

From the Graveyard to the Virtual Cemetery. Reflections on Beata Antea Gianetti of Noveledo*

To my dearly beloved deceased

1. Introduction

Sixty years ago a man decided to buy a house in Noveledo, a small hamlet in the municipality of Brissago. The house was located in the medieval historical centre, which at the time was still mostly intact, as though it were frozen in time. This is probably why the first tourists began taking photos of our grandparents, as though they were characters sprung out of a museum of days gone by. In fact, many elderly people lived in the hamlet, some of them born in the late 1800s. As it so happened, an elderly lady called *Gina* explained to the newcomer that the house had belonged to a religious person whom the inhabitants of Noveledo called *Blessed Antea*.

Gina told the newcomer that when she was still a child, her primary school teacher had asked her to do a writing task on a topic regarding their hamlet. She chose to write about Noveledo's Blessed. This might be why the memory of Antea had remained so vivid to her. She was also very intent on informing the new owner that just a few metres away from the house there was a small animal enclosure where the blessed person would go to pray and meditate. Hanging on the wall of the enclosure was a holy water font said to have belonged to the blessed woman. In fact, I and some of the Noveledo inhabitants of my generation remember having seen it. Gina ended the conversation by recalling that the enclosure where Antea would go to pray was used at the time to house the pig. This custom was still quite common in the Canton Ticino up until the 1950s and 1960s.

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This incident spurred the owner to call his newly acquired home *Casa Antea*. And the name remains to this day.

The elderly people in the hamlet would often speak of *Blessed Antea*,² a name which they pronounced as if it were one word, blending the name and attribute (in Italian, *Beata Antea*) through synalepha. People would speak of *Beata Antea* with admiration and even reverence. The fact that our predecessors had been her neighbours was something to be proud of. For us children, the story of Beata Antea was part of a mysterious world our grandparents would unveil to us at night by the fireplace. It was a world of wars and hardship, of smugglers asking to hide in basements, of escaping Jews arriving from the mountains of nearby Italy, who would knock on doors in the middle of the night asking for food and refuge. And naturally, not to let us miss out on that mixed feeling of fear and fascination which sometimes attracts children's attentions, there were also stories of chickens with severed heads scratching about the lanes of our hamlet. This horror genre also included tales of elderly women running through laneways like human torches in search of the nearest fountain. It was said these women would nod off to sleep by the fireplace and wake up in flames having fallen into it. There were even whispered tales of newborns hung in basements, the result of illicit relationships.

For us children, the story of Antea was part of that world, and in some respects, it is where we placed her. Every now and then, the issue regarding the historical truth of Antea was raised. This was also because written accounts had begun to appear throughout the years. Spurred on by the scant historical references available, the new owners of *Casa Antea* began their research. They even went as far as Arona, where the blessed woman was said to have left some traces, but they were unable to find anything significant.

No-one would have thought that the new millennium would have revealed a seventeenth century manuscript¹, thanks to an academic from Turin. The manuscript was a so-called hagiographic legend dedicated to our very own blessed. In an essay published in a religious history journal, Daniele Bolognini revealed having found a hagiographic manuscript on a certain Antea Gianetti of Bressago in the *Monastery of the Capuchin Poor Clares of Our Lady of Suffrage* archive in Turin. This manuscript traced some of the key moments in Antea Gianetti's life, beginning with the years she spent in Noveledo.

² Translator's note: hereforth referred to as Beata Antea.

It goes without saying that for those of us who had always heard of Antea since we were children, the discovery of the manuscript was the source of great enthusiasm. It also gave us the hope that this manuscript would help us discover not only more about Antea, but also more about the history of our hamlet. Of course, as I have already mentioned, the story of Antea contained within the manuscript is considered through the distorted lens of hagiographic terminology. *Hagiographic texts* (from hagiography: writing on the saints) are called such because they tell a person's tale by extolling, emphasising and selecting elements which will increase the chances of that person being recognised by the Catholic Church as a blessed or as a saint. Generally, an individual must first be beatified before being declared a "saint" through the process of canonisation.

In order to understand who Antea really was, it will be necessary to compare the *legend* written by the hagiographer with other written and oral sources. In this way, we may verify the accounts and find incongruencies that might help us better understand the period that interests us most, that is, the period Antea spent in our hamlet. In other words, by comparing the hagiographer's viewpoint with other viewpoints, we should be able to obtain a narrative that enables us to acquire a plausible picture, one that is closer to historical truth.

However, because I was not given permission to cite the manuscript, nor to see the letters which mention Antea Gianetti, I will have to limit myself to considering those parts of the manuscript that were published in Bolognini's work.

The aim of this *website* is to gather elements and suggestions, which we hope will be criticised, modified and completed by anyone who deems a platform dedicated to Antea Gianetti and to mystic thought useful. The more contributions get made, the better will we understand Antea and her time. We will ask ourselves what meaning we can draw from focusing on a figure who lived over almost half a millennium ago. We will also try to understand if and why this act can help us understand our own time better. While we know that in Antea's time religion was still a central indicator of moral values and guaranteed social cohesion, we can ask ourselves to what extent this might be true today. If it is no longer true, what has taken the place of religion? And who has taken on the role previously held by medieval blessed figures and saints in contemporary society?

We will try to build an *interpretative space* which will serve as the basis for all those wishing to take part in the discussion.

2. A Matter of Method

The need to provide evidence and to preserve the memory of significant figures has always been an important part of the history of Christianity.² One need only think back to the *Golden Legend*, the lengthy and widely read work by Jacobus de Voragine (1228 - 1298), which is a collection of saint's lives³ and to Jean van Bolland's⁴ monumental project *Acta Sanctorum*.⁵

It must be remembered that in hagiographic texts, saints (or blessed⁶) are always "holy for others",⁷ in the sense that they are described as society represented them at the time. It is for this reason that hagiographies are not biographies. Rather, in some respects, they are actually anti-biographies. For instance, they do not consider the biographical details which would invalidate the public image of the personages, even though these details may be of great importance.⁸ Having said this, not all hagiographies have the same level of biographical unreliability. Some hagiographies are closer to *real* saints and others are closer to *constructed* ones, ones made to measure to satisfy the expectations of the time.

