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Théologiques

Théologiques

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Volume 17, Number 2, 2009

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URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/044062ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7202/044062ar

See table of contents

Publisher(s)

Faculté de théologie et de sciences des religions, Université de Montréal

ISSN

1188-7109 (print)
1492-1413 (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this article

Bugslag, J. (2009). Material and Theological Identities: A Historical Discourse of Constructions of the Virgin Mary. *Théologiques*, *17*(2), 19–67. https://doi.org/10.7202/044062ar

Article abstract

This article charts, through the longue durée, two contested constructions of the Virgin Mary, the one theological, the other material. Material constructions, founded on such concrete material as relics, images, pilgrimage shrines and sacralized landscape features, differ considerably from, and have sometimes clashed with theological constructions. These two quite distinct hermeneutical strands of Marian identity, I contend, have always formed a discourse, and neither can be understood fully without reference to the other. This discursive consideration of Mary both broadens consideration of her historical identity beyond the hegemonic definition of the Church and creates a fuller appreciation of the diverse functions and meanings that Mary has had for her various constituencies.

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Théologiques 17, nº 2 (2009) p. 19-67

Material and Theological Identities

A Historical Discourse of Constructions of the Virgin Mary

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The Virgin Mary has meant and continues to mean many different things to many different people. Both the Roman and the Orthodox Churches have always realized this and have tried to keep her within the bounds of orthodoxy, but it has not been easy. Even on a purely theological plane, Mary has a remarkably contested history, marked by long-running disputes, new doctrinal pronouncements and new liturgical feasts. As has long been recognized, enthusiasms of many different kinds have often pushed beliefs concerning the Virgin Mary beyond the doctrinal pale, but it is not sufficient simply to divide those beliefs into « orthodox », on the one hand, and « heterodox » or « heretical » on the other. The various constructions of Mary all meant a great deal to their respective constituencies, and all deserve to be considered as evidence for her historical reality. This is a large subject, and no one person can hope to deal with all of its myriad implications.[1] As an art historian, I have been particularly struck with the material aspects of the problem. Particularly when one considers the many pilgrimage sanctuaries dedicated to Mary, the often miraculous images

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1. This point is made in a learned manner by Philippart (1996).

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believed to be housed in them, and other distinctive material aspects of these sites, such as sacralized landscape features, it becomes evident that through much of Christian history Mary has had multiple identities that cannot be contained within even a historically nuanced theological definition. This paper investigates identities of the Virgin Mary as they are manifested through her shrines and cult images and seeks to demonstrate that constructions based on such material evidence differ considerably from — and intertwine with — what is often taken to be her theological reality.

In order to understand the full historical reality of « Mary » a discourse must be envisioned, in which theological, liturgical, devotional, material and other constructions (regional ones, for example) participated. On a methodological level, this entails a cross-disciplinary consideration of sources. Theologians have a rich fund of written documentation on which to base their constructions of Mary, and this can lead to an illusion of totality or completeness, particularly considering that much theology and theological history is written by scholars who are also practicing Christians. Thus, although theologians may be aware of « heterodox » constructions outside of their own predominant disciplinary concerns, they do not tend to take them very seriously. Art historians, too, were content, until very recently, to envision religious art and architecture exclusively from the hegemonic perspective of the church, which tended to align art history with theology[2]. Within a religious sphere, archaeology and history have also been marked by similar biases, despite recent interest in « popular » religion and culture. None of these disciplines can safely ignore the distinctive material constructions of the historical Marian presence without distorting their own constructions. There is thus a methodological void to be filled by all disciplines. This can only be accomplished by extending specific disciplinary projects to encompass a discourse with other — sometimes competing or conflictual — constructions, based on an analysis of the diverse material aspects of the Marian cult.

Analysis of material constructions for Marian identity will be presented here in a roughly chronological framework which is coordinated with the main lines of theological, as well as liturgical development. These constructions are not limited to what is usually considered « art » but

2. This approach is commonly associated with the methodology of Emile Mâle. The framework in which theology is now being considered in relation to both history and art history is rapidly changing; for an overview, see Hamburger (2006). For a specifically Marian perspective on the problem, see Skubiszewski (1987).

extend to all the material components of Marian devotion, including both relics and sacral landscape elements associated with Marian shrines. These constructions thus spill over virtually all disciplinary boundaries. While Western Europe forms the focus for these investigations, the initial phases of development also present developments in the Holy Land and the Byzantine East, where Marian devotion first took shape.

Material evidence, in general, for the Virgin Mary has always been problematic, since unlike most saints, body relics have always been peripheral, largely limited to strands of her hair and, even more peripherally, relics of her breast milk. While theological agreement on Mary's Assumption has a long and fraught history, in material terms it has been taken for granted at pilgrimage shrines since their inception. The existence of Mary's corpse at a burial site has never been mentioned in any biblical or apocryphal source. Indeed, even the site of her death is contested. Particularly since the 19th century, Ephesus has mounted a widely believed claim, but through most of Christian history, the site most commonly associated with Mary's tomb was located at Gethsemane in the valley of Josaphat, just outside the walls of Jerusalem. By at least 431 there was a church enclosing her sepulchre which had already become prominent as a pilgrimage shrine (Delaborde 1880[3]). The sepulchre, however, was empty. When, at the Council of Chalcedon in 451, Emperor Marcian and Empress Pulcheria made known to Juvenal, the patriarch of Jerusalem, that they wanted to acquire Mary's body, they were told that the tomb had been found empty by the Apostles themselves, who had examined it on the request of St. Thomas.[4] This account makes reference to possibly two of the earliest written sources for the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, the *Euthymiac History*, probably dating from the late 5th century, and the so-called *Transitus A*, a version of the *Transitus Mariae* attributed to the Pseudo-Melito, dating probably from some time in the 5th century (Miegge 1961, 86 and 92)[5] Juvenal's claim appears to presuppose Mary's Assumption, yet

3. Pierre Maraval (1985, 264) claims more generally that a church was built at Mary's tomb in the middle, if not at the beginning of the 5th century.
4. See Wortley (2005, 181). I would like to thank John Wortley for alerting me to this article and for other advice. The earliest history of the Marian cult is particularly difficult to recover, since so many of its strands turn out to be later elaborations. For an informed overview of the problem, see Cameron (2004).
5. James (1924, 209), however, expressed doubt about the age of *Transitus A*, considering it « a late Italian fiction ». On the early sources for the Assumption, see Wenger (1955); van Esbroeck (1981).

the *Transitus Mariae*, which specifically stated the claim, was condemned at the end of the 5th century by Pope Gelasius (496-98). Whether events unfolded exactly in this manner or not, there is general agreement that the cult of Mary developed greatly during the 5th century. Thus, almost from the beginning of recorded devotion to the Virgin Mary, there is conflict between the orthodox pronouncements of the Church, and the material reality of undoubtedly her earliest pilgrimage shrine. As with so many of the doctrinal interpretations of Mary, the hard line on the Assumption taken by Pope Gelasius was soon to soften, yet it was not until 813 that the Assumption was adopted as a universal feast day in the liturgy of the Roman Church, and formal recognition of the Assumption as official dogma had to await the bull *Munificentissimus Deus*, promulgated as recently as 1950[6].

The 5th century was, nevertheless, a period which witnessed substantial doctrinal definition of Mary's status. Most importantly, the Council of Ephesus in 431 had declared her to be the Mother of God or God-Bearer, the *Theotokos* or *Deipara*. Although this was done primarily in the context of what at the time was considered the more important issue of the nature, or natures, of Christ himself, it had the effect of providing the Virgin Mary, for the first time, with a secure doctrinal presence within the Church. It is impossible to judge, at this historical distance, how much Mary's new official status reflected a growing cult and how much it was responsible for allowing her cult to flourish with the blessing of the Church.[7] Given the meagre biblical authority for Mary's acts and life, and the apocryphal nature of fuller sources, such as the *Protevangelium of James*, official recognition by the Church of her theological importance must, at the very least, have acted as a powerful catalyst for the growth of her popularity.

In the 5th century, however, the Virgin Mary would have stood out from the norm within the broader development of the cult of saints, which

6. Miegge (1961, 94 and 103). The Assumption has never been accepted as dogma in the Byzantine or Orthodox East, and the word « Assumption » is not even used ; rather, reference is to Mary's Dormition, or Koimesis. The feast of the Dormition was widely celebrated in the Byzantine East as early as the 6th century ; see Cameron (2004, 16). Already in the mid-5th century a « Mémoire de la Vierge » was celebrated around Jerusalem on August 15 ; see Wenger (1955, 102).

7. Benko (2004) claims that many of the spiritual needs of the burgeoning Christian population were conditioned by expectations based on the socio-religious practices of various earlier goddess cults around the Mediterranean, and that the Virgin Mary came to fill many of those needs in the otherwise strongly patriarchal ideology of early Christianity.

overwhelmingly still focused on burial sites that actually contained miraculous bodily remains (Brown 1981). However reticent the Church was to acknowledge Mary's bodily Assumption into heaven, the history of Marian relics assumed it as a fact from the very beginning, with the appearance of increasing numbers of secondary relics, in the form of her garments[8]. As later legend, once again, would have it, in order not to disappoint the emperor and empress, Patriarch Juvenal sent, in lieu of Mary's body, her shroud and clothing, in some accounts including her tunic, veil (the *maphorion*) and girdle (or belt), to Constantinople in 452. Marcian and Pulcheria installed at least one of these garments in the church dedicated to the Virgin Mary at their newly founded Blachernae monastery[9].

This event marks the beginning of the most substantial collection of Marian relics ever to be accumulated: the city of Constantinople — the Theotokopolis — became closely associated with the Mother of God, and at least in legend, empresses such as Pulcheria (d. 453) and her predecessor, Eudokia, were closely associated with their acquisition[10]. It is difficult to be precise about the nature and number of such relics. The Chalkoprateia church in Constantinople also apparently claimed a tunic and girdle of Mary, as well as her staff, encased in silver. Descriptions of Marian garment relics, on which the seemingly competing claims of the Blachernae and Chalkoprateia churches primarily rest, are not sufficiently precise or free of contradictions to know if both churches possessed comparable relics, or whether the same relics are being referred to in relation to both churches (Wortley 2005). This is a ubiquitous problem, partly because such relics were commonly enclosed in reliquaries that did not allow visual access to them and partly because expectations tended to be based on changing thaumaturgical enthusiasms. Virtually all Marian relics, garments in particular, are almost unlimited in their reproducibility, and the nature of many garment relics mentioned in the sources is notoriously vague. Thus, it is not

8. Such secondary garment relics are sanctioned by biblical sources; see Wortley (2002-2003, 171-172).
9. As with so many other aspects of this story, there is no firm documentation of Marcian and Pulcheria's foundation of the Blachernae monastery, although it seems likely that they had something to do with it; see Janin (1953). Pentcheva (2006) maintains a radical scepticism with respect both to Pulcheria's actual role in transferring relics and to the early relic and image claims of the major Marian shrines of Constantinople.
10. On the legendary role of these and other empresses, see Cameron (2004, 9-13); Pentcheva (2006).

surprising that, eventually, Marian garment relics became widely claimed throughout Christendom. The evidence for their authenticity resided to some extent in their often dubious and sometimes spurious pedigrees, but primarily in the miracles claimed for them. Thus, there is some amount of « overlap » in the claims of various Constantinopolitan churches with respect to early Marian relics, as well as in the claims for Western relics reputedly obtained in Constantinople. Despite such problems, however, the material presence of Mary was undoubtedly increasing there in the public estimation.

