ESSAYS ON LAY AND ECCLESIASTICAL COMMUNITIES

IN AND AROUND THE MEDIEVAL URBAN PARISH

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Reflexions on urban parish communities in medieval Europe and its relevance to current historiography

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Abstract: Regarding the smallest and closest ecclesiastical jurisdiction to the population, the parish constitutes a privileged unit of study for comprehending social, spiritual, and even behavioural aspects. Within the medieval city, its approach allows us to detect territories with differentiated populations that were also defined by the bond and relationship established with the parish church. This article serves as an introduction to the volume of studies on urban parish communities, spanning a chronology widely established between the eleventh and sixteenth centuries, and a geography that extends from the Iberian Peninsula to Transylvania.

Resumo: Tratando-se da jurisdição eclesiástica mais pequena e mais próxima das populações, a paróquia constitui uma unidade de estudo privilegiada para compreender aspetos sociais, espirituais e

até comportamentais. Dentro da cidade medieval, a sua abordagem permite-nos detetar territórios com populações diferenciadas que se definiam também pelo vínculo e relação estabelecida com a igreja paroquial. Este artigo serve de introdução ao volume de estudos sobre comunidades paroquiais urbanas, numa cronologia amplamente estabelecida entre o século XI e o século XVI e numa geografia que se estende da Península Ibérica à Transilvânia.

For decades, European historiography has focused on the study of the city as a setting that allows horizontal solidarities and connections to emerge, group spirit to consolidate, and relational bonds to be established between peers[2]. As such, the study of the organization of urban communities – in contrast to their rural equivalents, where structures are, as a rule, more rigid, vertical, and hierarchical – is already a classic theme, with many published works. These communities have been captured through the study of urban political elites[3], the establishment of labour links[4], and furthermore trade relations[5]. European historiography, however, has also studied the influence that churches and monasteries had in defining the lay communities around them, emphasizing a dialectical relationship between the institutional characteristics of the former and the structuring of the

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[2] Among others, see Susan Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900-1300*. 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1997), 155-218; Jacques le Goff, *Pour l'amour des villes* (Paris: Textuel, 1997) and Chris Wickham, *Sleepwalking into a New World: The Emergence of Italian City Communes in the Twelfth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

[3] See, among others, *Les élites urbaines au Moyen âge : XXVIIᵉ Congrès de la SHMES (Rome, mai 1996). New edition [online]* (Paris : Éditions de la Sorbonne, 1997) *http://books.openedition.org/psorbonne/34234*; Filipe Themudo Barata, *Elites e Redes Clientelares na Idade Média* (Lisbon; Évora: Colibri; CIDEHUS, 2001);

[4] Among others, see Wim Blockmans, "Flemish Textile Workers' Struggle for Emancipation in the Thirteenth Century", in *Disciplined Dissent in Western Europe, 1200-1600: Political Action between Submission and Defiance*, ed. Fabrizio Titone (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2022).

[5] Read, among others, Amélia Aguiar Andrade and Flávio Miranda, "Lisbon. Trade, Urban Power and the King's Visible Hand", in *The Routledge Handbook of Maritime Trade around Europe 1300-1600*, ed. W. Blockmans, M. Krom and J. Wubs-Mrozewicz (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 333-351. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315278575.

latter[6]. The study of urban medieval parishes took shape within this framework, and the parishes became the setting for the study of both the ecclesiastical communities that tended them and the institutions of assistance that were housed within them. This is in addition to the multiple developments in which the study of parishes furthered the understanding of the evolution of the urban fabric of the city[7].