In general, we can say that hagiographies have an educational goal. They are *mirrors* which can be useful for evaluating whether one's own behaviour corresponds to the model of hagiographic saintliness. Hagiographies are manuals, *exempla* available to anyone wishing to live as a saint. This is why hagiographic texts follow similar narrative patterns, making them almost interchangeable. Would it not then suffice to be familiar with just one text rather than to be familiar with them all?

To this we may answer that individual hagiographic texts should be read as parts of one big infinite book that contains them all,⁹ to which each hagiography offers a small contribution. Or we might say that hagiographies interest us as texts that provide information on the various personages surrounding the saints and their society,¹⁰ rather than as texts of the faith. It has been observed that those who gained most benefit from hagiographic sources were women, both as authors and as protagonists.¹¹ This makes hagiographic texts a treasure trove of inexhaustible data, especially regarding the way women were represented and the role they played in late medieval society.¹²

I must admit that, at least at first, Antea's *legend* piqued my interest because I especially wanted to understand if it contained real details on Antea's life in Brissago, and in Noveledo particularly. How much of it was true and how much fabricated? Nonetheless, I realised that while an investigative approach would be legitimate, it should be remembered that hagiographic texts, as well as iconography, do not have the aim of providing us with historical facts,¹³ and thus, using them in this way partially adds to misrepresenting their meaning.

Are there similarities between Antea's hagiography and those of other personages? Yes, there are analogies between Antea's hagiographic legend and hagiographies of the so-called *living female saints*.¹⁴ *Living female saints* were women who were considered models of popular saintliness throughout their lives. There are stereotypes in their legends that we can probably find in Antea's legend.¹⁵ Only a careful analysis of the manuscript will enable us to establish whether and to what degree these stereotypes may be applied to "Antea's case". Here is a concise summary:¹⁶

Generally speaking, female saints were of humble origins, which explains why in most cases they could not fulfill their wish of joining the convent. They met precise models of saintliness, like that indicated by St Catherine of Siena. They were often illiterate. Their religious vocation manifested itself in early childhood. They were virtuous and followed an austere life of sacrifices and fasting. At times they completely abstained from eating and survived thanks to the eucharist alone. They often submitted themselves to acts of penance, like wearing a hair shirt. Some had visible signs of suffering such as stigmata. They carried out fervent acts of prayer. They had a privileged channel of communication with the divine, which manifested itself through mystical ecstasy and visions of a neo-Platonic nature. They also efficiently resisted the temptations of the Devil, and therefore successfully took part in exorcistic rites. In describing their ecstatic states, they often used iconographic elements and paintings seen in chapels and churches. They had prophetic abilities and were instruments of revelations and miracles. They were able to intercede with saints. They were enormously charismatic, which enabled them to gain great popularity and to mobilise the masses, sometimes entire cities. They were conscious of this and had an acute awareness of their obligation and role in society and in the Church. It is for this reason that many decided to aid the poor and the sick. They took on

the role of court advisors, in fact princes at times thanked them by supporting their canonisation process.

3. The Early Years

Antea lived in Noveledo until the age of sixteen. The fact that oral accounts of the existence of a person born over half a millennium ago have been passed down reveals that Antea Gianetti's memory did not abandon the inhabitants of the hamlet. They made her "their" Blessed, unphased by the fact that the beatification process was never initiated.

According to Antea's hagiographer, Father Gerolamo Villani, Antea was probably born in Lucca in 1570 and moved to Noveledo with her parents that same year. Her father was from Brissago and her mother was Tuscan. It was her mother who taught her to recite the rosary and apparently, at the age of five, she already knew how to spin wool, "*lavorar di bindelli*" as it was called.¹⁷

Pilgrimages often took place from Brissago to nearby sanctuaries, such as the one in Re in the Vigezzo Valley.¹⁸ Visiting the "Madonna del Monte" convent which sat above Varese together with her mother probably elicited the young child's wish to join the convent. However, this project was not possible because her family did not possess the financial means to support the enterprise.

This is also probably one of the reasons why Antea married a builder at the age of 16. According to the hagiographer, he mistreated her – possibly supported by the fact that there was no punishment prescribed for domestic violence in the Brissago Statutes¹⁹ – also because of her excessive generosity to the poor.

Soon after their wedding, the couple moved to Sesto Calende where her husband was often away from home for work. He died at the age of 32.²⁰

Not much is known of Antea's childhood. Nonetheless, it is likely that this was not a joyful period. As was common for the humbler classes of the population, childhood was brief, almost inexistent.²¹ The "little adults" were prematurely integrated into work life, which is testified by the fact that punitive measures for minors were juridically comparable to those for adults.²²

We can only formulate hypotheses regarding the presence of trauma. Certainly, from a contemporary psychological viewpoint, the behaviour of some of the young mystics would have been considered (borderline) personality disorders.²³

The language spoken by Antea was presumably a similar vernacular to that used in written texts of the time. It is also probable that her Tuscan mother had some influence on the language she spoke, given that she would have been responsible for her daughter's religious education.²⁴ Antea neither learned to read nor write. There was no state school and only in time did private teachers become common figures. Nonetheless, it cannot be excluded that Antea may have learned to read as an adult.²⁵

Preaching, confession and administration of the sacrament of penance took place in the vernacular, also because it was important to ensure these religious directives were understood and observed.²⁶ Antea's religious and linguistic sources were therefore linked to her participation in religious life and to the repetition of formulas and gestures induced by popular religious literature. Furthermore, we must consider the sermons heard in church during Masses and funerals, which closely followed widespread hagiographic models.²⁷ Catechesis was reduced to just a few central concepts: *sin*, which had to be subjected to confession to obtain *forgiveness*, which was a prerequisite for *redemption*.