Although there is confusion surrounding the number and location of early Marian clothing relics in Constantinople, what is clear is that they were considered the equivalent of body relics of other saints, and that they were considered to work miracles that ordinarily would have been associated with body relics. When Mary's robe at the Blachernae church was examined in 626, it was found to be incorrupt, a *topos* usually associated with body relics, and according to the court writer Giorgios of Pisides,

> « it not only clothed the Mother of God but [...] in it she actually wrapped the Word of God Himself when he was a little child and gave him milk, whence rightly this divine and truly royal garment is not only the cure for every illness, but justly is incorruptible and indestructible, proclaiming the indestructibility and incorruptibility of its wearer ». (Cameron 2000, 13[11])

Many of Mary's garment relics, in fact, were described as seamless, and there appears to have been a symbolic identification between such seamless garments, particularly those claimed to have been worn by Mary at the birth of Christ, and her body, which was considered as the seamless garment which first clothed the Saviour (Carr 2001). The cultic and thaumaturgical reputations attached to Marian garment relics were highly distinctive during the 5th and 6th centuries, and contrasted greatly with the cults of other saints, which were more concretely focused on their bodily remains. The perceived nature of Marian garment relics thus, right from the beginning, validated belief in her Assumption, even though, as has been noted, there was considerable reticence on the part of the Roman and Eastern Churches to acknowledge Mary's Assumption.

Some Marian garment relics were even associated, not with the historical earthly existence of the Virgin Mary but with miraculous apparitions of her. The earliest instance of this, as recorded in the *Transitus A*, was at

11. Other early sources also associate incorruptibility with Marian garments ; see Wenger (1955, 39 and 120).

Mary's Assumption, when the Apostle Thomas witnessed her body rising into the heavens, and Mary let her girdle fall for him (Miegge 1961, 91). Many girdles or belts of the Virgin Mary were subsequently claimed by churches throughout Christendom, and more than one of these was claimed to be the very one vouchsafed to St. Thomas. Along with tunics and veils, girdle relics were to become one of most common forms of Marian garment relics.

Another prominent Marian apparition involved the *maphorion*, the veil contained in the Blachernae church. The late-ninth or tenth-century Life of St. Andrew the Fool describes how Mary appeared one night in the Blachernae church like an empress, with an entourage of angels, and after praying in the sanctuary, spread her *maphorion* over the whole crowd of people (Pentcheva 2003, 115). Quite remarkably, then, the apparition was not only of the Virgin Mary herself, but for all intents and purposes, of the garment relic contained invisibly in its reliquary within the church. Byzantine accounts of this apparition would, by the 14th century, inspire Western images of the Virgin of Mercy, in which the Virgin Mary spreads out her cloak in order to shelter the devotees nestling under it. This image, *inter alia*, validated Marian clothing relics, and a similar image arose, as well, in Russia, where the *maphorion* miracle gave rise to the *Pokrov*, a feast (14 October) celebrating Mary's intercession in the Blachernae church through her veil[12]. Besides garment relics, the Blachernae church also possessed a miraculous icon of Mary, the Blachernitissa, which by the late 11th century had become the object of the « usual miracle » : every Friday at Vespers, the veil covering the icon raised unaided, revealing the image in a blaze of light to onlookers and pilgrims, only to descend again on Saturday at the same hour. Although not a Marian garment relic *per se*, the veil over the Blachernitissa was thus implicated in miraculous events in a manner which recalled in its imagery apparitions of Mary herself. Only garment relics associated with Christ himself — his swaddling clothes, his shroud and the achieropoietic images of him on cloth — can compare with those of the Virgin Mary. This not only differentiates Mary from other saints, but indirectly reflects belief in her Assumption, thus putting the relic

12. Devotion to the *Pokrov* was adopted and encouraged by Andrej Bogoljubski (d. 1174), prince of Suzdal, who founded the church of the Intercession on the Nerl River in 1165. The cathedral of the Intercession in Moscow followed shortly later, and the *Pokrov* miracle, like the Virgin of Mercy image, became the subject of a popular Russian icon; see Hamilton (1983, 146-148). On the origins of this devotion, see Wortley (1971).

cult of Mary into some degree of conflict with the doctrinal pronouncements of the Church.

Shortly after garment relics began to proliferate, images of the Virgin and Child also began to be considered miraculous. In form, meaning and function, such images of the *Theou Mētēr*, as Mary came to be called, resembled those of the *Mētēr Theōn*, the mother of the gods, adding another distinctive strand to her developing material construction (Belting 1994[13]). In a more strictly Christian perspective, once again, this aligns the Virgin Mary with Christ and differentiates her cult from those of the other saints. Empress Pulcheria, who is said to have donated garment relics to the Blachernae church, is also credited with donations to another important Marian church in Constantinople, that of the Hodegon Monastery, including Mary's milk and Christ's swaddling clothes, but most famously an icon of the Virgin and Child which was, by the 10th or 11th century, believed to be a portrait painted from life by the Evangelist St. Luke, thus giving it not only first-hand but revelatory status.[14] Not only did this icon gain a reputation for working miracles, but so did innumerable of its copies, all of which now tend to be referred to as Theotokos Hodegetria icons. From this time, miracle-working icons of the Virgin and Child, some attributed to St. Luke, continually multiplied. Their biblical origins and miraculous reputations assured them the status normally granted to body relics, and almost uniquely among images of saints — except for miraculous images of Christ — they functioned and were treated in a manner identical to relics *per se*. Other icons — and in the west statues — of the Virgin and Child, not necessarily connected with St. Luke, would eventually come to be regarded as miraculous, as well.

It is significant that, in relation to both garment relics and miraculous images, Marian « relics » can be compared most directly with those of Christ, who similarly left no body on earth which could function in the same cultic manner as the body relics of saints. This posed a doctrinal problem for the Church even more serious than the issue of Mary's Assumption. Even at the end of the 4th century, there appears to have been a propensity for ordinary Christians to attribute to Mary a status dangerously close to that of Christ:

13. According to Belting (p. 36), by the 7th century, the figure of Mary « had by now become as polymorphous as the demands made on her were multiferous ».
14. Once again, Pentcheva (2006, 120) is highly sceptical of early holdings of relics and images by the Hodegon Monastery and denies Pulcheria's role in providing them.

> At the end of the fourth century, Epiphanius, denouncing the sect of the Collyridians, declared, « The saints are not to be honoured beyond what is right but we must honour their Lord [...] Mary, indeed, is not God, nor has she received her body from heaven but by a conception by a man and a woman. » « The body of Mary is holy but she is not God ; she is Virgin and worthy of great honour but she is not given to us in adoration, rather she adores Him who is born of her flesh. » « Let Mary be honored but let the Father, Son and Holy Spirit be adored. Let no one adore Mary. » And these words Ambrose of Milan echoed in the same century, « Mary was the temple of God, not the God of the temple. Therefore only he is to be adored who worked within the Temple[15]. » Miegge (1961, 83-84)

Such pronouncements, uttered undoubtedly with some degree of alarm, must certainly reflect what was felt to be the undue adulation of Mary by substantial segments of the Christian community (and not just among heretics).

If popular sentiment was already conflicting with Church doctrine, there may well have been concrete reasons for such a situation. During the period of conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity, still incomplete during the 5th century, religious expectations were still inflected by the existence of pantheons not only of gods but of goddesses and by synchretic habits of mind that tended to conflate religious identities[16]. Giovanni Miegge, in his history of Catholic Marian doctrine, cites the attitudes embodied in *The Metamorphoses*, by the 2nd-century platonist Apuleius on the synchretic nature of goddess worship. Although addressed specifically to Isis, Apuleius's invocation makes clear that the « Queen of Heaven » — a name by which Mary was later known — goes by many names, and he addresses her in terms which can easily be imagined to be quite comparable to the thoughts of Mary's early devotees at her pilgrimage shrines :

> O thou holy one, perpetual saviour of mankind, always bountiful in nourishing mortals, thou dost give a mother's sweet affection to the wretched and unfortunate. No day goes by, no night, no slightest moment that is empty of thy benefits or that thy protection is not over men by sea and land. Thou dost assuage the tempests of our life ; thou dost hold out thy helping hand and drawest out the tangled threads of the Fates ; thou calmest the storms of

15. The « Collyridians », or Kollyridians, can probably be considered as « an interest group », largely composed of women, rather than a « sect ». See also Benko (2004, 170ff).
16. Benko (2004) has hypothesized a far more integral relationship between the identities of Mary and her « pagan » goddess counterparts.

> Fortune and restrainest the stars in their hurtful course. The supernal beings honour thee, the infernal deities do thee reverence; thou dost make the world revolve and to the Sun thou givest its light; thou dost rule the world and hast the powers of hell under thy feet. The stars obey thee, by thee the seasons come again, in thee the gods are joyful and the elements are thy servants. At thy nod the winds blow gently and clouds gather, seed comes to life and crops grow up. The birds of heaven fear before thy majesty and the wild beasts of the hills, the serpents hiding in the earth and the monsters swimming in the deep. To celebrate thy praises my talent cannot suffice... (cited by Miegge 1961, 69)

Almost all of these themes were eventually to be taken up by Mary's devotees at one or another of her pilgrimage sites, and right from the beginning, synchretic elements characterized her shrines and aspects of devotion to her.

Quite distinct from Mary's theologically defined nature, for example, the character of Marian devotion in Constantinople early took on a distinctive aspect which indicates a transference of devotion from the likes of Nike and Athena Promachos, as supernatural defenders of the city, to Mary. As early as 626, during an Avar siege, the Blachernitissa icon was paraded on the city walls, apotropaically assuring the city's salvation. Later, Mary's *maphorion* was used in the same way and gained a reputation as the palladium of Constantinople. The *Akathistos* hymn, traditionally believed to date from 626, celebrates Mary's power in war, and Byzantine emperors increasingly relied on her in their military efforts. Later still, the Theotokos Hodegetria icon usurped the *maphorion*'s role. Perhaps as early as 717, it vied with the Blachernae relics in protecting the city, being paraded on the walls during an Arab attack. Needless to say, this prominent military aspect of the Marian cult, which was later to be taken up in Western Europe, as well, presents a far different « Mary » than the humble « handmaiden of the Lord » in the Gospels.

No previous theological pronouncement of the Church prepares for such a role for Mary, but rather, she acts as a bridge between developing Christian practice and religious expectations of an entirely non-Christian, or trans-denominational nature. Mary appears to have been particularly suited to such a role, since the highly patriarchal Judeo-Christian tradition could not, by itself, accommodate the strands of goddess worship that were so deeply embedded in many of the cultures and ideologies that eventually formed Christendom[17]. Mary, it seems clear, was heiress to many roles that new

17. Benko (2004) provides one of the best documented cases for this transformation.

Christians expected religion to provide, and as with her military role, these were often far from soteriological in nature, intended more to influence qualities of mortal existence rather than purely eschatological outcomes.

