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Embodiment in Religious Resilience

88/2 (2022)



STUDI E MATERIALI DI STORIA DELLE RELIGIONI

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## Embodiment in Religious Resilience

Dipartimento di Storia, Antropologia, Religioni, Arte, Spettacolo



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# STUDI E MATERIALI DI STORIA DELLE RELIGIONI

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*Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni perseguono nel loro campo speciale i fini della scienza e della cultura. Alla scienza storica contribuiscono facendo oggetto di storia la religione nel suo svolgimento. Alla cultura schiudono più larghi orizzonti, promuovendo una maggiore partecipazione del pensiero italiano alla conoscenza di forme e momenti di civiltà meno prossimi e meno noti.*

(Raffaele Pettazzoni 1925)

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Sapienza - Università di Roma - Piazzale Aldo Moro 5 - 00185 Roma  
Fax 06 49913718 e-mail: smsr@uniroma1.it

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o sui pontefici (pp. 143-149) e i flamini (pp. 149-151), a loro volta categorie sacerdotali di primo piano, e non solo sul piano strettamente religioso, ma anche politico.

In perfetta consonanza con quanto si è venuto finora segnalando procede l'attenzione per le colonne portanti della civiltà romana, con una virtuosa intersezione tra mito e storia, politica e religione. A p. 143 si incontra un riferimento importante alla *pax deorum* (concetto cardinale ripreso anche più avanti, a p. 351), mentre a pp. 162-164 viene affrontato il concetto di *bellum iustum*, con la descrizione del ruolo fondamentale dei *fetiales*, in origine schierati in prima linea, indi depositari di un ruolo simbolico, ma non per questo meno incisivo sul piano delle strategie militari.

Anche l'aspetto etimologico riceve un'attenta considerazione: i «vari tentativi di spiegazione» del termine *pontifex* sono superati da una comprensibile propensione per l'ipotesi più verosimile, allusiva alla costruzione dei ponti (p. 147); Mercurio è giustamente collegato con la *merx*, in virtù della protezione assicurata ai *mercatores* (p. 322 s.); i numerosi piccoli dèi elencati nel capitolo xvi hanno nomi fondati sui radicali che ne descrivono l'essenza: *Vaticanus* sul vagito (né passa inosservata la metatesi delle occlusive interne), *Fabulinus* sulla prima parola, *Educa* e *Potina* sul cibo e l'acqua, *Abeona* e *Adeona* sulla direzione dei bimbi in movimento rispetto all'uscio (p. 354).

Nel complesso dunque il volume, limpido e articolato, si presta ad una lettura di grande giovamento sui sentieri spesso impervi delle vicende mitiche ancestrali: basti pensare ai tratti leggendari che hanno precocemente avvolto la figura di Romolo, alla quale viene riservata un'attenzione davvero ragguardevole (*L'eroe venuto da lontano*, pp. 17-112). In perfetta sintonia con questa chiave ermeneutica procede l'apparato bibliografico (*Letture*, p. 371 s.), circoscritto a pochi testi essenziali e di dominio pubblico, facenti capo all'A. (*Enea lo straniero*, Torino, Einaudi, 2020) e studiosi conclamati del settore archeologico, storico-religioso, antropologico e letterario, quali, in ordine rigorosamente alfabetico, Jean Bayet, Maurizio Bettini, Eva Cantarella, Andrea Carandini, Filippo Coarelli, Giovanni D'Anna, Georges Dumézil, James George Frazer, Mario Lentano, Arnaldo Momigliano, Massimo Pallottino, Dario Sabbatucci e Mario Torelli. Un *Indice dei nomi e dei personaggi* (pp. 375-381) garantisce infine un utile strumento per eventuali controlli interni.

Arduino Maiuri (Sapienza Università di Roma)  
arduino.maiuri@uniroma1.it

Paolo Cozzo, *In cammino. Una storia del pellegrinaggio cristiano*, Carocci, Roma 2021. ISBN: 9788829011032.