The matter of liturgical singing during sacred rites warrants a separate mention. It is highly likely that in smaller churches women sang during Mass,²⁸ just like they did until not so many years ago in Brissago. Gregorian chants were also probably chanted on the feast days of the liturgical year. Normally, however, this repertoire would have been sung by the celebrant, the schola cantorum or by more educated singers, rather than by ordinary people. There is also evidence of *salmatrices* from Traffiume. It cannot be excluded that they were called to participate in the liturgical functions during festivities.²⁹

We imagine that Antea's way of thinking was influenced by her relationship with nature, which was part of her daily environment. While on one hand nature was the source of work and strain, on the other it was also an opportunity for meditation and rest. And it was especially in this contact with nature that Antea could perceive Creation as something incommensurable and as a dimension that transcended humankind as living entity³⁰ thereby leading it to an experience of the Absolute, which we will discuss further later on.

4. Time and Space

If we observe late 1800s photos of Brissago as well as more recent ones, or even if we observe the township from the lakeside or from the opposite bank, we can still see the original settlement. In particular, we can see the outlines of the medieval hamlets. Until the 1960s, the heart of Noveledo was considered “a living museum of medieval mountain architecture”.³¹

In Antea’s day, the hamlets were microcosms. To this day, little is known of their internal organisation. Contrary to the present, the living space was architecturally homogenous and the houses were often built in steps following the morphology of the landscape.

And just how did the Noveledo population live five hundred years ago? We can come to an approximate understanding of everyday life mostly thanks to analysis approaches that focus on quotidian history.³² My impression is that in many respects my grandparents’ lives in the late 1800s would not have been so different to Antea’s life. Physiological needs were attended to in garden spaces. There was no electricity and this meant using candles or wax surrogates. Water was collected at the hamlet fountain. Food requirements were guaranteed greatly thanks to local agriculture.

The boundary between public and private space was not as clear cut, also due to the poverty of private infrastructure. Clothes were washed by the river and there were statutes clearly stating how far up the river one could be allowed to do so. It is likely that prior to the existence of the fountains, water was collected from several rivulets and channelled into containers positioned in basements, to be used by two or more houses.³³ Rooms were meagre and were often occupied by several people. It would certainly not have been easy to find a space to be alone. This may be why Antea would find refuge for prayer and contemplation in the animal enclosure.

Most of the hamlets did not have a real square, which did not exclude that, as was still the case fifty years ago, there were common spaces for socialising. At the entrance of Noveledo there was a space, called the “Preora”, which has now been transformed into a parking lot, where people would meet in the evenings after work to talk and gossip.³⁴

Many spaces were lived in as common spaces. People of my generation recall how it wasn’t until the 1960s that a number of signs began to appear marking certain pathways and passages

that had previously been considered public spaces as private property.

Even now, the houses in Noveledo's town centre are almost all interconnected, at least those of clear rural origin. They formed a tight network, which nowadays is often interrupted by walled off doors marking property boundaries. Instead, at the time, suspended passageways were constructed to enable people to go from home to home without having to walk out onto the street. This occurred when family relations allowed or requested it. In this way, one could visit one's family in just a few steps. It is likely that there were periods where one could cross the entire hamlet without ever setting foot outside.

In a society that was almost exclusively agricultural and pastoral, every space was exploited to the last centimetre and property boundaries were calculated with the utmost precision. This may be seen by anyone who enters the woods, where the dense presence of dry-stone walls testifies to the intense exploitation of farm-worthy land.

Upon observing old town maps, we discover a web of roads and paths, which made capillary-like transit between the marked places possible. Today their names have mostly been lost to us. Where possible, further study might reveal meaning for a religious toponymy, or hagiotoponymy.³⁵

Inhabitants would often set out due to work, also because they had plots of land scattered throughout the local area. It is likely they may have spent nights in various places according to where they had to work. This leads us to believe that even the religious monuments where Antea worshipped might not always have been the same ones.

Many commentators have repeatedly pointed out the strain of working in steep, impervious and "vertical" landscapes like Brissago. Nowadays the numerous stairways linking the hamlets are primarily used by amateur sports lovers equipped with the latest fitness trackers and sustained by energy drinks enriched with exotic fruit. In Antea's day, the slopes were walked by women carrying heavy wicker baskets, their young bodies accustomed to the weight of hard work.

Nonetheless, the meaning of verticality,³⁶ even from a spatial perspective, reveals its full potential if considered from a religious-mystical dimension. Ascensional symbolism has a central role in mysticism and not just in Christian mysticism. Ascension expresses the path which leads to the cathartic experience of being close to the Absolute, which coincides with reaching the summit.³⁷

This interpretation may be used to understand Antea's Mountain ascent when allowing the animals to graze. She herself would then spin their wool back in her home in Noveledo. The ascensional path leading to mystical enlightenment found a concrete response in the landscape that Antea moved through during her childhood. After all, the representation of an ascent to God thanks to various means such as the cross, Jacob's Ladder,³⁸ trees and mountains may be found in St Augustine's works.³⁹

These spatial suggestions, which link the religious dimension to the symbolic meaning of the spaces present in mystic thought, may help us understand the significance of the "valley's" role in the "vale of tears"⁴⁰ as a space that enables us to humbly rise up to the celestial realm. The valley still held negative connotations of a dark and dangerous place in my day. In moments of despair, people would threaten to "throw themselves away" in the valley, meaning, to take their own lives.