There were other ways, as well, that early Marian shrines in Constantinople give evidence of synchretic associations. A remarkable number of the important Marian shrines there were associated with miraculous, curative springs or other water sources, which earlier had been associated with a range of Mediterranean gods and goddesses. The Blachernae church, for example, also had a bath and fountain whose waters were reputedly curative, and Mary was also invoked there for aid in childbirth, another function of several goddesses which were formerly worshipped in the now Christian reaches of the Roman world. The Monastery of the Spring (Pegê), rebuilt by the Emperor Justinian in the 6th century, also featured a grove of trees. According to Procopius, Justinian built a church dedicated to the Virgin at the place called the Spring, which featured a cypress wood, flower strewn fields and a spring of calm water — everything, he says, suited to a holy place (Procopius 1961, 40). It goes without saying that such a conception of a holy place owes a great deal to pre-Christian beliefs and expectations, as does the reputation of this and many other such springs associated with Marian shrines for thaumaturgical power in healing the sick. The Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem, founded in the early 4th century by the Emperor Constantine, had apparently been situated within a sacred wood dedicated to Adonis (Maraval 2002[18]). Not only that but, in actual contrast to the Gospel descriptions of the Nativity, the church was built around a grotto in which it was claimed that the birth of Christ had taken place[19]. Close to the grotto was a cistern into which, according to a local legend, the star of the Magi had fallen and whose waters had been used in the purification of Mary after the Nativity. Just southeast of the church was another grotto, the Grotto of the Milk, which was also associated with Mary. These grottoes add another chthonic element to early Marian shrines that, with trees and water sources, continued to characterize Marian shrines throughout the Middle Ages and Early-Modern period

18. The site had apparently been frequented by the local Judeo-Christian populace prior to its inclusion in the sacred grove at some time after 135, but by the 4th century, social memory of the site would have been associated with the grove, which would have been almost 200 years old by that time.
19. The mid-2nd-century *Protevangelium of James* is the earliest written source for the birth of Christ in a grotto; see James (1924, 46).

and suggest further synchretic beginnings to her cult, since they characterize a range of pre-Christian sites in Europe and the eastern Mediterranean[20]. As well, however, just these landscape elements — grottos, trees, springs, rocks, mountain tops — were amongst the earliest biblical « pilgrimage sites », identified with the plentiful references to such landscape features in the Old and New Testaments. Indeed, the Roman Emperor Constantine intentionally sought out « mystical caves », or grottos, as sites to build churches in memory of the events of the Gospels (Kopp 1963, 14-27). By her identity with such « holy » landscape features, Mary was thus, from the perspective of Christian pilgrimage, incorporated into a biblical landscape that the Bible itself does not provide for her[21].

The Grotto of the Milk at Bethlehem also highlights another aspect of Mary that proceeds quite naturally from her doctrinally approved maternal role but which goes beyond doctrinal expectations : namely, Mary's perceived ability to help mothers. The most common of the legends associated with this site claims that the Holy Family sought refuge here during the Flight into Egypt, and in nursing the Christ Child, some of Mary's milk spilled onto the rocks. In other versions, Mary's milk dried up until she prayed to God, upon which it returned in such quantities that the grotto was covered in it. Moisture exuding from the chalky walls produces a white substance, like curded milk, that as early as the 7th century was commonly taken to be a milk relic, and at least 69 European churches eventually claimed Mary's milk from this source (de Mély 1890). Related to this grotto is the Church of St. Nicholas, in which it was also claimed that Mary squirted some milk on one of the columns and the floor, and that the column sweated continually, producing a similar substance. Obviously, this belief was capable of producing an unlimited supply of Mary's « milk », which was particularly sought to aid women in nursing their children, and the Grotto of the Milk was a pilgrimage site frequented not just by Christians but by Jews and Muslims, as well (Waterton 1879, 202-205 ; Pringle 1993, 137-157, with further references). It is, perhaps, not surprising that such a site was not limited to Christian use, since it fulfils a function that cannot be said to be specifically Christian but which broadly characterized any number of fertility goddesses in a whole variety of religions (Sharbrough

20. According to Sharbrough (1977, 46-48), trees, rocks and springs were age-old markers of goddess worship in ancient Europe.
21. Maraval (1985) describes a remarkable number of biblical pilgrimage sites characterized by thaumaturgically active elements of the landscape.

1977, 8-9). The age-old function of such sites, whether Marian or not, appears, as well, to have conditioned to a surprising extent their material form, and particularly the contiguous presence of a stable selection of thaumaturgically instrumental landscape elements.

Two aspects of this shrine site are characteristic of many other Marian shrines that were to appear. Firstly, added to the meagre biblical accounts of Mary and the fuller apocryphal accounts, legends have accrued at this shrine site that construct direct links between the site and the Virgin Mary herself. Such shrine legends typically contain details of Mary's life and miracles that have no basis in doctrinally approved sources — here, for example, the Holy Family's presence in the grotto is found neither in the Gospels themselves, nor even in the standard apocryphal sources, but only in the shrine legends of this particular site. Moreover, such legends commonly contain either variant versions or elements that conflict both with documented historical facts and with shrine legends elsewhere. Shrine legends have, thus, not been accorded much attention either by the Church or by the historical disciplines, yet they were important in interpreting Marian pilgrimage sites to the devotees who used them. I shall return to shrine legends later, but for now, suffice it to say that they offer constructions by which traditional holy places in the landscape are provided with a Christian pedigree that makes them both meaningful and acceptable to the Christians who use them. Their distance from the canonical accounts of the Virgin Mary and her life signals not heterodoxy but rather a structural distinction within the Christian community between the institutions of the Church, with their educated responsibility to maintain a single, consistent orthodox position, and the majority of secular Christians, whose concerns were far more mundane and far more varied. As Jonathan Sumption put it, for the masses, « Christianity remained [...] a ritual framework of life, rather than a body of coherent beliefs and commanding ideals » (Sumption 1975, 267-268). And the concerns of that life, beyond a specifically Christian concern for eternal salvation, were those of the common people at all times : health, fecundity, healing and security — all of which the Virgin Mary (and many other saints) offered in various ways. Christian women, particularly, have from a very early date identified with Mary as mothers, a claim that the Church always took pains to deny on theological grounds (Baun 2004).

The earliest history of Marian cult practices is clearest in the eastern Mediterranean, where it developed considerably in advance of western Europe. As has been demonstrated, the material aspects of Marian devotion

— shrine sites, relics, icons — developed in a considerable degree of conflict with the accepted doctrines of the Church, in this case concerning Mary's Assumption. It might be said that, as doctrinal differences between the Eastern and Western Churches developed, these conflicts were more apparently faced and resolved in the Orthodox Church than in the Roman Church. Divine presence in icons received more explicit theological attention by Orthodox theologians, such as St. John of Damascus, and particularly after the end of the Iconoclastic Period in 843, the worship of icons was brought into the theology and doctrine of the Church. Indeed, the feast of Orthodoxy, established in 843, centrally played up veneration of the Theotokos Hodegetria icon. As well, the iconography of Byzantine art, particularly that of the Nativity, normalized the sacrality of such chthonic shrine-site features as grottoes. Moreover, the theocratic conception of Byzantine imperial rule contributed to the normalization of Mary's thaumaturgical military role. The history of Marian theology, in fact, can be characterized as a continual attempt to bring such « popular » and material constructions within the acceptable beliefs of the Church[22].

The presence of Marian shrines was much slower to develop in Western Europe, and although the Byzantine east provided a source of models and of relics for European sites, the character of the Marian cult in the West was distinct from it, not least because of the doctrinal position taken towards images by the Roman Church[23]. Nevertheless, it was in Rome that the earliest manifestations of Marian devotion were established in Western Europe. Immediately following the deliberations of the Council of Ephesus in 431, which established Mary as the Mother of God, Pope Sixtus III (432-40) had the great basilica of S. Maria Maggiore erected. This was the first church dedicated to the Virgin Mary in Rome, and from this time, Mary had a continued presence there, signaled materially in churches and images. At the Lateran Council of 649, belief in the virginal birth was declared a doctrine of the Church, and in the mid-7th century, the first Marian feasts were introduced to Rome from the East. The liturgy of these feasts included processions to S. Maria Maggiore. This stational liturgy, eventually encompassing several Roman churches dedicated to Mary, would grow in importance through the later Middle Ages, when indulgences were

22. Thus, in a somewhat narrower context, Wenger (1955, 95): « toujours la théologie vient justifier une pensée véhiculée d'abord par les aprocryphes ».
23. For an overview of the Roman Church's attitudes towards the definition and use of images, see Kessler (2006).

attached to it[24]. Eventually, both S. Maria Maggiore and the Sancta Sanctorum chapel at the Lateran Palace claimed substantial secondary relics of Mary, but her presence in Rome was most importantly signaled by icons, at least two of which were eventually claimed to have been painted by St. Luke, the so-called Madonna of S. Sisto, originally located in the church of S. Maria in Tempulo, and the « Queen of Heaven » (cf. Apulius's invocation of Isis as the « Queen of Heaven » above) in S. Maria Maggiore[25]. Several of these icons can be shown to date from the 6th or 7th century, and others, so it is claimed, were brought to Rome from Constantinople during the Iconoclastic Period (726-843), but as with relics, their thaumaturgical potential was only gradually realized, and there is no clear indication of when they began to be considered as miraculous. In terms of pilgrimage to Rome, Marian icons were all overshadowed by the supposedly acheiropietic icons of Christ, particularly the Veronica, and Marian relics had to compete with the bodies of SS. Peter and Paul and a host of early martyrs. Nevertheless, Rome was to remain an important centre of Marian devotion, and its close relationship to the papacy put an orthodox stamp on it.

The dissemination of Marian devotion through Europe has not yet been mapped out very precisely. The Holy Roman Emperors, probably specifically on the model of the Byzantine Emperors, early championed devotion to Mary : Charlemagne dedicated his palace chapel at Aachen to Mary in 805, and after losing control of Aachen, Charles the Bald dedicated his new palace chapel at Compiègne to Mary in 877 (Iogna-Prat 1996[26]). The celebration of Marian feasts spread through much of Europe during the 8th and 9th centuries with the introduction of the Roman rite (Scheffczyk 1959, 8). Not only was Mary becoming more embedded in the liturgy, but probably in relation to the growth of private and votive masses, Marian altars were proliferating[27]. Carolingian theologians considerably developed a theological basis for Mariology, giving Mary a privileged role in the work of salvation (Scheffczyk 1959, esp. 345ff). Carolingian theological formulations concerning Mary had, by the 10th century, become reflected in a broader liturgical presence, and inklings of a more personal

24. For the early period of Rome's stational liturgy, see Baldovin (1987).
25. This icon has also been known as the Salus Populi Romani since the 19th century. On these early Roman icons of the Virgin, see Belting (1994, 311-30).
26. Charlemagne early acquired the same sort of legendary authority as Byzantine relic collectors in the « imaginative memory » of Western Europe ; see Remensnyder (1996, 891-892).
27. As were Marian church dedications ; Scheffczyk (1959, 31).

devotion to Mary also begin to appear during this period (Fulton 2002, 193ff).

Nevertheless, reports of Marian miracles are rare before 1000, even though Byzantine miracle accounts increasingly circulated. They rapidly begin to proliferate after the mid-11th century, however, and Carolingian theological developments can undoubtedly be considered as a prolegomena for this development[28]. Through the 9th and 10th centuries, theological interest in Mary emerged as a subject in its own right, rather than, primarily, as a peripheral object of Christological interest. Mary's royalty, as Queen of Heaven, and her power as a *mediatrix* was emphasized, and these developments can be taken as an entirely orthodox pretext both to increasing reports of Marian miracles and to the appearance of images of the Virgin in Majesty[29].