Within the parish, communities have dispensed with conceptual problematizations. Structured from the bond that a population and a territory have to a church, they have been understood and studied as communities crystallized in one of the longest-lived relational models of Western society[8]. In this context, social and religious studies have been organized around the dichotomy between lay and ecclesiastical communities[9], emphasizing the influence of a paradigm of association and the practices of one in relation to the other. A further, similarly explored line of study is that of the intervention of the laity in the regulation of clerical activity to counterweight any eventual shortcomings and negligent behaviour on the part of the clerics. Finally, there are well developed studies that seek to understand the involvement of the laity in the construction of parochial pastoral care, namely through the foundation of soul-suffrage ceremonies and the management of their maintenance over long periods of time. Recent work by Clive Burgess on the city of Bristol emphasizes how parishioners' zeal for the financial viability of chantries strengthened the religious and pastoral functions of the parish, while cementing

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[6] Among others, see Ludovic Viallet, *Bourgeois, prêtres et Cordeliers à Romans (vers 1280 - vers 1530). Une société en équilibre* (Saint-Étienne, Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 2001); Hélène Noizet, *La fabrique de la ville : espaces et sociétés à Tours, IXe-XIIIe siècle* (Paris : Publications de la Sorbonne, 2007), Philippe Cailleux, *Trois paroisses de Rouen, XIIIe-XVe siècle: Saint-Lô, Notre-Dame-la-Ronde et Saint--Herbland : étude de topographie et d'urbanisme* (Caen : Pôle Universitaire Normand, 2011).

[7] See, among others, Nigel Baker and Richard Holt, *Urban Growth and the Medieval Church: Gloucester and Worcester* (London: Routledge, 2004).

[8] Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900-1300*, pp. 79-100.

[9] See, among others, Anne Massoni and Maria Amélia Campos (eds). *La vie communautaire et le service à la communauté : L'exemple canonial et ses répercussions dans le monde laïc (Europe Occidentale, du XIe au XVe siècle)* (Évora : Publicações do Cidehus, 2020) http://books.openedition.org/cidehus/11477.

the sense of community[10]. Additionally in this respect, the role played by widows is particularly significant. Recent research outlines the relevance of urban parish communities in the study of social connexions and in the transfer of literacy skills and practices[11].

Even though the current volume reflects upon a well-grounded field of study, there is room for new approaches and a better understanding of the urban parish communities. With that in view, in February 2021 we invited the submission of unpublished, original research on Communal Organization in the European urban parish, from the Gregorian Reform to the Council of Trent.

Despite the substantial amount of scholarship undertaken on the subject, the history of parishes has remained markedly institutional in approach, mostly due to the scope of sources available and the very logic behind the preservation and organization of documents in the archives. The examination of parish networks has largely been based on records of ecclesiastical taxation, making the papacy a 'universal' force to be reckoned with. Such assessments are undoubtedly valid and useful, as are the often-irreplaceable sources on which they are based, but the Research in Medieval Studies meetings series opted to highlight instead research on the communities forming the urban parish, which often predated the establishment of a church in the region and the institutionalization of jurisdiction and circumscription. In view of this, we called for research papers focusing on sociological analyses of the secular and ecclesiastical communities, the rhetoric of each, and the interactions between them – both in terms of cooperation and collaboration as well as conflict and competition – to characterise the parish in its temporal and spiritual dimensions.

As a starting point, we suggested four lines of enquiry, to be seen, not as separate, but rather as intersecting plans, with the common

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[10] Clive Burgess, *The Right Ordering of Souls: The Parish of All Saints' Bristol on the Eve of the Reformation* (Woodbridge, UK ; Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2018).

[11] See Susan Folkerts (ed.), *Religious Connectivity in Urban Communities (1400--1550): Reading, Worshipping, and Connecting through the Continuum of Sacred and Secular* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021).

goal of contributing to understanding the parish as an institutional, judicial, and fiscal reality across medieval Christendom, through a better knowledge of the men and women that were part of it. The suggested avenues of research were: 1. Secular and regular ecclesiastical communities in and around the parish; 2. Households and urban lineages: strategies of social affirmation and the preservation of memory; 3. Urban social groups and professions: association, representation, and solidarity; 4. Foreigners, religious minorities, and disreputable occupations: dynamics of integration and exclusion.