The entire public space, and in great part also private space, was sanctified by occasional rites including all those signs that throughout the centuries had been scattered there: chapels, crosses, small churches, regular processional destinations of varying sizes.⁴¹ In order to trace Antea's sacred routes, we must set aside her highly probable fancy for the "Madonna del Ponto" Church, which today is called Madonna di Ponte, and the fact that in her day it was probably little more than her local chapel,⁴² and instead conduct an accurate inquiry into which religious monuments were already present in the area in the late 1500s.⁴³

Religion constituted the deepest element of solidarity in society, possibly only surpassed by blood ties, particularly between mother and daughter. We have asked ourselves whether Noveledo might have functioned as a substitute for the convent life that Antea would have liked to live from a young age and that she was obliged to give up because she did not possess the financial means. In its ritual quintessence, Noveledo was a small-scale model of the religious world, just as the monastery was.⁴⁴ And Antea would have brought an aura of sanctity to it, also due to the belief that the existence of "female saints" in secular spaces was thought to transform these spaces into sacred ones.⁴⁵

The sacredness of space found its equivalent in the sacredness of time. Sacred and secular time probably largely coincided. The time of daily life was primarily indicated by the

rhythms of nature, from the rising and setting of the sun. Secondly, it was marked by the ringing of church bells.⁴⁶

In the day-to-day country environment, time was connected to one's individual perception of events and to their value as time experienced rather than as objective, measured time. It was not yet urban time, measured out and chronologically tracked by what would become the bells of the workplace in industrialised civilisation.

While historians have traced the transformation from *experienced* time to *measured* time to the fourteenth century,⁴⁷ "Antea's time" was still linked to the natural rhythms of agricultural tasks and religious practice. This "primordial" time⁴⁸ marked everyday life for some time to come, at least in rural areas. For Heidegger, this is a time where human temporality is perceived as such.⁴⁹ Human beings are not *in* time, rather it is time that constitutes the essence of human beings. It is the time of paths trodden on foot, where exertion marks the passing of time without it being measured in equal units. It is more like the Hellenic cyclical time, taken up by Nietzsche's concept of the eternal return than the linear Christian time subjected to a *telos*.⁵⁰

It was probably only later on, when she was welcomed as a guest at court, that Antea had to submit to the rhythms of courtly duties and to reluctantly accept means of transport such as carriages, thus substituting the *experienced* time of walking to the *secular* time of efficiency. She must also have given up the pleasure of offering God the suffering caused by bloodied feet that were wounded during long walks. In conclusion, while initially walking was the fruit of free choice in Brissago, favouring meditation and silence, later, even one's movements were subject to the father confessor's control.

5. Virgin, Bride and Widow

At the age of 16, Antea left Noveledo for Sesto with her husband. The marital state constituted an involution compared to the sense of autonomy that the religious dimension had begun to transmit to her.⁵¹ Through marriage Antea was reintegrated into a female role within the family, from which it was difficult to free herself. My impression is that Antea must have faced the new marital situation with a spirit that was not at all accommodating, but deeply rebellious.

It would be natural to interpret her departure from Noveledo as the leaving behind of those places which represented her

first desires, intense prayer but also her intimate union with nature in all its manifestations. Noveledo was a magical space, where work dictated the daily rhythms of prayer and meditation. However, it is probably a romantic exaggeration to describe this moment of departure as the abandonment of an idyllic place and a harmonious relationship with nature. I imagine that the hagiographic texts emphasise all the breaks in biographical development as moments that were overcome thanks to heroic courage or to the resigned submission of the saints to the will of Providence. “Frail” feelings certainly cannot prevail in subjects eligible for future sanctity. In her famous text on “rootedness”, Simone Weil insisted on the fact that young peasant women, after their honeymoon with nature, during which they live in contact with the land, go through a phase in which childhood enthusiasm yields to the feeling of boredom and the spasmodic wait for Sundays.⁵² That is the moment in which – observes Weil – the young peasant woman is lost and sees only journeys as way out of this condition of boredom.

If we interpret the phases of Antea's existence with criteria used by the sociology of migration,⁵³ we could say that the honeymoon phase spent in Noveledo (virginity), followed by the shock of marriage (wife) and the sudden death of her husband, gave way to a phase of regained autonomy (widow). Although we should not overlook that widows belonged to a particularly weak category,⁵⁴ being able to travel meant that Antea had gained a newfound freedom and renewed autonomy.

According to the precepts of the time, a widow's condition was considered very carefully. In general, although the social expectations were that widows should lead secluded lives, they were granted a certain freedom of movement. This was always, however, under the sanctioning supervision of a father confessor.⁵⁵ The model of the living female saint unquestionably challenged male power, represented by the spiritual father, as it reversed the roles that viewed the main and necessary reference for leading a devout life in the “spiritual father”.⁵⁶ One of the father confessor's concerns was therefore probably also to prevent the saint from having the upper hand with him, too.

Through the sacrament of confession, the spiritual father controlled and directed the lives of the female saints, from their inner selves to decisions regarding the type of clothes they could wear.

It is hard to imagine that Antea would have felt at home in the court environment, which was so different from the environments she grew up in. On the other hand, what was

presumably asked of her was that she be herself: a person dressed in rags who would walk the alleyways of Noveledo barefoot. One gets the impression that the female saints were in a contradictory position. On the one hand, they became part of the noble family. They were dressed and revered, and even forced to soften their ascetic conduct in favour of court decency. On the other hand, they had to remain who they were, precisely to satisfy the expectations of courtly circles⁵⁷ desirous of finding before them true candidates for sainthood. But being oneself by choice or by duty are two profoundly different things. And it seems inevitable to question whether the living saints were not sometimes forced to play a game from which they could not escape. We have no evidence to support this hypothesis, but neither do we have elements to the contrary. Similarly, we cannot know to what extent the individuals followed religious precepts out of conviction or in order to fulfil social obligations and derive benefits from them.