Early Marian miracles were recorded at and around Reims, at Paris[30], and at the Irish monastery of Bobbio in northern Italy during the 10th century[31], but it is only in the 11th century that a significant level of Marian devotion becomes evident, signaled by the proliferation of Marian prayers in the early 11th century and increasing reports of miracles associated with Mary (Fulton 2002, Part Two; Philippart 1996). By this time, as well, a handful of prominent Marian shrines had emerged, at Rome, Le Puy, Chartres, Clermont-Ferrand, etc., but it would appear that Mary still lacked a very firm material presence, and sites specifically associated with her were slow to appear. None of the European collections of her miracles before the 12th century associates the miracles specifically with a Marian shrine. The essentially peripheral nature and relatively small number of Marian relics must account for this slow pace of development. In fact, when hair of the Virgin was found and authenticated at Coutances Cathedral in the early 12th century, there were objections by the canons, since « hitherto no relic of the Virgin was known to exist on earth » (Sumption 1975, 49). This, as we have seen, was far from the case, but it points out what a novelty material evidence of Mary still was in northwestern France as late as the 12th century and, once again, validates indirectly belief in

28. By the 12th century, Marian miracle collections had reached the status of « popular literature » (Southern 1953, 246-254).
29. This connection has been convincingly made by Goullet and Iogna-Prat (1996).
30. As recorded by Flodoard of Reims; see Signori (1996a).
31. For Bobbio, see Sumption (1975, 49 and 312); « Miracula sancti Columbani » (1934, esp. p. 998).

Mary's Assumption[32]. Even by this time, however, Marian relics were becoming common in other parts of Western Europe, and claims of their presence would soon occasion no such reticent disbelief.

As well, it was in this very period that wooden carved images of the Virgin and Child in Majesty begin to appear in significant numbers (Forsyth 1972). Many (but certainly not all) early examples are known to have contained cavities intended to contain relics, making of them reliquary-statues. Thus, almost immediately, such images supplemented — and in some cases, it would seem, supplanted — Marian relics in accounts of Marian miracles and apparitions. Indicative of this is the well documented case of the earliest recorded Majesty statue, that of Clermont-Ferrand: in the late 10th or early 11th century, the monk Rotbert described the new church there, consecrated in 946, and its reliquary-statue of the Virgin. Although from later sources it is known that its Marian relics included some of the Virgin's hair, fragments of her clothing and possibly drops of her milk, none of the relics was specified by Rotbert, and it is clear that the reliquary — the statue of the Virgin and Child — eventually shared, if not usurped altogether, the sacral focus and thaumaturgical reputation of the relics. The process was even more complete at Le Puy, where it was only discovered that the 11th-century Majesty statue was also a reliquary while it was being burnt at the French Revolution; the relics inside had by that time been completely forgotten. Thus, right from the beginnings of Marian pilgrimage in Western Europe, both relics and images played active roles, and in distinction to the Byzantine east, where painted icons continued in use to the virtual exclusion of sculpted images, statues predominated. Apart from a few outlying examples, miraculous painted images of the Virgin and Child only had a significant European presence in Italy and some eastern areas which maintained close relations with Byzantium.

Church dedications to the Virgin Mary increased rapidly from the 12th century, due in part to her importance among the Cluniac and Cistercian monastic orders, and as Marian sites became denser throughout Western Europe, Mary's intercessory powers began to become more localized and their character began to expand, as well. One of the earliest indications of a distinct change in the tenor of Marian devotion in Western Europe is

32. The 12th century saw a distinct shift in theological tone concerning the Assumption, from spiritual to bodily; see Mayr-Harting (2004); also Barre (1949) and Schmitt (2006).

associated with the outbreaks of ergotism — the *mal des ardents* — that began to erupt in Western Europe from the late 10th century, recurring with some regularity well into the 12th century. Hysterical crowds of the afflicted made mass pilgrimages to several Marian shrines, including Arras, Cambrai, Tournai, Soissons, Paris, Chartres, etc. Confraternities and annual processions began to appear. This phenomenon apparently signals the beginnings of a divorce of Marian devotion from the liturgy and an expansion of Marian devotion beyond its monastic, largely soteriological, roots in a newly affective approach to salvation theology. Increasingly, Mary was being invoked in relation not to the fate of the individual after death but to the welfare of the individual during their mortal life. This « secularization » of the cult of Mary was accompanied, it would appear, by an increasing localization. It was from this time onwards that Mary began to be known by a spirally diversity of advocations : Our Lady of Chartres, Our Lady of Soissons, etc.

Some characteristic aspects of these developments can be seen in the Marian cult of Notre-Dame des Ardents as it developed at Arras. The legends that developed around this cult clearly responded to the desperation felt from the epidemic of ergotism there. They involve apparitions not only of the Virgin Mary but of a holy object associated with her as a thaumaturgically powerful relic. And those who were instrumental in securing Mary's aid were not, as one might expect, pious and upstanding Christians but, in this as in many other cases, less than ordinarily pious individuals to whom Mary vouchsafed her attention simply because, whatever might be said against them, they invoked her by name. According to these legends, the principal actors in the drama of Mary's apparition were two minstrels, a profession which, at the time, was a byword for dissolution and sinfulness. The story is told in great detail in an early charter of Notre-Dame des Ardents :

> A poor village minstrel named Itier lived at Tirlemont in Brabant. Another fiddler named Norman lived at Saint-Pol in Artois. These two men, according to the ideas of the time, had good reason to hate one another. Some years before, Norman had killed Itier's brother in a brawl. Now, during the night of 21 May 1105, a woman of supernatural beauty appeared to Itier. « You sleep, » she said to him, « Listen to my words. Get up and go to the holy Sion of Arras, where 144 sick people are suffering mortally. I will have you speak to Bishop Lambert, and you will tell him of this vision. You will tell him keep watch with you and a third person through the night. At the first cock crow, a woman dressed as I will hand over to him a candle which

> you will light. You will let the wax fall in vases full of water. You will give this water to the sick ones to drink and will wash their wounds. Those who believe will be cured; those who don't believe will die of their disease. You will take as a helper Norman whom you hate, and whom you will see and become reconciled with. He will be the third companion. » The same night, this woman appeared to Norman and told him the same. Norman made his way to the prelate Lambert who did not believe him. But Itier arrived in his turn, and the two men were reconciled in his presence. The prelate then began to pray with them, at the foot of the altar of Notre-Dame de l'Aurore, in the cathedral. At the first cock crow, the Virgin Mary appeared to them as she had showed herself to the two minstrels in their vision, leaving between their hands a miraculous candle. The water received several drops of wax and was distributed to more than a hundred sick people. It worked their cure instantly. This holy candle was enclosed in a shrine which was placed in the church of Saint-Aubert. (Couturier de Chefdubois, 1953, 58-60; my translation)

Although there are no contemporary documents recording these events, a confraternity was in existence by 1120, and the chapel of Notre-Dame des Ardents was built in a square at Arras in 1215 by Mahaut, Countess of Flanders, to shelter the Holy Candle (Drochon 1890). The surviving reliquary made to house the Holy Candle was made in c.1220-40 (Collective 2005, 14-19 and 86). The subsequent history of the Holy Candle, with its processions and invocations, is quite well documented, and drops of wax from it were used to make « secondary » candle relics that were widely distributed through the region, including examples at Brussels, Lille, Bruges, the abbey of Ruisseauville, Fleurbaix, Oblinghem, and Wambercourt.

As is typical of many Marian miracles, Itier and Norman were not exemplary Christians: they were disreputable minstrels, and one of them had blood on his hands. Some of Mary's interventions — helping pregnant abbesses or inebriated monks, for example — are sometimes even characterized as « amoral » , since they depended more on her invocation than on whether they were deserved. Typically, as well, there is little hint here that, as strict orthodoxy demanded, Mary was simply mediating between humanity and Christ as the effective cause of the miracle. She seems quite clearly to have been working on her own, rather than as *mediatrix* with Christ, and not for the eternal salvation of humanity but, more straightforwardly to alleviate mortal misery. Her solicitude can fairly be characterized as maternal, yet there is often a sensuous, and even sensual, element

to recorded Marian miracles[33]. In this respect, we can see something of the distinctive role that the Virgin Mary played as a *mediatrix*. Abbot Odo of Cluny (d. 942) appears to have been one of the first Europeans to invoke the Virgin Mary by the title of « Mater misericordiae » or Mother of Mercy (Gripkey 1938, 17-18). Her maternal mercy, of course, is directed towards those who invoke her name, but her special power to plead with Christ on behalf of humanity was increasingly seen to rely on her role as the Mother of God. According to Fulbert of Chartres (d. 1028), her maternal relationship with Christ means that Christ accords her more honour than the other saints, and alludes to her imperious exercise of the authority she has with her Son (Gripkey 1938, 18-21[34]) Indeed, in the course of the 13th century, somewhat after popular recognition of such status, it came to be doctrinally acknowledged that Mary was owed a higher degree of veneration than the other saints. St. Thomas Aquinas established distinctions between the nature of reverence owed to Christ, Mary and the other saints : Christians owe *latria*, adoration, to God himself, *dulia*, veneration, to the saints, but to the Virgin Mary alone is owed *hyperdulia*, superveneration (Miegge 1961, 180).

In other words, the doctrinal nature of the Virgin Mary was changing, and it cannot be doubted that such change was at least partially due to the weight of popular belief, based on her material cult. While theological writings attributed the thaumaturgical effectiveness of prayers to Mary to her privileged relationship with her Son, who through her mediation actually worked the miracles, the accounts of miracles at her shrine sites were far less theologically scrupulous. Even in collections of Marian miracles, written by educated clerics who certainly knew the orthodox doctrine of Mary's mediation with her Son, Mary is sometimes characterized not as « mediatrix » but as « operatrix » (Gripkey 1938, 122ff[35]). And occasionally, even in these sources, mediated as they are by clerical ideology, enthusiasm

33. Philippart (1996, 577-85) highlights the « transgressive » and conflictual perceptions of the Virgin Mary as they appear in miracles and hymns, from the 11th century onwards : she is at once daughter, mother and spouse, not only with respect to Christ but often in the sentiments of her devotees. Similarly, for the Byzantine east, see Baun (2004, 68).

34. Mary's status above the other saints was formalized by the Carolingians ; see Scheffczyk (1959, 30).

35. The author tries valiantly — desperately, one might almost say — to maintain an orthodox « theocentric » perspective on Mary's mediation, although less doctrinally acceptable interpretations are certainly possible.

sometimes overcomes dogmatic scruples. Thus, in the late 12th-century miracles of Rocamadour, the Virgin Mary is invoked in startlingly unorthodox — even heretical — terms : « Our Lady, thou, who hath created everything from nothing, thou, who cures the sick and guides trespassers back to the right path, thou, who are the way and the truth[36]. » For the masses, it was the Virgin Mary herself who worked miracles, and she left material reminders of them that retained thaumaturgical power not only to effect eternal salvation but to intervene in the lives of her devotees. Christ, however much he may have appealed to human sympathies through his suffering, always retained the awesome status of the final Judge, while Mary did not : her role did not centrally involve judgement but mercy[37]. The material trace of her intervention at Arras at the beginning of the 12th century was the Holy Candle[38]. Other material traces were also common, however, and as we shall see, the most common material trace of the Marian presence was to be statues of her.

In conjunction with these developments, Mary increasingly took on, in the popular imagination, the status of a local tutelary advocate. Although the exact stages of this transformation remain vague, it cannot be doubted that the chthonic associations earlier associated with Mary in the East were being forged anew in the West. Just what this new alliance was formed upon remains unclear, but from this time Mary's theological significance diverged markedly from her popular devotional profile. During this same period, theologians such as St. Anselm and St. Bernard of Clairvaux were constructing a different Mary, theologically grounded in exegesis and learned monastic devotion. Since it was manifested in writing, this image of Mary now has more documentary « presence » than the popular image, which survives largely through oral traditions which were eventually recorded in writings by early modern antiquaries, folklorists, etc., and through material traces, which are now widely dissociated from their original context. Insofar as it is appropriate to distinguish between these two overlapping hermeneutic strands of Marian identity, however, they interwove with each other through the rest of the Middle Ages and Early Modern period, each taking its own distinctive trajectory.