The author set himself an ambitious task: to write a history of Christian pilgrimage from the earliest days to the present. He has succeeded admirably, fulfilling this task clearly and comprehensively, in a mere 228 pages of printed text. This laudable concision does not come at the cost of the omission or superficial treatment of critical issues, or of readability: the book is cogently and lucidly written. It can be recommended enthusiastically to general readers and specialists alike.

Professor Cozzo first defines his subject as a devotional form practised by believers from the very beginning of the Christian community. It was not a doctrine grounded in Scripture and theology, and so was never drawn into the theological conflicts that divided the early Church: it was simply a devotional *practice*, hallowed

by tradition, evolving in response to political, cultural and economic factors. Because of this adaptability it stood the test of time and continues to flourish. Even in today's secular world (I learned to my surprise) an estimated 80 million people per year engage in some form of Christian pilgrimage. And these numbers are rising, not only at renowned sites like Santiago de Compostela, but at the myriad local sanctuaries that dot the landscapes of Europe and Latin America.

Pilgrimage arose in the semi-clandestine life of the early Christian communities, which venerated their martyrs and their relics in the places where they died. Pilgrimage and the cult of relics were inextricably linked. The apostles Peter and Paul, executed in Rome, are the preeminent examples of martyrs commemorated by their relics. All this changed with Constantine's edict recognizing Christianity in 313. The faithful could worship openly and pilgrimage grew rapidly, following the visit of Constantine's mother Helena to Jerusalem, during which she supposedly unearthed the True Cross. Jerusalem, Constantinople and Rome, formed the major axis for pilgrimage. Lesser sanctuaries were founded and attracted pilgrims too: St Martin at Tours, San Gargano in Apulia, later Santiago and Canterbury.

The Cistercian monastic revival and the Gregorian reform movement of the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries imparted new impetus to pilgrimage, and it assumed a new, militant form in response to the destruction of the Holy Sepulchre by Caliph Al-Hakim, and the Seljuk conquests in Anatolia astride the route to Jerusalem, Urban II's call to deliver Jerusalem inspired a new kind of pilgrim, the *miles Christi*, who marched to conquer the Holy Land, while a parallel movement embarked on the Reconquista in Muslim Spain. The Crusader kingdoms ultimately fell, and pilgrimage to Jerusalem became once more a peaceful journey, managed by the Franciscan Order. The adventure – or misadventure – of armed pilgrimage represents a deviation from the original ideal of pilgrimage as a personal search for the divine presence in a holy place.

Armed pilgrimage proved to be a blind alley, but in the meantime the practice was evolving as a form of penance, rewarded by indulgences, in a nexus that became monetized. Wealthy persons unwilling to face the rigours of a pilgrimage could pay proxies to discharge their obligation, or even commute it for cash. These practices, which eventually devalued the ideal of pilgrimage, were common long before Boniface VIII proclaimed the Jubilee in 1300, with indulgences to pilgrims who made the journey to Rome. Professor Cozzo devotes an illuminating analysis to the Jubilee and its consequences. Vast masses of the faithful responded to the pope's appeal. Rome's capacity to feed and house them proved totally inadequate but nonetheless the Jubilee enhanced the prestige of the papacy: so much so that Jubilees would be repeated at frequent intervals for the next two centuries. After the removal of the papacy to Avignon the flow of pilgrims diminished, but Rome remained the chief goal for pilgrims, followed by Santiago. But not Jerusalem. The Ottoman conquest of Palestine and Egypt in 1517 (not the fall of Constantinople in 1453; here Professor Cozzo corrects the traditional interpretation), choked off the last trickle of pilgrims to the Holy City.

In the later Middle Ages, a chorus of voices was raised against pilgrimage, led by adherents of the *devotio moderna*. They advocated an unmediated interior piety in opposition to the ritualized worship offered by the Church. To them, pilgrimage was a distraction from true Christian piety, a cloak for crime, vagabondage and the neglect of domestic responsibilities. They were especially hostile to the traffic in indulgences linked to it. Erasmus is the most prominent of these critics, but he was echoing a feeling shared by many believers. This criticism would be voiced even more forcefully by Luther after he witnessed the traffic in indulgences during his visit to Rome. His

outrage provoked a cataclysm that led him to reject papal authority and divide the *respublica Christiana* into warring camps.