An element that clearly seems to emerge both from the hagiographies of the living female saints and from what we know about Antea, is the coexistence of two behavioural aspects that are only contradictory in appearance. While on the one hand we find a strong tendency to meditation and mysticism in Antea, on the other hand, she is also characterised by a strong entrepreneurial ability, whose ultimate goal was to carry out her project, that is, to spread the devotion of the dead.⁵⁸

Even then, Franciscans were using techniques of mass communication: they would print out inexpensive sheets of paper for wide circulation⁵⁹ to spread their convictions. Antea may have learned to prepare “signs” to communicate with what we would now call the *general public* from them. Perhaps the time she had to forgo to the elite of the era was, thanks to the resources available, directed to reaching the greatest possible number of people through her mission. Might Antea be considered the first spiritual Robin Hood?⁶⁰

6. Mystical Union and Consolation

Women have played a fundamental role in the history of mysticism in Western spiritual culture.⁶¹ However, the writings of female mystics were often anonymous, probably because the authors feared being targeted by prejudices of the time.

The rebellious charisma of female mystics fascinated men in power, so much so that it has been said that the mystical

writings of women were often written in such a way as to give the impression that they may have been written by men.

The mystical explosion of the seventeenth century⁶² produced numerous examples of ascetic, mystical and pious writings in Italian prose.⁶³ They were testimonies of faith in which the anxieties, fears and meaning that religion had for many subjects, who for different reasons lived apart from active and operative society, emerged.⁶⁴ They were testimonies that also reached sublime levels of depth and religious power, as in the case of the Poor Clare Camilla Battista da Verano.⁶⁵ It was a period in which a form of religious sensibility which was rich in sentiments and strong outbursts of passion predominated.⁶⁶ But will an analysis of the mystical writings of that period help us understand Antea's mysticism?⁶⁷

As many female mystics have pointed out, mystical experience is always a very personal and unique experience, and therefore difficult to access if not from the perspective of those who have experienced it. It is precisely for this reason that it is difficult for a language to be able to express its singularity and unrepeatability nature. Perhaps only the language of poetry in its highest forms is able to do so. We recall for example of the *Song of Songs*⁶⁸ or Teresa of Ávila's prose.

This is probably also where the lack of clear semantic contours of the concept of mysticism derives from.⁶⁹

Even pictorial representations of ecstatic states are often unconvincing, although, as mentioned, it was the mystics themselves, in describing their ecstasies, who were inspired by paintings seen in churches or chapels.⁷⁰ It was said that the facial features of female mystics in ecstasy would change completely, making them much more beautiful.⁷¹

Is it possible that Antea's illiteracy fostered her mystical impulse? It cannot be excluded, also because mystical contemplation does not necessarily require the support of the written language, although there are many examples in which writing works as an encouragement to meditation.⁷²

Mystical ecstasy presupposes intense and direct contact with the divine, often accompanied by visions and angelic music, as well as a radical detachment from the surrounding society.

There was, however, a great concern at the time to distinguish genuine mystical states from mental states caused by diabolical illusions.

In Christian mysticism a deep relationship of love is established with a *personal* God who penetrates the most intimate

sphere of the ego. This personal aspect is manifested in an exemplary way in the concept of mystical marriage.⁷³

Detachment from intramundane reality through mysticism has often been interpreted as an act of liberation from an oppressive everyday life. In psychoanalytical terms, one could speak of a *removal* from reality. We have observed how women were subjugated by men, both in the home and in the workplace, and how the rules imposed by a traditionally misogynistic church were added to this. Given these considerations, mystical ecstasy has been interpreted in reductive terms as the transfer into the *internal forum*, in one's own conscience, of a need for freedom that is not achievable in the *external forum*, in the reality of one's interpersonal relationships. Moreover, this is the reading that a Marxist historiography would make of it, according to which mysticism, as an extreme expression of religious sentiment, is nothing more than the extreme escape from a reality that has become oppressive and unsustainable.

The internalization by women of conflicts that could not be resolved in the *external forum*, would have made them more attentive to care issues – in this context we may also speak of the care of souls – and would have resulted in greater sensitivity, as was needed to take care of people's difficulties and problems. Antea and the living female saints were appreciated for their ability to care for others, for their willingness to understand individuals and to take their fragility and vulnerability into account. In a turbulent political period, dominated by fear, illness and public and private violence,⁷⁴ this consolatory skill certainly contributed to the living female saints' success and constituted one of their main characteristics. However, the ability to care for and counsel souls may have originated in the ability to take on points of view that were *external* to the problems that beset people. This ability was proper to saints and favoured by their marginal position in society. And it might have been the result of the great resistance female saints demonstrated when enduring situations of extreme discomfort. Suffice to think of the extreme practice of renouncing nourishment, which limited the intake of food to the sacrament of the Eucharist. Or the radical renunciation of possessing goods of any kind. In the desire not to have possessions, it is possible to see a gesture of profound religiosity that consists in the absolute abandonment to a higher power, a gesture of absolute liberation from any fear and absolute trust in the divine.⁷⁵

7. Witch or superstar?

Contrary to what one might think, most of the persecutions for witchcraft took place in the early modern age, and precisely in the period we are considering.⁷⁶ Witches and sorcerers risked torture and death at the stake. Magical practices were widespread and it was believed that being a witch was an innate attitude, acquired mainly by hereditary transmission.⁷⁷

Obvious analogies between saints and witches have often been noted.⁷⁸ The similarities of their stories have generated multiple interpretations, even of a psychopathological nature,⁷⁹ by those who have focused on the sexual character of the unions between human and divine. Often the female saints would say that in their ecstasy they had become brides of Jesus, who had embraced them and had given them an invisible wedding ring, whose presence they nonetheless felt on their finger. Witches instead confessed to having had love relations with demons and to having received objects such as amulets or other objects as gifts.⁸⁰

Even in Ticino, witch trials often ended with burning at the stake or, if the judge wanted to be particularly lenient, with beheadings.⁸¹

The editors of the Brissago Statutes report that there were black magic phenomena⁸² in the village and that the parish priest had denounced some women claiming to heal or prevent diseases with ointments and magical rites. Particularly abominable was the rite, also noted by the editors of the Statutes, which consisted in letting a cat walk over a newborn's cradle and then burying the poor animal alive.⁸³

Witchcraft and magic permeated daily life, and there was the widespread belief that they were able to change the environment and destiny of people both for good and evil. For instance, the use of amulets and rituals that could also be performed by ordinary people was common.⁸⁴ While witches were feared because of their possible coalition with evil, they were regarded with respect and appreciated for their supposed healing abilities. They could cause evil, but they could also fight it and, in many respects, were considered on a par with monks and priests.