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36. Cited by Signori (1996b, 296-297). On the miracles of Rocamadour, see also Albe (1996) ; Bull (1999).
37. This is very thoroughly documented in England during the later Middle Ages by Oakes (2008).
38. With respect to the many Marian miracles involving burning candles that are not consumed, Philippart (1996, 580-581) hints at the possibility of an « exégèse phallique ».

Several related factors were responsible for a profound development of Marian devotion in the later Middle Ages. One was the rise of private devotion from the 13th century onwards, certainly encouraged by the mendicant orders and aided through the popularization of books of hours and such devotions as the Joys and Sorrows of the Virgin and, later, the Rosary. Another was Mary's special status as *mediatrix*. She was closer to Christ than the other saints and thus her mediation was more effective than theirs. Yet, that mediation could not be channeled, in the usual way, through the body relics of « the very special dead », as Peter Brown called the saints, for virtually no body relics existed : Mary's Assumption had not only removed her body from earthly existence, but unlike the other saints, whose bodies, in the form of relics, were still on earth, she was bodily present in heaven with her Son. This was made clear from the 12th century by the increasingly popular image of the Coronation of the Virgin which depicts Mary enthroned next to Christ — almost, in fact, as his equal (Verdier 1980 ; Thérel 1984)[39]. In this new iconographic subject can not only be seen how Mary's theologically defined lack of bodily presence could be justified but how images — and other less conventional material traces, as we shall see — could be brought to bear on her unique situation. In a situation of escalating importance and lack of bodily tangibility, images « materialize a way of experiencing ; bring a particular cast of mind into the world of objects, where men can look at it » (Geertz 1976, 1478). Marian images thus functioned in a more broadly cultural manner than can be imputed from the theological pronouncements and concerns of the time, based on an essentially pedagogical equation of images with words[40]. It was not simply that Marian images showed the illiterate what they could not read in books : images are more elusively indeterminate than words and are capable of shaping belief in a manner that does not passively reflect written pronouncements. Nor was it simply a matter of showing the invisible by means of the visible or directing devotion : Marian images came to embody her in ways that were essentially offensive to theological attitudes towards images,

39. See also the review of Thérel's book by Skubiszewski (1987). As in so many other respects, this Marian image finds a « pre-Christian » precedent in images of the mother of the gods. According to Belting (1994, 32) : « Emperor Julian the Apostate (A.D. 361-63), writing at a time when Christianity was already the state religion, composed a speech on the "motherless virgin who sits beside Zeus" and is "the mother of the thinking gods". Constantine restored her temple in Constantinople and donated a new cult image. »

40. For a useful overview and bibliography, see Kessler (2006).

taking on, rather, the character of relics than images. Rather than constituting a means towards the contemplation of higher, non-material truths, they functioned essentially as fetishes in a manner that, were the Church to have pronounced on it, would have been regarded as idolatrous[41].

The late Middle Ages saw a proliferation of images of all the saints, but amongst them, those of Mary formed an inordinately high percentage. From a relatively early date, moreover, images of Mary became the focus of her mediating power in ways which tended to transfer to images the instrumentality of Mary herself. For example, Rupert of Deutz (d. 1129) was inspired to write Marian exegesis by a voice he heard while praying before an image of Mary; St. Bernard was praying before a statue of the Virgin when she appeared to him and offered him her milk. The Marian miracle collections that appeared during the 12th and 13th centuries abound in miracles, many of them originating quite significantly in the Byzantine East, in which images of Mary were the effective instrumental channel for Mary's intercession (Gripkey 1938).

During the same period, apparitions of Mary appeared to crowds of pilgrims in churches such as Soissons and Chartres, where, as Flodoard tells us she did as early as the 10th century, she appeared as a blaze of light. The sensible presence of Mary, in other words, was growing — despite the paucity of her relics — most apparently through visual expectations in which images played a central role. In the early 12th century, for example, Guibert de Nogent claimed that, when his mother, in the diocese of Beauvais, pictured the Virgin Mary, she saw, in particular, Our Lady of Chartres (Benton 1984, 84-85). Although it is not clear that she was inspired by a particular image, Mary's presence at Chartres was increasingly mediated by images, and eventually, Marian presence and images would quite commonly be conflated into a single identity. This can be seen at Rocamadour, which rose to prominence as a Marian shrine in the late 12th century. There was no substantial Marian relic there, and none of the

41. The word « fetish » is now used, in an anthropological sense, to describe an inanimate object with magical power or through which spiritual influence may pass. It was first used by Portuguese explorers, in connection with African religious figures, in the late 15th century. They, however, derived it from the Portuguese word « feiticos » which could refer specifically to Christian relics and miraculous images. See « Fetishism » (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 9, 1960, 200-201). The Catholic Counter-Reformation attempted to channel the use of images towards acceptable practice, but their efforts did not have a significant effect outside of major urban centres. The results of Post-Tridentine legislation varied considerably; see Heal (2007).

earliest miracles recorded mention the statue of the Virgin and Child that eventually provided the principal focus for the devotion of pilgrims to her shrine (Bull 1999). However Mary worked her earliest miracles there, later pilgrims were in no doubt that the statue was instrumental in invoking her aid. The statue was thus grafted onto a pre-existing miraculous reputation embodied in the site itself, providing a visual focus for devotion that was increasingly favored at Marian sites. Even more remarkable is the shrine at Einsiedeln, in Switzerland, which became a pilgrimage site in the 9th century after a miraculous apparition of Christ, who dedicated the new church there; this left no visible sign, and it was eventually an image, not of Christ but of the Virgin and Child, that provided the visual focus necessary for the shrine's most popular period of miracles and pilgrimage devotion (Collective 2001, 250-51). Einsiedeln is now principally known, in fact, as a Marian shrine, and although the present statue of the Virgin and Child dates from the 15th century, legend traces it back to the time of the initial apparition of Christ (Moss and Cappannari 1953, 320[42]).

It was, in fact, only from the 12th century that statues of the Virgin and Child became at all common in western Europe, initially the enthroned « Majesty » type, with the Christ Child solidly supported on his Mother's lap, followed from the 13th century by images depicting Mary standing and holding the Christ Child on one arm. The synodal statutes issued by Peter Quinel, the bishop of Exeter in southwest England, in 1287 made an image of the Virgin Mary mandatory in every church in his diocese (Powicke and Cheney 1964, 1006). Not all such devotional images, by any means, acquired miraculous reputations and thus became cult images[43]. Miraculous cult images, nevertheless, became by far the most common foci of thaumaturgical instrumentality at the mushrooming number of Marian shrines that began to appear from this time, and while the cult of relics was enshrined in the doctrine of the Roman Church, that of miraculous images never was. Here, once again, can be sensed a clear — and growing — distinction between the construction of the Virgin Mary in doctrine and

42. I am aware of no study that treats the « Marian » identity of images of both the Virgin and the Christ Child, but where they have acquired specific names, reference to the Christ Child is invariably omitted. It is my feeling that this reflects the powerful « universalist » identity of Christ, as opposed to the growing « particularity » of Mary, through her material constructions.

43. For the distinction between a devotional image and a cult image, see Marks (2004).

at her pilgrimage shrines. Considered objectively, Marian images functioned as fetishes, and at the Reformation, it was not only Protestants, but reform-minded Catholics such as Erasmus who considered the cult of Mary as idolatrous[44].

From the 14th century onwards, well into the Early Modern period in Catholic Europe, Marian shrines, most of them focused on a miraculous image, not only proliferated but also became increasingly local in scope, with the exception of a few more successful sites. The chronology of this development has not yet been systematically charted, but there can be no doubt that by the 15th century, Marian pilgrimage shrines had never been as ubiquitous nor as varied.[45] While a Dorothy of Montau (1347-94) might, out of pious devotion, become an itinerant Marian pilgrim, others sought cures, fertility, release from imprisonment, protection on the high seas, relief from drought, etc., at a multitude of local shrines. One specialist sort of Marian sanctuary is known as a « sanctuaire à répit » : parents took stillborn infants to these chapels in the hope that Mary would momentarily revive them long enough to be baptized and thus receive burial in consecrated ground, avoiding an eternity spent in limbo (Vloberg 1960[46]). Many Marian shrines were also caught up in the escalating number of penitential pilgrimages during the later Middle Ages ; increasingly, these were imposed not by a confessor but by a secular court, as a form of temporary exile. Rocamadour, for example, was a major destination for penitential pilgrimages from the Low Countries. Also by the 15th century, many Marian shrines had indulgences attached to them. This was particularly the case at Rome, where many of the Marian stational churches, most prominently S. Maria Maggiore, accrued huge indulgences, especially at Jubilees. At least one Marian shrine outside Rome, Le Puy in the Auvergne, was granted a plenary indulgence on the model of the Jubilees : probably during the 14th century, the cathedral of Le Puy was granted a plenary « jubilee » indulgence that took effect in every year in which the feast of the Annunciation, 25 March, fell on Holy Friday (Framond 2000). In these

44. Desiderius Erasmus satirizes not only Marian shrines such as Walsingham but the whole « theory » of pilgrimage, i.e. that the special grace of the saints is more fully available at one particular place than another.

45. Mary Lee Nolan and Sidney Nolan have made a general study of pilgrimage shrine formation, which shows a remarkably high number of new shrines during the period from 1400 to 1529, and an even higher number in the period from 1530 to 1779.

46. One of the best documented « sanctuaires à répit » is that at Oberbüren in Switzerland ; see Collective (2001, 252-53 ; with further bibliography).

expanding circumstances, not only is the distinction between the Virgin Mary as « mediatrix » and as « operatrix » called increasingly into question, but when it is born in mind that the instrumentality of the vast majority of these shrines was a statue, rather than a primary or even a secondary relic, the distance of the material construction of Mary at her shrines from theological conceptions should be apparent. In fact, Mary alone was seldom invoked at any of her shrine sites. Reference was invariably to one of her innumerable advocations, which both fractionalize Mary into many distinct — and sometimes even competing — personalities and localize her in distinctive ways. Even more strikingly, however, the Marian cult statues at a huge number of her shrines were accompanied by the same sort of chthonic elements that characterized the earliest pilgrimage shrines to the Virgin Mary in the eastern Mediterranean.

The remarkably chthonic and localized construction of the Virgin Mary at her many local shrines, which contrasts so dramatically with the doctrinally defined « Queen of Heaven » , is based on several widely disseminated characteristics : the siting of the shrine in close conjunction with chthonic elements such as springs, rocks and trees which enter actively into the perception of the site ; shrine legends that embed the origin of the shrine and its statue in its chthonic elements ; and practices in which the miraculous image coordinates with the socio-economic functioning of the locale and participates in the activation of beneficial forces of nature in relation to agricultural activities. The sites, statues, legends and practices together work to construct and justify the location of sacrality with respect to specific, sometimes very small communities[47]. Although many of the same concerns characterize the shrines of various local saints, those with a Marian presence outnumber all others combined and are far more often focused on an image than a relic, as with other saints. What is striking among shrine legends is that, although they are tailored to specific localities and circumstances, the same *topoi* and patterns recur frequently over and over again.