The ten chapters published in this book are the result of the discussion of the papers presented during the meeting and the double anonymous peer review by the volume's scientific commission. They almost completely cover the proposed lines of research and give a definite contribution to a wide-ranging reflection on the medieval parish and the secular clergy, considered within a long-term chronological framework and a wide geographical scope that allows the analysis and confrontation of case studies from the Iberian kingdoms, Northern France, Italian Piedmont, Lombardy, Flanders, Transylvania, and North of the Holy Roman Empire.

As a whole, this book tells of dynamics of social, religious, and cultural exclusion and inclusion within lay communities, of the constitution of family elites and parish confraternities; it shows the composition and the recruitment rationales of the parish clergy and of some ecclesiastical chapters with a duty of *Cura animarum*; it examines the relations of the churches and parochial clergy with more prominent – secular and regular – ecclesiastical institutions in the context of the establishment and exercise of the right of patronage; finally, it explores the role of the secular clergy in the application of justice, based on the characterization of their cultural and juridical formation.

If a standard definition of "parish" in the period under analysis were to be proposed, it would be as the smallest unit of ecclesiastical administration, composed of a territory and the population residing therein, held together by a church – with a baptismal font and

cemetery – where the inhabitants received the sacraments and, in return, paid a number of taxes. Although the organization of the parish network happened irregularly and at different paces in different regions, after the Fourth Lateran Council this classical definition seems applicable to the whole of Western Christendom. However, the elements that form the parish – territory, population, church, spiritual service, taxation, etc. – expose it to numerous variables and conditioning factors that make this ecclesiastical unit a complex yet versatile entity, especially in the urban world.

The ecclesiastical communities organized within parish churches show yet another dimension, with the parish as a space of integration and circulation of men of heterogeneous origins and characteristics. Francesco Cisselo and Elena Corniolo reveal how the chapters of cathedrals and parish churches were often a form of provision of benefits for clerics on the move for religious and academic purposes. The University in Vercelli exerted the same form of attraction to these men as the pilgrimage networks in the Piedmont region. Despite this, studies on Vercelli and Aosta show only a small number of foreign clerics, in contrast to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries Coimbra that Rosário Morujão presents in her article. In this city, ecclesiastical benefices often served instead to maintain university clerics, and, in one of the less populated parishes of the city, part of the seats in the collegiate chapter were used to support student clerics. The parish church here thus served as an effective reception centre – when the clerics came to Coimbra to live –, or an abstract and distant support when benefits were granted to students going to other universities in Europe.

The analysis of the parochial clergy conducted by Adinel Dinca for the region of Transylvania, in the kingdom of Hungary, in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries, unveils a significant number of Transylvanian clerics within the *natio Hungarica* attending European universities. A close look at the activity of these individuals discovers their engagement in representing laymen before both lay and ecclesiastical justice, while the study of the libraries in the region

shows a high ratio of law books. Although Adinel Dinca has confirmed the legal education of auxiliary clerics, it could be argued that in Transylvania, as in the remainder of Christendom, the parish clergy was a vast and very diverse social body, in terms of their social background and education. In Transylvania, as in other regions, in addition to the religious service inherent to their status, they provided the lay population across the board with the expertise needed to deal with the lay and ecclesiastical courts at different, more or less complex, moments. In my opinion, it would be very useful to replicate this type of analysis applied to other regions. Although the heterogeneity of the available sources does complicate comparative approaches, the combined analysis of the legal expertise of parish clergy and their activity in representing parishioners and mediating conflicts in different regions of Western Christendom could be very fruitful. I believe this is also central to understanding medieval parish communities.