The Church's ambivalence towards superstition presumably derived from the fact that it did not want to dampen the faithful's enthusiasm too much, because this would have caused it to distance itself from them. Rather, it was thought necessary to direct superstitious beliefs along the lines of those legitimately recognised by the Church. To this end, for example, the idea of

miracles as substitutes for superstitious acts made it possible to clearly distinguish between the power legitimately attributed to female saints and the unacceptable power of their antagonists.⁸⁵ There was also insistence on the need for an ecclesiastical policy that would make up for religious ignorance by educating people to the faith, particularly children.⁸⁶

In the religious sphere, there was always the suspicion that exceptional women must have been hiding some evil pretence. Whenever women claimed to lead their own independent religious lives, the work of the devil was suspected to be hidden there somewhere.⁸⁷

Because female subjects were attributed with inherent fragility and vulnerability, they were considered easy prey and Devil's allies. It was perhaps for this reason that medieval city legislation identified immoderate women's mourning, which could give way to evil, as dangerous, even though it was women who managed the ritual of the dead. An attempt was therefore made to exclude them "first from processions and then even from burials".⁸⁸ There is also a passage in the Brissago Statutes which states the desire to exclude women from rites for the dead which took place *outside* the church, probably because they feared excessive theatricality when manifesting their grief.⁸⁹ It was precisely this disciplining of female *pathos* that led to a strong masculinisation and clericalisation of funeral rituals.⁹⁰

It might be said that anything considered irrational was subjected to the scrutiny of the ecclesiastical authorities. Even elements relating to superstition and manifesting themselves in dreams and visions could give rise to ambiguous interpretations, precisely because of how easily dreams mixed religious elements with magical ones. Dreams were viewed with distrust because they could reveal hidden truths of the afterlife that escaped the ecclesiastical authorities' direct control. That is why hagiographers would modify them, removing any possible misunderstandings that might have placed saints in the hands of the Inquisition.

Who knows if and how Gerolamo Villani, Antea's hagiographer, intervened on the dream he reports in the manuscript. During one of her many trips, Antea, not having found accommodation amongst the living, sought refuge with "her dead ones", in a cemetery. Falling asleep, she dreamed that a strong storm had broken out and that as a gesture of gratitude for the attention that the blessed had bestowed on their souls, the dead came out of their tombs, freed themselves of the sheets they

had been wrapped in and formed a large tent to protect Antea from the heavy rain.⁹¹

The staging of dreams in hagiographic texts stems from a greater interest generated from the exceptional aspects of the female saints rather than their virtues or biographical details. Hagiographies willingly focused on miracles and bodily suffering, tragic deaths and struggles with the Devil, and even fantasy-like dreams.

It should be emphasised that recounting dreams presupposed a willingness, which could be defined subversive, to reveal that part of one's identity that is not controlled by vigilant subjectivity. Telling one's dream presupposed the acceptance of the unconscious, of the world of drives and desires that would have been unthinkable in the first millennium.⁹² In fact, when the first Christians were ordered to reveal their identity, they replied, "I am Christian!" Subjectivity was defined from the outside, not from an internal point of view.

It is not difficult to understand why hagiographies centred on the exceptional aspects of the female saints' lives. It is precisely these aspects that stimulated interest in the female saints and their success among followers. They would also have increased the likelihood of a successful canonisation process.⁹³

Similarly, sporting heroes are not acclaimed for their daily training or because they follow a strict regime, but for those feats which make them unique in the eyes of their contemporaries, such as breaking world records.

Thus Antea, like many living saints, became a sort of *Superstar*, an *athlete of religion*,⁹⁴ whose extraordinary gifts were praised and whose public image was also the result of a refined marketing strategy, carefully studied by her hagiographer.

To conclude, can we consider the figure of the witch a model the living female saint had to compete with? To be sure, the witch social construction tended to overlap with the saint model. The comparison between female saints and witches enables us to better understand what the exceptional expectations on characters like Antea were, and what possible misunderstandings they could be subjected to.⁹⁵

8. The Living and the Souls in Purgatory

The notion that the thought of death must constantly accompany our existence is frequent in philosophical thought. Also in tune with this idea is the Platonic conviction, later taken up by Montaigne, that philosophy should teach us how to die.

However, Antea's relationship with death is not philosophical, but religious. And it is understandable only in the context of the *birth of purgatory*,⁹⁶ the final form of which some historians situate in the twelfth century, while recognizing that, at least since the fourth century onwards, there were several intermediate steps that would have led to the concept of purgatory.

In short, Purgatory is the place of purification for those who did not reach the state of holiness in the course of their earthly life.