Marian shrine legends have seldom been the subject of enquiry, but they are essential in recovering the localized constructions of the Virgin Mary throughout Europe. In order to exemplify the hundreds of very similar legends concerning the origins of miraculous statues of the Virgin Mary,

47. On the place of Marian shrines in local pilgrimages, see Bugslag (2006).

let us consider a paradigmatic account, mentioning, as well, some common variants. Typically, the statue's origin is miraculous. The accounts usually begin with a shepherd or shepherdess, or some other type of agricultural worker, who perhaps notices that an ox or bull in their herd keeps returning to the same spot; although it does not eat, it is fatter and healthier than the rest of the herd. The shepherd follows it, and alerted by the animal pawing the ground with its hooves and horns, digs up a statue of the Virgin and Child. Alternately, the shepherd finds the statue in a tree. Sometimes grottoes also play a role. Immediately, a spring gushes forth from the ground at the find spot. The shepherd takes the statue to his parish church, but the next day, it has miraculously returned to the find spot, and after several such failed attempts at moving it, a rustic chapel is built — as it is put in countless stories — on the site that the Virgin herself has chosen. Miraculous cures and interventions soon become associated with both the statue and the spring.

A concrete example of such a local pilgrimage shrine is provided by the chapel of Notre-Dame des Anges at Clichy-sous-Bois, just on the outskirts of Paris, which, according to tradition, originated when three merchants were robbed on this site in 1212 and tied to three oak trees. After having made a vow to the Virgin Mary, the merchants were miraculously released by angels, and a spring gushed forth at the foot of the trees. A small oratory was built and provided with a statue of the Virgin, and the site became known for miraculous cures, particularly of fevers. The church has been rebuilt many times since then, but the statue and spring are still apparent, and at least until the late 19th century, three crosses marked the site of the three oaks (Drochon 1890, 25-37; Couturier de Chefdubois 1953, 102-103). The conjunction of a statue, a spring and the implied presence of trees is typical of small Marian shrines[48].

Such foundation legends help to validate and, in a sense, construct the sacrality of a local landscape, and they do so in a manner that considerably predates the beginnings of Marian pilgrimage to many sites. The very same significant landscape features that crop up in relation to miraculous Marian statues — rocks, springs, trees — were determiners of sacrality before and during the conversion period of Europe, and early missionaries and councils often specifically condemned the worship of or vows

48. For a general study of this phenomenon, see Nolan (1986, 5-20).

made to rocks, trees and/or springs.[49] Hardly any council, general or particular, did not proscribe some such « superstitious » practice. The second Council of Arles (442-506) and, later, the second Council of Tours in 567 both enjoined pastors to chase from the church anyone coming with vows to rocks, trees or springs : « quemcumque in hac fatuitate persistere viderint, vel ad nescio quas petras, aut arbores, aut ad fontes, designata loca gentilium, perpetrare [...] ab Ecclesia sancta auctoritate repellent ». Two capitularies of Charlemagne forbade the lighting of candles or torches and rendering devotion to trees, springs or rocks[50]. Councils at Rouen and Toledo in the 7th century made the same condemnations (Jones 1992, 22). Such condemnations, in fact, were still being made as late as the 10th century (Filotas 2005, 145-148 and 195-201). By that time, however, « the pagan element in folk pieties seems to have been forgotten » (Filotas 2005, 193-194). Moreover, the entirely comparable chthonic elements widely associated with biblical sites in the Holy Land tended to validate the idea of such chthonic elements in a Christian context through the authority of revelation.

Nevertheless, such condemnations were thus made century after century. Francis Jones has emphasized that this continued attention to sacral landscape elements constitutes a clear indication of the unwillingness of the agricultural peasantry of Europe to give up the propitiatory practices that had assured their survival for millennia. Jones also detects a distinct shift in the tenor of the church's attitude towards the sacralized elements of the landscape at around the same time that pilgrimage was coming to its peak in Europe and, as well, at the same time that statues of the Virgin were beginning to appear in substantial numbers. He cites, for example, the 26th canon of St. Anselm, dating from 1102, which decreed : « Let no one attribute reverence or sanctity to a dead body or a fountain without the bishop's authority » (Jones 1992, 22-23). Rather than try to stamp out these practices,

49. See the copious documentation in Filotas (2005). On healing shrines associated with springs and their fate during the conversion period, see Rousselle (1990). This interdisciplinary study contains an in-depth examination of the relationship between medicine and thaumaturgical healing during the 3rd and 4th centuries AD. It focuses solely on spring shrines, since they are the best archaeologically documented type of healing shrine from Late Antiquity. Understandably, as well, the shrines considered were all major shrines supported from nearby cities. She claims too finally, I believe, the abandonment of such sacral sites in favour of the burgeoning thaumaturgical regimen based on the relics of saints.

50. These early decrees are cited in Grenier (1856, 410).

by this time, the church was trying to control them, and it would appear that this was commonly done by building chapels near such significant landscape features, and even by « baptizing » a sacred spring or tree by placing the image of a saint there. In his famous letter of 597 to St. Augustine of Canterbury, Pope Gregory the Great actually recommended such a strategem. Virtually the same observations were made by Dom Grenier in the mid-18th century, that zealous priests substituted, with pious skill, crosses and small chapels for trees and rocks : a great number of them could still be seen in his time besides the main roads in Picardy, or else people placed relics in the trunks of trees, objects — as he put it from an orthodox perspective — of « superstitious devotion » (Grenier 1856, 410[51]). At Allouville in Normandy, for example, presumably to sanctify an already established devotion to an 800-year-old oak tree in the village, the curate erected an altar to the Virgin in it as late as 1696. A pilgrimage still takes place there on 2 July (Drochon 1890, 135[52]). This is a process that has been called « guided synchretism » (Turner 1978, 59). One can easily believe that it was replicated at many local Marian pilgrimage shrines throughout Europe.

Whatever the exact mechanisms of this process, what results is a shrine site whose essential « Christianity » is vouchsafed by the Marian presence there, but which incorporates many « non-Christian » material elements. Although in its late 19th-century form the Chapel of Notre-Dame at Contenvillers, in Picardy, was of comparatively recent date, its form recalls a sacred grove, such as that of Adonis, in which the Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem was located (see above[53]). More immediately, this distinctive combination of shrine and trees also recalled the shrine legend, according to which the statue of the Virgin was discovered by shepherds in a thicket, but in one way or another, the Virgin Mary, as she is manifest at this typically minor rural site, has become subsumed into a religious perspective that cannot be limited even to « Christianity » , let alone the theological constructions of the Virgin Mary generated by the Christian Church.

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51. Although published in the mid-19th century, Grenier wrote in the mid-18th century.
52. Unlike many local shrines in France, this one was preserved from destruction at the French Revolution thanks to an ingenious strategem of the devout local school master, who attached a sign to the tree carrying the inscription « Temple of Reason » ! The website on the commune at Allouville contains recent photographs of the tree-chapel and also shows the current local « representation » of the shrine. For such tree-shrines in general, see Laugier and Gavot (1969, 107-18).
53. Typically, the sanctuary of Notre-Dame de Contenvillers is not well documented ; see Brohard and Leblond, (1992, 167).

That is perhaps even more apparent with respect to another Marian « tree shrine » in Picardy, that of Notre-Dame de Monflières, just outside of Abbeville. Legend traces the origins of this shrine back to the early 12th century, when a shepherd found a statue of the Virgin in an elm tree. The image was contested between the parishioners of Bellancourt (on which Monflières depends) and those of Vauchelles. It was put in a cart drawn by oxen who, according to a well-known topos, decided on the location of the statue by stopping at Monflières. A chapel was built there, and an elm tree planted in commemoration of the find tree, although the identity of the tree before the chapel seems to have been widely conflated with that of the find tree. A succession of chapels was built in front of it, and many local pilgrimages were directed here well into the 20th century. An annual pilgrimage of thankgiving by the people of Abbeville had been instituted at the end of the 15th century after the Virgin of Monflières was credited with saving them from the plague, and as at many other surviving Marian chapels in northwestern Europe, another was instituted during the cholera epidemic of 1849. The chapel contains many ex votos, including a rich garment for the statue donated by Queen Marie-Antoinette in 1779, in thanks for the safe deliverance of her daughter (Brohard and Leblond 1992, 165-68; Laugier and Gavot 1969, 115). Although there is still some pilgrimage activity there, in 1965, the « arbre miraculeux » was cut down. So great a place did it still play in the thaumaturgical instrumentality of the site, however, that a piece of its charred root was obtained by the nearby parish of Huppy and is still preserved in the church there as, essentially, a relic. It is virtually impossible to place a theologically acceptable rationale on such a « relic », although it occasions no local controversy. Just as was the case over a thousand years ago in this same part of Europe, this must be considered, beyond its connections with the Virgin Mary, as a tree cult, which has been Christianized by its Marian associations.

A similar situation can be clearly visualized in a print, dated 1737, depicting the pilgrimage to Our Lady of Montaigu, or Scherpenheuvel, in Belgium. A pilgrimage developed to a statue of the Virgin and Child in an oak tree, according to legend, before the 13th century. It is documented as early as 1304. As is so common elsewhere, a legend arose that the statue refused to be moved: a shepherd, noticing that the statue had fallen, tried to take it away, but was crushed under its weight until his master replaced it in the oak. A shrine was built on the spot; it was destroyed in 1568 during the religious wars but rebuilt in 1602, from which time the miracles associated with the shrine began to proliferate anew. In 1604, the bishop

of Antwerp had the tree, now dead from the depredations of pilgrims seeking relics, cut down. This did not end the tree's thaumaturgical reputation, however, for as was the case with other Marian shrines in 17th-century Belgium, copies of the Montaigu statue were made of the wood from this miraculous oak tree, many of them in turn acquiring miraculous reputations (Gillett 1957, 188-191). Due to the increase in popularity of the shrine, a splendid new church was built in 1609-27 on a different site, by Archduke Albert, with the town built symmetrically around it[54]. This new church contains a replica of the oak behind the altar, with « relics » from the original oak under the altar (Beissel 1913, 19-20; Gillett 1957, 188-91; Begg 1985, 159-60). The new church can be seen in the print, in the centre background, but as well, the artist has imagined the statue back in its original oak. There are cripples imploring the Virgin of Montaigu for intercession, in the hope of miraculous cures, but as well, a large communal procession, replete with banners of various confraternities and representatives of the local ecclesiastical hierarchy, is snaking its way from the town towards the original shrine site. Although in actual fact a nostalgic fiction, this image indicates, once again, the deeply felt thaumaturgical instrumentality of sacred trees associated with many Marian shrines throughout Europe.