After these three chapters on ecclesiastical communities, one can find a second approach, focused on external ecclesiastical and lay agents that influenced the organization of the parish, its daily life and its religious service. Among the ecclesiastical elements with significant influence on parochial life, the role of the bishop must be stressed – and likewise that of the episcopal governance. Kyle Lincoln invites us to reflect on the agency of a bishop, and his role as lord of a territory and, as such, the issuing authority of the law that applies to that territory, in a study focused on the kingdoms of Castile and Leon during the twelfth century. This analysis was based on the study of the *fueros* (municipal law-codes) issued by the episcopal chanceries of Belinchón (1171), a Toledan archiepiscopal fief, and of Palencia (1184), which were systematically compared with analogous law codes issued by the archbishop of Compostela and others. The early period considered does not allow great prominence to the parish network in the analysis, but it nonetheless offers a clear understanding of the complex process of composition and writing of laws, and of the several agents involved therein.

The parish network is tacitly present as the backdrop to their implementation, as well as the social framework of their acceptance and contestation.

The analysis carried out by Luís Rêpas and Mário Farelo of the management of the right of patronage held by the royally-founded monastery of Odivelas over the collegiate of São Julião de Santarém offers further important perspectives on external influence on parish life. It is relatively consensual that the existence of a secular chapter permitted the payment of favours through the granting of benefits. I believe it can also be agreed that chapters enabled the integration of men from very humble social backgrounds, after evaluating their skills for pastoral and religious service. In this sense, a secular chapter was an environment that allowed mobility and social ascension by merit and dedication to the community, through the rendering of religious service. However, in all the charts analyzed, the clerics in charge of the *cura animarum* of the populations were at the bottom of the pyramid. Moreover, the *cura animarum* was frequently given to a clergyman without prebends, who was often paid by the canons of the chapter to do the job. I would argue that therein lies one of the difficulties of studying the parish and understanding the bonds that shaped parish communities: sources to study pastoral service in the period before the Council of Trent are scant, and those whose job it was to oversee its provision did not leave much evidence of their activities.

Present and vigilant over the entire parish structure and network, it was generally incumbent upon the bishop to arbitrate and decide on any conflicts. The social and religious practices, the actions and morals of the parish clergy, as well as their true fitness for office, were closely watched by the episcopal jurisdiction. I believe there is still room for further studies, approaches, and analysis of medieval synods, constitutions, and episcopal visitations, towards a better understanding of the relationship between laity and clergy within the parish. Rêpas and Farelo's contribution clearly illustrates the different dimensions of episcopal intervention in the small circumscrip-

tion of a parish church, whose patronage, however, belonged to a monastery.

The reflection on patronage is also an important element in the essay signed by Aires Fernandes. In explores the role of Santa Maria da Oliveira, in Guimarães – the largest collegiate church in medieval Portugal – as patron of the church known both as of São Miguel and of Santa Margarida do Castelo, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. It constitutes a very important case study to explore the influence of a powerful ecclesiastical institution on the organization of a parochial church. Through a rigorous examination of the right of presentation held by the collegiate church, the author compiled a comprehensive list of the presented priests and was able to ascertain that this collegiate church also exercised the right of confirmation, despite the usual episcopal monopoly of this prerogative. Given the relevance of the city of Guimarães to understand the administration of ecclesiastical rights within the archdiocese of Braga, this text provides useful information to further the study of the history of this religious circumscription and of the organization and supervision of its clergymen.

Given their small scale, parishes were often used by lay power structures to exercise their authority. They are also a privileged setting for researching social dynamics of inclusion and exclusion towards the Other by social groups, local governments, and welfare associations and others. An example of this is the effort made by Lombard merchant communities, over the centuries, to be accepted in the regions in which they settled, during the late Middle Ages and Early Modern period. Ezio Claudio Pia has traced the dichotomous and hypocritical way Lombards were viewed in the parishes where they lived: even as they were used as financial agents by the different structures of the Church, they still bore the burden of the sin of usury. Resorting to this activity was clearly a means of investing in their social integration, sanctioned by parish priests and bishops.