With the birth of this *third place* everything changed, especially people's mental patterns and the way they perceived time. The "biography add-on,"⁹⁷ which was only accessible after death, undermined the binary logic that offered no alternative between eternal life in Heaven and eternal suffering in Hell. Since few could claim a life of holiness, Purgatory became a probable destination for the majority of the faithful, and it is not surprising that hagiographic literature provides us with a vast testimony to the popularity of Purgatory.⁹⁸

Of fundamental importance was the fact that the prayers of the living could help reduce and alleviate the period that the dead went through in this purification process before the final judgment that preceded entry into Heaven.⁹⁹

We also find confirmation of this in Dante's *Purgatory*, in which all souls, without exception, ask the Poet to make sure that the living will pray for them, because, as Manfred of Sweden says at the end of the third canto "much benefit arises, here, through the prayers of those who are still over there",¹⁰⁰ which means that thanks to the living (*those there*), one may progress greatly and advance in purification *here in Purgatory*. And even the living, with their prayers and their intercession for the dead, could increase their *chances* of a happy afterlife. This created a situation of mutual benefit, a *win-win* situation. This is why Antea's missionary activity mainly focused on the souls in Purgatory and Antea made *Pray for the souls in Purgatory!* her slogan. Noveledo's mystic became a real *militant for the liberation of souls in Purgatory*.¹⁰¹ All this was in tune with the widespread, almost obsessive, tendency in the late Middle Ages to order Masses for the dead, perhaps as an expression of underlying uncertainty regarding devotions.¹⁰²

With the invention of Purgatory, "hell not perpetual, but temporary,"¹⁰³ also came a change to the psychological and emotional relationship with the dead. There was no longer only solidarity amongst the living, but also between the living and the dead in a *state of grace*.¹⁰⁴

Moreover, the interaction between the living and the dead reinforced the relationship of responsibility that children had towards their parents, so that children were urged to contribute to an afterlife that would reduce their parents' suffering as much as possible. Similarly to what had happened in popular belief concerning "spirits", a sort of "age group" was created, that of the dead, which was placed alongside those of children, young people, the married and the elderly also in liturgy, art and Catholic devotion to the dead.¹⁰⁵

The emotional closeness between the living and the dead generated by the Purgatory theory seems to correspond to the physical closeness of the dead in Antea's daily life.

It was in fact only over the centuries that the deceased were to become increasingly removed from residential centres, also for a matter of public hygiene. Originally, the dead were buried in churches, a practice that was later reserved only for the clergy and then completely abandoned. We know, for example, that Antonio Rainaldi, a Brissago priest, was buried under the main altar of the parish church.¹⁰⁶ The other deceased were instead buried in a cemetery space that was not clearly marked off, in the space surrounding the church. Often it was a meadow.¹⁰⁷ Sometimes cemeteries even preceded village settlement¹⁰⁸ and then, following a concentric development pattern, the settlements were established. The dead were buried around the church and they did not have individual tombstones. One big cross sufficed for everyone. In a more external circle, a wall was later erected to separate the sacred space from the profane, and to keep animals away from the tombs. Jews and unbaptised children were excluded and allocated a separate area. Finally, people who had committed suicide were thrown into a mass grave or abandoned to the currents of a river. Beyond the cemetery, there was the area inhabited by the living, the township. Beyond that was cultivated ground. In this way, one had to cross the cemetery to go to church and return home.

Archaeological evidence shows that there are scattered tombs throughout the township and also in the hamlets, which could suggest the existence of cemeteries or similar structures created for the communities of the hamlets.¹⁰⁹

One could say that this society so filled with religion¹¹⁰ also lived an experience that was filled with the dead, both from a spatial and emotional point of view.

The cemetery was indeed considered a sacred place, but since the separation between *sacred and profane* was not clear-cut, it could become a stage for activities that were not per se

devout. This is also testified by the stories of pastoral visits during which the practice of hanging up clothes, or placing hay and wheat to dry in the sun on cemetery grounds was condemned. As were animated and blasphemous arguments, an occurrence so widespread in the town as to require a severe sanction in the Statutes.

In addition, several clashes occurred in cemeteries leading to the violent death of those involved.

During pastoral visits, these excesses were understandably condemned, as was the neglect of the cemetery grounds, such as the lack of fences that should have kept the animals away from the graves.¹¹¹

On the other hand, and not without a certain benevolence, it was observed how some forms of behaviour were a show of the somewhat “coarse”¹¹² spirit of Brissago’s population, which was accustomed to a very simple and basic life. However, some forms of behaviour were also the consequence of the strong interpenetration of the culture of the dead in people's daily lives. Moreover, in a society where violence and disease played a significant role, the relationship with death was part of an almost day-to-day naturalness and not the result of abstract reflection. The dead were close to the living, just as death was an indissoluble and fatal companion of life.

After all, keeping the dead at home until the funeral was common practice until just a few decades ago and in part it is still practiced by a few families.

The interpenetration of death in everyday life was even more evident during funerals which, as we have seen, were considered events which belonged to the public rather than private sphere, so much so that the Statutes made the participation of the heads of family mandatory. If this failed to occur, payment of a fine was requested.

I imagine that, as was still the case a few decades ago, the deceased would have been accompanied in procession from their home to the cemetery.

Finally, the invention of Purgatory also dealt a blow to the archaic conceptions according to which the souls of the dead would return to threaten churches and cemeteries, thereby disturbing the living. Although in the fifteenth century many still believed that “souls in pain” wandered through cemeteries, poised between life and death,¹¹³ Purgatory became the place where the dead were peacefully united with the living in their wait for redemption, and cemeteries were turned into waiting rooms.

9. The Hope of the Afflicted

Was Antea happy? Is it possible to answer this question? And does it make sense to ask it? As it is, it is difficult to say if one of our contemporaries is happy, let alone a person who lived 500 years ago! Most of what we know about Antea is based on fragile sources and on hypotheses in which we probably partially project our own desires: we would like Antea to be as we would like her to be. Nonetheless, we shall assume that Antea was happy and attempt to provide reasons for this hypothesis.

We can try to answer the question of Antea's happiness by considering the purely religious and theological aspects of the matter. Let us assume that religious sentiment arises from our search for the meaning of our existence and that of the world. Obviously, we can also find an answer to our search for meaning in other areas of our existence, for example, in our work and in our attention to interpersonal relationships. We can even satisfy our need for meaning with the conviction that the meaning of existence consists in its being meaningless. If we believe that the search for meaning places us before the emptiness created by its absence, we can simply turn our gaze into the abyss. That is why the atheist existentialist Camus says that the only truly serious philosophical problem is that of suicide.¹¹⁴

In actual fact, the question arises in these terms especially in exceptional situations. When faced with the loss of a loved one, when faced with traumatic situations that seem to offer no way out, that is, that are meaningless. It is in affliction that the need for consolation and justice becomes most pressing.¹¹⁵

But people in the Middle Ages were not so much afflicted by the existential emptiness of existentialists as by the fear of hunger, misery, disease and epidemics. The fear that probably dominated over all was that of the end of the world,¹¹⁶ the fear of *universal judgement*, which would have done justice to all human injustices once and for all. The fear of death was not the fear of nothingness, but of the prospect that an afterlife full of suffering awaited them and that, in the worst case, it could be eternal.

