielmo di Assisi and his son, handed over to the rebels in place of the lord of the city Walter of Brienne, who was accused of misgovernment. Henchman and executioner of the Duke of Athens, Guglielmo is, in the eyes of the chronicler, guilty of having supported Brienne in his attempt to secure his lordship over the city. His end will be a warning to the citizens so that they learn to guard themselves against those who want to gain power usurping the freedom of Florence.

The dominion of Walter of Brienne is indeed, in the chronicler's perspective, a divine punishment hurled against the Florentines, and the cannibalistic act emerges as an exemplary punishment, the penalty to inflict on tyranny³³. In the Forlì conspiracy, Andrea Orsi is punished for his children's crime, indirectly paying the penalty for the usurpation of legitimate power, the most serious punishment, for "those who have badly governed³⁴".

From the need to connote an "enormous" crime as infamy, the desire arises, therefore, to implement (or to stage in the narration) a massacre that can distinguish itself from the myriad of post-mortem violent practices also performed in the official justice field³⁵. Public Authorities had to remain extraneous to anthropophagy: authorities never appear during cannibalistic rituals, and when present they remain in obscurity, letting soldiers, children and the angry mob act. Even when, from behind the scenes, names of important families or precise institutional roles come forth, the emphasis is always on the fury of the people in turmoil.

33 Villani, *Nuova cronica*, p. 298-299, and p. 339.

34 Matarazzo, "Cronaca della città di Perugia", p. 149-150; Pellini, *Della Historia di Perugia*, p. 137; Cobelli, *Cronache Forlivesi*, p. 341.

35 On the "enormity" of the crime see J. Théry, "'Atrocitas/Enormitas'. Per una storia della categoria di 'crimine enorme' nel basso medioevo (XII-XV secolo)", *Quaderni storici*, 131 NS, 2009, p. 329-375.

The reinterpretation of the rituals of violence made by the chroniclers makes it difficult, therefore, to probe the intentions of the aggressors, to recognize them in their individuality, or even to establish with certainty the dynamics of the facts and the veracity of the testimonies of acts of cannibalism. Instead, more clearly, a scheme of representation of the cannibalistic act is outlined, which narrators often refer to, accentuating the aspects that contribute to presenting the revolt as a spontaneous one and the terrible death of the public enemy as vengeance on the part of the community or better still, divine vengeance.

The cannibalistic acts are inserted within inverted, derisive and defamatory rituals: the dethronement of the “tyrant” is the symbolic overturning of the customary rituals of enthronement. The dressing corresponds to the undressing, the decapitation to the coronation, the backward ride on a donkey to the lustrous procession. In this universe of symbolic overturns, the lord’s devoured body constitutes the essence of the retaliation: the devoured tyrant was, first, a devourer. The unjust man that, perpetrating misgovernment, oppressed and burdened the citizens as if he had swallowed them, will be, in turn, eaten. The wolf becomes the lamb and the cannibal turns into a victim, expelled through the anthropophagous massacre from the human community and downgraded to the last link in the food chain³⁶.

The testimonies emphasize the offender’s bestialisation by using words that recall the manipulation of animal carcasses. Giacomo del Pecora was cut into pieces and reduced “worse than the carcass of a beast had ever been reduced³⁷”. Arrigo Fei was “hung by the feet” and “gutted like a pig³⁸”. Cola di Rienzo was hanged upside down and, given his mighty size, he resembled “a big buffalo or rather a cow at the slaughterhouse³⁹”. Francesco Ventimiglia also seems a beast at the slaughter to the chronicler Michele da Piazza, and Nicolò Matto is said to have been cut into small pieces “like meat at the slaughterhouse⁴⁰”. The victims of the anthropophagic act are usually compared to pigs,

36 On devouring metaphors in the political language, see Montanari, *Il fero pasto*, p. 67-70; Montanari, “Sempre fu che pesci maggiori mangiano li minori”.

37 *Cronaca senese di Donato di Neri e di suo figlio Neri*, 6b, p. 627.

38 Villani, *Nuova cronica*, p. 338; Coppo Stefani, *Cronaca fiorentina*, p. 208; *Storie pistoresi*, p. 190-191.

39 Anonymous, *Cronica*, ed. G. Porta, Milan, Adelphi, 1981, p. 197.

40 Michele da Piazza, *Cronaca*, p. 59; *Chronicon Estense*, col. 510 b-c.

cows and calves (note, however, the exception of Altobello), while the executioners are compared to dogs, never used for food, to emphasize their ferocity.

It is not just a matter of language, as the victims of anthropophagy suffer the fate of animals. Certainly, however, in the communication code linked to political struggle, the act of devouring animals is a recurring image: the hegemony of the strongest in the clash between powerful, less powerful and possibly not powerful individuals is represented by the food chain, which results in the annihilation of the weaker one. The enemy is metaphorically and concretely swallowed, eviscerated, divided, devoured and digested in an endless cycle of dominance and subordination.

The practices of post-mortem violence aim at the expulsion of the “public enemy” from the social nucleus, marking an alterity aimed at connoting him well beyond the end of his earthly existence. The written reinterpretation by the chroniclers of the ritual performed accentuates this process using a purely alimentary lexicon.

What was anthropologically defined as the “rejection” of the victim’s body is a process parallel to the exclusion of the individual from the community and the denial of the values that his figure has incarnated in life: anthropophagy is used to create a condition of “alterity⁴¹”.

In the testimonies that pass on urban violence rituals, therefore, the customary representations of anthropophagy are turned over to designate the cannibal as an “other” and bestial individual: inhuman attributes connote the devourers as well as the devoured, but the process of discrimination involves the victim of the cannibalistic destruction. The crowd of executioners aggregates around the act of anthropophagy. The enemy of the community, however, becomes the “eatable other” and his expulsion from the social body he belonged to is perpetuated after death, when the preserver of the historical memory rewrites the ritual.

In conclusion, we address the question of the plausibility of the presented testimonies. The cases of ritual anthropophagy seem better documented than those of nutritional anthropophagy that appear in the famine chronicles, as they are often described in detail by several testimonies of personalities contemporary to the facts narrated. The

⁴¹ On the practices of “rejection” of the body, see A. Favole, *Resti di umanità. Vita sociale del corpo dopo la morte*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2003.

testimonies of cannibalistic lynching, therefore, appear as a whole fairly plausible.

What prompted, therefore, such a high concentration of cases of ritual anthropophagy in the urban territories of central and northern Italy from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century? Firstly, we should highlight that the episodes follow the chronological and geographical development of the use of public and symbolic violence in the Italian territory. Secondly, it is interesting to observe how, starting from the fourteenth century, a lively and fervent reflection on tyranny emerges in the same context. At the political, social and juridical level, fourteenth-century scholars tried to define the various types of “tyrant”, outlining a range of acceptable reactions to face the advent of an unjust or illegitimate ruler. A suggestive interpretation consists, therefore, in relating the consistency of the anthropophagy reports with the simultaneous effort to conceptualize tyranny. In this perspective, the will to resist the tyrant and the depiction of an oppressor forced to pay for devouring the body of the city may have fuelled the desire to highlight anthropophagy episodes, increasing the diffusion of narrative tropes on cannibalism, but also actual ritual emulations⁴².

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42 See the essays collected in *Tiranni e tirannide*.