The Reformation marks a new phase in the history of Christian pilgrimage, not just for the obvious reason that Protestant Europe renounced it, but also, because devotional practices in Catholic regions were changing, in response to the Counter-Reformation. The Council of Trent reaffirmed the value of pilgrimage among other traditional devotional practices, and reasserted the cults of the saints and the Virgin Mary. Catholic believers responded by flocking to their sanctuaries, and especially to those of the Virgin. With Jerusalem now barred to them, they also journeyed to the many replicas of the Holy City that appeared in the late Middle Ages and flourished in the ardent spiritual climate of Catholic Reform. Typical of these were the Sacri Monti in the foothills of northwest Italy, on which Professor Cozzo is a leading expert. Pilgrimage to these substitute destinations allowed the faithful to fulfil their spiritual duty and reap the rewards of pilgrimage without travelling to Jerusalem itself. Meanwhile Rome's appeal faded as papal authority diminished in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the authority of local sovereigns grew. Professor Cozzo makes the important point that pilgrimage assumed a more regional, even national character. Pilgrims sought out sanctuaries in their homelands: Italian pilgrims went to shrines in Italian territory, French pilgrims to sanctuaries in France.

The era of the French Revolution and Napoleon marks another caesura in the history of pilgrimage. To the faithful, it seemed that the *philosophes'* unbelief had triumphed. But only for a moment: throne and altar were restored in 1815. The Church regained its authority in partnership with reactionary sovereigns determined to liquidate the heritage of the revolutionary era. Battle-lines were drawn between restored Catholicism and what Professor Cozzo terms 'modernity', or secularism and liberalism. In this Catholic revival, infused with a Romantic sensibility, ancient traditions and rituals were revived, among them pilgrimage. It was consciously deployed to mobilise the faithful in an ideological crusade against secularism and nationalism. The struggle intensified after the humiliation of Pius IX by the Roman revolutionaries in 1848. In response, the pope invoked the Virgin Mary as the protector of the Church, and miraculous apparitions proliferated across Europe, leading to the foundation of new sanctuaries. Lourdes is the emblematic case: after the Virgin's apparition in 1858 a sanctuary was founded, which immediately attracted masses of enthusiastic pilgrims, their journey facilitated after 1866 (as Professor Cozzo points out) by the opening of a railway line.

The Russian revolution intensified this struggle, and the political use of pilgrimage. The Church saw the Bolsheviks, avowed atheists, as its sworn enemies, and as before, employed its twin weapons of pilgrimage and Marian devotion in the struggle: the sanctuary at Fatima in Portugal, founded after an apparition in May 1917, was one of several new Marian shrines to appear in this period. After 1945 the conflict between the Church and the modern world entered a new phase in the Cold War. Successive popes took a clear political stance against communism, none more forcefully than the John Paul II, who made endless pilgrimages (104 journeys to 129 different countries), not only in Europe, but all over the world. He could claim victory for his tireless campaigning when the Berlin Wall fell in 1989.

But after the defeat of communism the pope and his successors could not rest. State-dictated atheism was gone, but another enemy now reveal itself: secularism in the form of unfettered neoliberal capitalism and unbridled hedonism – or could one say (in Professor Cozzo's terms) modernity in a new, dangerous incarnation? Yet

again, the popes have resorted to pilgrimage and the Marian cult to combat this foe, but with the ancient practice of pilgrimage decked out with the latest technology. Pilgrimage has become virtual, Millions of pilgrims can make the journey to Lourdes without leaving the comfort of their couches. Professor Cozzo concludes his excellent book by drawing our attention to this extraordinary development: pilgrimage, ever adaptable to changing circumstances, once Eurocentric and constrained by the physical difficulties of travel, has become global. In this virtual world, its possibilities for change and development are limitless. And unforeseeable.

*Geoffrey Symcox (Department of History, UCLA)*  
symcox@history.ucla.edu