Perhaps even more centrally than trees, springs have also played, and continue to play, instrumental roles in Marian shrine sites. Moreover, there has been a greater effort on the part of the Church to explain and condone the thaumaturgical efficacy of Marian springs, largely because of the notoriety of the Marian apparitions at Lourdes in 1858 to the young Bernadette Soubirous, which made of Lourdes the most spectacularly successful Marian shrine of the modern period. During the ninth apparition on 25 February, the Virgin told Bernadette to drink from the spring, and this became a regular feature of her later meetings with the Virgin. Then, during the twelfth apparition on 1 March, a friend of Bernadette who was present, Catherine Latapie, plunged her dislocated arm into the spring and was healed. This is the first recorded miracle at the site, and it specifically involved the thaumaturgical efficacy of the spring. Subsequent to the apparitions at Lourdes, a thorough investigation of them was carried out under the guidance of Mgr. Laurence, the bishop of Tarbes, who declared them as

54. The church in Counter-Reformation Cologne encouraged pilgrimage to Montaigu; see Heal (2007).

miracles officially recognized by the Church. These investigations specifically included the miraculous properties of the spring at Lourdes:

> After the wonderful things that happened « for the good of souls » , the Bishop moved on to the results produced by way of physical healing, especially among the sick who imitated Bernadette by drinking and washing themselves in the place pointed out by the Apparition, and asked if this was not an indication of a supernatural power coming down upon the spring of Massabielle: « In this way, sick try the water of the Grotto, and this is not without success; many were sick who did not respond to the most stringent of treatments, and who suddenly recovered their health. These extraordinary cures have had an immense effect [...] Sick people of all countries request the water of Massabielle [...] we cannot list here all the favours granted, but what we want to say is that it is the water of Massabielle which has cured those who were sick and who were abandoned or declared incurable. These cures have been obtained by using a water which in itself has no special curative qualities, according to those skilled in chemistry who have carried out rigorous tests. » These cures are permanent, specifies Mgr. Laurence, who wonders what had caused them: « Science, which was consulted on this subject, responded negatively. These cures are thus the work of God. Because, » the Bishop remarks, « they are directly linked to the Apparition which is the point of departure and inspiration of the confidence of the sick.[55] »

Not surprisingly, the Church credits « the Apparition » and its inspiration of faith within the sick with the mediative activation of the spring's thaumaturgical effects, thus subsuming this age-old association with the theologically acceptable role of Mary as *mediatrix*. Yet, there is no theological rationale for the distinctive manifestation of Mary's power at the site being embodied either in the miraculous spring or in the grotto in which it is located. Quite remarkably, as well, a statue of the Virgin Mary was soon installed in the grotto on the site of « the Apparition », as a simulacrum for it, and has subsequently become an important visual and material aspect of the site's identity. The material manifestations of this Marian shrine site, in other words, mirror those that have characterized Marian sites for centuries. Remarkably, as well, the statue and grotto — and sometimes, as well, a « spring » — have been recreated at Catholic churches around the

55. From the official Lourdes website, <http://www.lourdes-france.org/index.php?texte=1&langage=en> (consulted 12 Sept. 2009). The church has subsequently kept a carefully attested record of the many miraculous cures effected in relation to interaction with the spring.

world as simulacra for the apparition and the thaumaturgical efficacy of the site. While these many recreations have not, to my knowledge, generated miracles in their own right, they serve to keep alive chthonic associations with the Virgin Mary that, as I have shown, reach back beyond the beginnings of Marian devotion within the Christian faith, and link the Church-recognized miraculous efficacy of the site with an entirely distinct religious framework, rooted in powerful natural manifestations of the holy. As at so many other Marian shrine sites, moreover, the shrine legends serve to explain and to construct the holiness of the significant material elements of the site: the spring, the grotto and (in simulacrum) the appearance of the Virgin Mary.

Besides such means for inscribing a Marian pilgrimage into a local « sacred landscape », shrine legends also actively constructed a sense of local identity[56]. As has been shown, shrine legends commonly substantiate, in one way or another, that the statue itself, of its own volition, preferred its chosen location. This can also be seen with respect to the Marian shrine in the village of Vassivière, in the mountainous region of the Auvergne in central France. According to tradition, since the Middle Ages there has existed a very small chapel here, with a miraculous spring, sheltering a modest statue of the Virgin Mary, of the type known as a Black Virgin (see below). The statue enjoyed particular devotion from passers-by, who considered it as the guardian of the roads and the protectress of voyagers. The shepherds who led their flocks to the summer pastures never forgot to cross themselves when passing the statue. In June 1547 a strange adventure occurred which increased the celebrity of the small Virgin. A merchant from the nearby town of Besse refused to salute the Virgin and derided the devotion that his two companions showed to Notre-Dame de Vassivière. He immediately lost his sight and recognized that it was because he had neglected to salute the Virgin (note the common conflation of the identity of the Virgin herself with a statue of her). Led to Vassivière, he made honourable amends to Mary (i.e. the statue) and recovered his sight. Word of the miracle spread quickly. The inhabitants of Besse resolved to take better care of the statue and installed it in the Romanesque church of their village. In the night, the statue returned unaided to its rustic chapel on the

56. Lourdes is not a particularly good example of this, since it is perhaps the most « trans-local » Marian healing shrine ever to have arisen. Particularly before the railway (and even more so, the airplane), which made of Lourdes a Marian shrine of international importance, most Marian healing shrines were local in scope.

mountainside. The stunned citizens tried it again, and then a third time, with similar results. An accord was struck between the citizens and the statue (once again, note the personalized instrumentality of the statue). A chapel dedicated to Notre-Dame de Vassivière was built on the mountain, and consecrated in 1555. Henceforth, the Black Virgin passed summers in the mountains and was sheltered from the rigours of winter in the church of Besse. This legend gave birth to a ritual intimately connected with pastoral existence. On 2 July, on the feast of the Visitation, the parishioners, preceded by their curate, depart early in the morning, to the sound of bells, accompanying with great pomp the statue of Notre-Dame to its mountain chapel where it rests for the summer. The feast of the Visitation, more commonly known as the « Montée », is presided over by a King and Queen of Devotion, who buy at auction the right to follow the procession in sumptuous array, preceded by two enormous candles carried on stretchers. Other participants represent saints and angels. This ritual takes place even now, and a daily mass is said in the mountain chapel. When the first frosts arrive, the Black Virgin descends to Besse in a ceremony called the « Dévalade », which takes place on the Sunday following 21 Sept. For on the feast of St Matthew (11 Sept.), the flocks leave their summer pastures, and the statue of the Virgin shortly later accompanies them. The procession stops before every farm to the accompaniment of gun shots and flares. A large number of pilgrims follow the statue bare-foot, as a sign of penitence. This ceremony is still very much alive, and the Dévalade attracts huge crowds. It is readily apparent that this ritual is connected to the ancestral rhythms of transhumance in a rural region which has always been devoted to animal husbandry. The Black Virgin here still participates in essential myths of a society in which natural forces dominate. Like the elements, like the vegetation, like the animals, the statue of Notre-Dame de Vassivière is integrated into the succession of the seasons. Through this, it acquires at the same time its primitive force and its miraculous power[57].

As in so many other cases, it is almost impossible to characterize devotion to Notre-Dame de Vassivière in anything like doctrinal terms: religious, social, economic and geographical factors are all intimately combined — the « Queen of Heaven » has quite thoroughly become a local chthonic tutelary goddess. Besides its association with a miraculous healing spring, the legends of the statue's repeated returns to its « rightful place », legends that

57. This account is principally taken from Cassagnes-Brouquet (2000, 56-60).

are very common and widely disseminated in many forms, create an identity between the Virgin Mary, this particular statue, and its local sanctuary that, from strictly doctrinal perspective, would be considered idolatrous, were it not such a common phenomenon, since it confuses or conflates the identity of Mary so thoroughly with an inanimate object.

The statue's identity as a « Black Virgin » adds a further, quite exotic particularity to its local perception. Although the phenomenon of Black Virgins is still not sufficiently understood nor their appearance fully explained, it is clear that they arose primarily in the Early-Modern period. Various rationalizations of them have originated from their shrine sites, none of which can be fully justified as a historical account, yet one thing is clear about them all. Just as with the chthonic elements of so many Marian shrines, identity of a Marian cult statue as a « Black Virgin » serves to particularize the image and its thaumaturgical potential in a highly distinctive manner. Indeed, recent examination has shown that many « Black Virgins » were not originally black but were darkened at some point in their history (Cassagnes-Brouquet 2000[58]). In such cases, it is particularly obvious that the inscription of a Marian statue's character of blackness in the « imaginative memory » must represent an elaboration of the object itself[59]. In turn, the formalistic tenor of this distinctive coloristic quality of Marian statues lends more emphasis to the thaumatugical instrumentality of the statue, as opposed to the Virgin Mary working through the statue as *mediatrix*. Like shrine legends, which « represented a concerted textual effort to create the specificity of the relics and to integrate them into the history of the community » (Remensnyder 1996, 906), the blackness of Black Virgins becomes a sort of visual hagiographical *topos* that serves to mark its local uniqueness as a channel for the transmission of supernatural power. We are very far indeed with this phenomenon from any kind of theological character, but rather, what it does is make the object more effective as a fetish — or from the Church's point of view, an idol[60].

Often, as well, we are very far from any strongly apparent aesthetic character, although the aesthetic qualities of statues of the Virgin and Child vary remarkably. It is not primarily as a work of art, however, that such an object had meaning within its sanctuary setting. The low aesthetic level

58. For the well documented case of the Black Virgin at Le Puy, see Vialet *et al.* (1983); Carlat (1993); Vilatte (1996).
59. On imaginative memory, see Remensnyder (1996); Mariaux (2006, 224).
60. On the creative Christian rationalization of Christian « idols », see Camille (1989).

involved in many of these works is a result of the low social and economic positions of the many small communities that claimed Marian shrines. Yet, such statues and shrines played an integral role in these communities of considerable importance and interest, and low aesthetic quality must be acknowledged as pertaining to the social and economic conditions of art production among these groups. Many of these works were not made by professional artists, and even some of the most thaumaturgically powerful and popular images, such as Our Lady of Rocamadour, are almost totemic in their powerful stylized crudity. A comparison with other cultural traditions of fetishes is readily suggested.

Quite anomalously, from an aesthetic perspective, many such statues became honored by richly worked haloes, crowns and garments. This involves not simply a formal transformation of a statue but also provides, through donations and the actual dressing of a statue, for a participatory identification through which the faithful can become constitutive of the identity of that statue (Trexler 1991, 196[61]). It also tends to reduce the distance between simulacrum and actuality in a manner that, during the Counter-Reformation, led to attempts to legislate against this practice, which was considered as explicitly idolatrous. Indeed, in some of the many places where the practice of dressing statues of the Virgin Mary has survived, statues of the Virgin are often spoken of as if they were actually alive. A remarkable instance of this comes from the recent fieldwork of Marlène Albert-Llorca in Catalonia in relation to Our Lady of the Snows, a statue of the Virgin and Child that is shared between the nearby villages of Aspe and Hondón de las Nieves in the Alicante province. This statue had been found between the two communes, and the record of their contention over its ownership can be documented at least back to the 17th century. Since the 19th century, they have alternated possession of the statue for a year at a time. Each time the statue is transferred from one village to the other, its clothes are changed, and the statue even has travelling clothes for the journey between villages. For the inhabitants of Aspe and Hondón, the garments

61. See also Albert-Llorca (2002, 121): « L'habillement permet à la communauté locale de s'approprier la statue ; il a aussi pour effet de la singulariser. Non parce qu'il spécifie son apparence [...] mais parce que ses parures sont des pièces uniques. La statue porte un *manto* offert par telle famille, des bijoux qui appartenaient à telle et telle autre, une perruque confectionnée avec les cheveux de telle et telle femme. Rassemblant les dons des habitants, la Vierge peut dès lors donner corps à la "communauté imaginée" ».

« change » the Virgin into « theirs » , and as if it were a living being, they accuse one another of not feeding her well. In 1994 a man of Aspe confided in the ethnologist : « You see how thin she is ? They don't feed her well at Hondón. Look at her closely this evening, when she arrives at the square in front of the church ; look at her closely, and you will see that she has changed in appearance. It is easy to see that she prefers being with us than at Hondón » (Albert-Llorca 2002, 117-21).