The history of the Jewish communities in the territory of the kings of France can be understood as a historiographical paradigm of the

volatility of the justifications for inclusion and exclusion, decided by lay authorities and ecclesiastically legitimated. Through a critical reading of the extensive historiography on the subject, Manon Banoun clarified how the dichotomy between the religious and cultural segregation of Jews and the need for their proximity to finance the court of the Capetian king conditioned the topography of cities like Paris. At the same time, it became evident how this tense relationship – from a political, religious, and cultural point of view – eventually led to the progressive disappearance, first, of its identifying elements, and finally, of the Jewish Ghetto itself.

In the following chapter, Cordelia Hess offers an important geographical counterpoint with a broad perspective of the relations between Jews and Christians in Northern Europe, through the analysis of two cities: Fulda and Wittenberg. In this case, the main focus of the study is not the location of the Jewish Quarter within each city but the relational dynamics between the two religious groups. Conditioned by the scarcity of sources available to study the integration of Jews in the Holy Roman Empire, this chapter primarily exposes situations of conflict and violence in the daily life of both communities. These were probably exceptions in an otherwise likely peaceful coexistence, for which evidence has not yet been found. Covering a broad chronology, this essay offers an insightful vision of the political and social fabric and the cultural interplay of Jewish and Christian communities in northern Europe during the Crusades and Late Middle Ages.

The parish was a sphere where, through surveillance and the control of spiritual life, the population was scrutinized for their geographical and cultural origin, their moral behaviour, and their customs, regarding which social and religious mechanisms of exclusion could be triggered. However, it was above all a space of inclusion, of reinforcement of solidarity, and community bonding through spiritual ties and cooperation. As much is shown by Ana Rita Rocha, who analyzes the relations between laymen and clerics in the organization of brotherhoods in the context of the city of Coimbra. These lay and clerical organizations had their headquarters in parish churches,

where they kept their patrimony and, from there, they articulated themselves in the spiritual support of their brothers, especially at the time of death. In Portugal, unfortunately, medieval confraternities left very few traces. Nevertheless, understanding their dynamics of association, functioning, and commemoration of their members in life and death, is key for the characterization of parish communities and the relationship and interconnection between laity and clergy in the long term.

Due to the large geographical framework, it covers, and the plurality of topics upon which it invites readers to reflect, this book is an important contribution for research on medieval urban society, medieval churches, and urban parishes. The parish is here seen as a place where both lay and ecclesiastical communities can be analyzed as protagonists of lay and ecclesiastical service and interests. The parish is also viewed as a sphere of inclusion and exclusion, where conflictual interactions can be identified and described, but also where associative and welfare institutions were founded and built. Finally, urban medieval parishes also provide the basis for the study of the circulation of clergymen and the structuration of a whole network encompassing all of Western Christendom.

To conclude this brief introduction, I must acknowledge that some objectives of this volume on urban parish communities were not fully met. Within these, the examination of the relations between lay and ecclesiastical communities is an example. Other than the elements extracted in the studies on the social origin and recruitment of parish clergy and the studies of local elites and confraternities, the focus was mostly directed either towards lay communities or to clerical communities, rather than their interconnection. It is a given fact that the available sources do not easily facilitate this analysis, but there is scope in a further project to examine and highlight these related dynamics that resulted from the pastoral and spiritual service inherent in the parish. Furthermore, a future analysis could elaborate and elucidate a passing topic in these texts: death and death commemoration strategies within the parish. Whilst this is a classic theme, a revisitation

by contemporary historiography, applying new methodologies in further study, will allow us to reach new conclusions about the urban medieval parish[12].

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[12] Since March 2022, I am heading an exploratory research project titled *COMMEMORtis – What survives after death? Parish communities and death commemoration strategies in the medieval city* [FCT, EXPL/HAR-HIS/0532/2021], which aims to reopen the discussion on the History of death in the Middle Ages and reach new conclusions through the use of new approaches grounded on Digital Humanities research tools. (https://commemortis.wixsite.com/my-site).

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