Indeed, at Agres, also in Catalonia, the miraculous finding of the statue of the Virgin there is acted out annually by the congregation, and a young woman from the village is chosen to « play » the statue, which thus becomes fully alive (Albert-Llorca 2002, 51). Quite remarkably, between 1925 and 1933, thirty-three statues of the Virgin Mary in the diocese of Valencia were officially declared by various local councils to be perpetual members of their local governments (Albert-Llorca 2002, 95 and 221, n. 96). One of the consequences of such extreme particularization is the acknowledgement of the distinct identity of different statues of the Virgin Mary, each with a different advocation which makes of it an entity distinct from all other statues of the Virgin Mary. Thus, the Spanish Virgin statues of Lluch, Algemesi, Carcaixent, Cullera, Valencia, Majorca and Alzira are known as the Seven Sisters, and other such related statues of the Virgin exist, as well (Albert-Llorca 2002, 68-70).

Thus, as Alban Bensa wrote of popular local cults in general, it can be said of these statues that they embody a certain ambiguity : at one level, they present themselves as iconographic universals, all being readily identifiable as the Virgin and Child, an identity that conforms with the theological beliefs defined by the Roman Church hierarchy ; yet, on a very different level, through their various advocations, social particularization and chthonic associations, they present themselves as particularistically local, characterizing an original form of local, largely peasant piety, rigorously inscribed in space, that makes each of these statues an entirely distinct source of thaumaturgical power (Bensa 1978).

The ultimate implications of the wide dissemination of Marian sanctuaries in the late Middle Ages and Early Modern period have never been thoroughly investigated, but some preliminary conclusions are possible. In investigating the relationships between individual Christians and nature in Late Antiquity, Peter Brown has contrasted the « vertical » model of dependence on the *potentia* of the saints in invoking supernatural aid with a « horizontal » model of the age-old dependence on « the voiceless power

of nature itself » (Brown 1981, 118[62]). As Christianity permeated the Late Antique world, the dialectic between these two models shifted. At least in the early Middle Ages, the Church in western Europe resisted the integration of « horizontal » elements such as springs, rocks or trees, which are lost sight of until centuries later. Their re-emergence is a complex historical phenomenon which has yet to be fully explained, but throughout the late Middle Ages and Early Modern period, Marian devotion through Europe manifested itself in ways that particularized Mary's identity to local populations in a variety of ways that sometimes take on recognizably regional forms. In Spain, at sites like Montserrat, mountains played a prominent role in the definition of Marian shrines[63], while in Austria, many miraculous Marian images — even statues made of stone — arrived at their sanctuaries floating on rivers[64]. Much more widely disseminated were miraculous springs associated with Marian shrines[65]. Many of these natural elements combine intimately, as well, with the human activities associated with them. While, at Vassivières, Mary has been incorporated into the socio-economic patterns of transhumance pasturage, many others are integrated into the concerns of a more sedentary, rural agricultural existence. In Flanders, an area where cloth manufacture was prominent, several Marian shrines feature thread miraculously supplied by the Virgin herself in apparitions[66]. Wherever they exist, miraculous Marian shrines and statues thus undermine Mary's strictly theological identity in a variety of ways. For local populations, perennial religious concerns mesh with those of the Church in a highly distinctive manner, yet which is not considered to clash at all with « their » Mary's orthodoxy. Thus, in 1769, the village of Aspe, who were contesting ownership of the statue known as the

62. Given later developments, both Brown (1981) and Rousselle (1990), conclude too finally the completeness of the general transformation of the « horizontal » into a « vertical » model of supernatural instrumentality.
63. On Montserrat and such other Spanish Marian shrines as Nuria, see Albert-Llorca (2002, 75-78).
64. On Austrian Marian shrines associated with rivers, see Beissel (1972).
65. Nolan and Nolan (1997) attempt to chart other regional aspects of European pilgrimage shrines, including those dedicated to the Virgin Mary.
66. The oldest such apparition to be recorded occurred at Valenciennes in 1008, during an outbreak of plague, when the Virgin surrounded the city with a string, thus protecting it; see l'abbé Julien (1886). Other such thread, which effected miraculous cures and was believed not to diminish when cut, existed at Bareldonck, Dadizeele and Rozebeke, for which see van Heurck (1922).

Virgin of the Snows with the nearby village of Hondón, petitioned the religious authorities with a remarkably naïve enthusiasm : « For the people of Aspe », they wrote, « there is no other God nor any other St. Mary than the Virgin of the Snows » (Albert-Llorca 2002, 104).

Nowhere is this a cut-and-dried situation. Different voices characterize each community, with more orthodox opinions mingling polyvalently with others of an entirely heterodox nature. At many Marian shrines, the Church officially explains the efficacy of the site in theologically acceptable terms, while at the same time claiming a theologically neutral status on the phenomenon. That is certainly the case at Lourdes, where the ecclesiastical guardians of the site until recently averred that :

> the Apparitions add nothing to the Creed or the Gospel ; they are a reminder for an age that had a tendency to forget them ; they are indeed, a prophetic Visitation to our world. God does not want us focusing on the wonderful or the extraordinary ; but through the Apparitions he gives us a sign that we should return to the Gospel which is the Word of his Son, the Word of Life[67].

Yet, the sick and crippled still visit Lourdes in droves, hoping specifically for a miraculous cure. And it is not just « the people » who enthusiastically drink water from the spring and take it home in modern « pilgrims' ampulae » but also monks, nuns and priests. And the widely spread simulacra of the Lourdes apparitions, all over the world, focus specifically on its chthonic aspects. Whether the church wishes it or not, people are still strongly drawn to aspects of the Marian cult that lie far outside of the theological boundaries of Church-approved belief. Indeed, when the material constructions of Mary at her shrine sites and their implications are accorded significance, it becomes apparent that, in the religious history of Europe, it is appropriate to take a broad, sociological perspective on her various social and religious roles rather than an essentially authoritarian perspective which is limited to the institutional agendas of the Church.

This difference of perspective has, indeed, led to misunderstandings on the part of piously orthodox and ecclesiastically minded scholars. Jacques Toussaert, for example, on the basis of his statistical findings that

67. From the official Lourdes website, <http ://www.lourdes-france.org/index.php ?texte =1&langage=en> (consulted 12 Sept. 2009). Significantly, this website has subsequently been radically altered to remove any detailed description of the miracles and any attempt at explaining them.

attendance at Mass was greatly on the decline during the later Middle Ages, was at a loss to explain, or even recognize, the pilgrimage activity that continued to thrive in his region of study (Toussaert 1963). In fact, Marian pilgrimage shrines were appearing in ever greater numbers at the time, and it is now more completely recognized that « parish religion » and « shrine religion », as William Christian has called them, constitute two discrete aspects of European religious life and practice (Christian 1977). The Catholic Church, too, explicitly recognized that increase in pilgrimage can occur in periods of declining attendance at Mass when, in April 1992, they convened « the first church conference ever held on the subject of pilgrimage » (Nolan and Nolan 1997, 91). Thus, as it has from the beginning, the theologically defined mission of the Church cannot be brought into complete harmony with the material realities of pilgrimage shrines and, as they have since the 5th century, must rationalize practices and beliefs which spring from the material constructions of pilgrimage shrines. Future study of the history of « Christian » religion in Europe must regard religion from a broader sociological perspective than the institutional self-definition of the Church[68].

Where it can, the Church has attempted to bring the Marian cult back within the theologically condonable fold. This was particularly the case during the Catholic revivalism of the 19th century, when many Marian shrines were redefined in more acceptable ways by suppressing both the chthonic material elements of the sites (trees, for example) and the ideological underpinnings for them[69]. At the same time, Mary was enlisted by the Church to fight the perceived threat of secularism and such new, godless ideologies as communism. One widely used measure that was redefined to fit these circumstances was the coronation of statues of the Virgin. This

68. This is a more promising methodological framework in which to consider this phenomenon than the problematic concept of « popular religion », for which, see Boglioni (1977); Filotas (2005, p. 25-28).

69. This, in turn, it might be argued, has made a significant impact on the historical disciplines within the academy. Witness Émile Mâle's statement, first published in 1913, that during the Middle Ages « They organised art as they had organized dogma, secular learning and society. The artistic representation of sacred subjects was a science governed by fixed laws which could not be broken by the dictates of individual imagination. It cannot be questioned that this theology of art, if one may so put it, was soon reduced to a body of doctrine » (1958, 1). As can be seen in Hamburger (2006), disciplinary methodologies have at least begun to abandon this theologically blinkered perspective.

ritual had been given a solemn and public form during the Counter-Reformation : Pope Clement VIII (1592-1605) had himself crowned the Virgin in the Church of S. Maria Maggiore in Rome, which was crowned a second time by Pope Gregory XVI (1831-46) on 15 August 1837, on the same day that he promulgated the bull *Coelestis Regina*, which fixed the rules for the ritual, stipulating that only images of Mary, and not other saints, might be crowned. Moreover, before the coronation of a Marian statue could take place, papal approval had to be given, after a request from the bishop of the diocese, who was required to hold an enquiry in order to assure that the statue had been subject to a long and particularly intense veneration (Albert-Llorca 2002, 123-24). The word « veneration », of course, is entirely within the acceptable bounds of orthodox image use, and the ceremony of coronation provided the opportunity for disseminating to the crowds of pilgrims drawn to the shrine a theologically acceptable vision of its character and function and for subsuming the particularity of a specific statue within the liturgically defined universality of the Church hierarchy. Yet, at the same time, to the devotees of the shrine, it acknowledged the particularization — and favor — of their « Mary » over all others. The ambivalence of the gesture is, thus, typical of long-standing ecclesiastical attitudes towards the Virgin Mary : a purified theological image of the Mother of God trickles down from the top of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, where it eventually transmogrifies in its discourse with a radically different material image that wells up seemingly out of the earth itself. As I hope to have shown in at least a preliminary manner, these two very different constructions of the Virgin Mary not only interweave in the current discourse concerning her identity, but they have been there, in one conjunction or another, from the very beginning.

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Résumé

Le présent article se penche, dans une optique de longue durée, sur deux constructions contestées de la Vierge Marie, l'une d'ordre théologique et l'autre d'ordre matériel. Les constructions matérielles, constituées de matériaux concrets, telles que les reliques, les images, les lieux de pèlerinage et les composantes géographiques sacralisées, sont fort différentes des constructions théologiques et elles s'entrechoquent parfois avec ces dernières. Nous sommes d'avis que ces deux courants herméneutiques distincts de l'identité mariale ont toujours constitué un discours, et que ni l'un ni l'autre ne peuvent être compris sans leur conjonction. Cette considération discursive de Marie permet d'une part d'élargir les paramètres de l'identité historique de Marie bien au-delà des limites hégémoniques prescrites par l'Église et, d'autre part, de mieux saisir la variété de fonctions et de sens conférés à la Vierge par ses diverses « clientèles ».

Abstract

This article charts, through the longue durée, *two contested constructions of the Virgin Mary, the one theological, the other material. Material constructions, founded on such concrete material as relics, images, pilgrimage shrines and sacralized landscape features, differ considerably from, and have sometimes clashed with theological constructions. These two quite distinct hermeneutical strands of Marian identity, I contend, have always formed a discourse, and neither can be understood fully without reference to the other. This discursive consideration of Mary both broadens consideration of her historical identity beyond the hegemonic definition of the Church and creates a fuller appreciation of the diverse functions and meanings that Mary has had for her various constituencies.*