We have seen that the doctrine of Purgatory plays down the passage from life to death by giving us a third purifying space. A space in favour of those who are not entirely good but not entirely bad either.¹¹⁷

Can we believe that Antea was happy because Purgatory gave her the prospect of easier redemption? Of course not. Being a step away from sainthood, a direct passage to Heaven was most likely envisaged for Antea. It would also be quite contradictory to think that Antea's happiness stemmed from a utilitarian calculation of the probability of an afterlife in Heaven.

We might simply say that Antea was happy because she believed in the resurrection of the dead and eternal life. And what did she derive this conviction from? We can certainly argue that it would not be reasonable to think that everything ends after death, and we may argue this for various reasons. One of these reasons concerns justice. If it is always the strongest who win in earthly life, we would at least like justice to be granted in the afterlife for all the injustices and sufferings endured on Earth! In short, we expect that Good will at least triumph after death and that we may achieve that happiness in life which for Aristotle is the ultimate goal of our actions. Moreover, it seems right that there be a connection between ethical behaviour in this world and a life in the afterlife, and that it certainly not be to the detriment of morally irreproachable behaviour. It could be argued, however, that the meaning of belief in the afterlife is precisely to give our suffering meaning, and that this happens regardless of the possibility of a reward after death.

But let us return to the question of what generated Antea's happiness. We have excluded the idea that it was only the result of a belief in eternal life after death. Then what might have been the cause? Antea's happiness was the result of listening and contemplation.¹¹⁸ Of the mystical ability to open oneself to the Absolute. To clarify this, we must momentarily delve into the matter of the time in eternal life. We can describe earthly time as a succession of moments in which we try not to get bored and we try to rid ourselves of our fears. It is a time marked by the domination of before and after. Every after irremediably turns into a before and so on inexorably. It is the realm of the transience of an instant.

When we imagine eternal life, we attribute a completely different quality to it, one that is free from the slavery of successive instants. In our limited representational capability, we may say that it is the domain of *eternal simultaneity* that takes the place of the *transience of earthly time*. The relationship between the *earthly time of transience* and the *eternal time of simultaneity* is often misunderstood as if the two were chronologically separate. *First* there should be earthly time and *then* the time of eternal happiness, the negation of earthly time, after

death. However, since eternity is not – as Hegel would say – the *abstract negation* of human time, rather it is the transposition of temporality on another plane, it is not the *after* of earthly time, rather it is *another time*.

Believing in eternal life is therefore not believing in eternal life *after death*, for eternal life is stuck *in the middle* of our earthly life. For Christians, there is no difference between before death and after death. To this regard, the Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar¹¹⁹ cites Jesus’s promise in John 14: 15-21:

“I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: Because I live, ye shall live also.”³

The meaning is: naturally, you are still of this world, but mortality no longer belongs to you. That is why we wish to think of Antea as a happy individual and believe that her unhappiness might be our own projection. For Antea, eternal life was present in her daily life, and earthly death did not concern her. And it was in the mystical moment that she lived the sense of eternal being most completely. This is why we wish to call her the mystic of Noveledo.

10. The Future of Reverence of the Dead

Perhaps some of you have come across the Facebook, or other *social media*, profile of a person you knew who has already been dead for some time. Facebook is becoming the largest existing graveyard and the number of deceased users is increasing dramatically, so much so that it will exceed the number of living users this century. It is expected that by the end of the century the number of dead users will be almost 5 billion.¹²⁰

The critique of the changes undergone by the reverence of the dead in contemporary societies has become commonplace in social criticism. In our global civilization the deceased have presumably become human ballast to be got rid of as soon as possible. A society that only looks to the future, that is devoid of past consciousness, would tend to reduce the reverence of the dead to a duty that is considered *due* but not really *lived*. Evidence which demonstrates the hasty and anonymous removal of the memory of the dead can be found, among other

³ Translator’s note: translation from King James Bible

things, in the growing number of those who wish to forsake a burial and a tombstone with their name engraved. Experience teaches us that it is only a matter of time until one's descendants forget. Criticism of contemporary societies reaches its climax in condemning their lack of sensitivity towards the dead, which is made evident in the evaporation of religious substance from contemporary societies.

If we look closely at this phenomenon, however, we realise that the process is somewhat more complex. First of all, we must take into account that the rise in the number of deceased persons is inversely proportional to the space available for burials. The consequence is that the number of years available to family members to visit loved ones in cemeteries is inevitably reduced. The time span for which a tomb is available for visitors is often reduced – depending on the demographic development of the country in question – to less than a generation. The now prevalent choice of cremation partly grants an extension of this period. However, it is only a matter of time until the number of burial niches proves too small and inevitably the time spent in them will have to be reduced. Another way of lightening the burden cemeteries are suffering space-wise is the growing custom of scattering the ashes of the dead in woods and lakes with improvised rites based on new age philosophies. They supposedly allow the deceased to go back, and not just symbolically, to being part of that *life cycle* that views nature as the beginning and the end of a circular process in which the mystery of life is infinitely reproduced. Setting aside the philosophical-religious meanings attributed to these “scattered burial” procedures, they can also be interpreted as the legitimate desire of some deceased persons who do not wish to burden their family with ritual duties, the fulfillment of which is becoming increasingly complicated in an era of increased residential mobility.

The development of so-called *virtual cemeteries*¹²¹ must be interpreted as having a complementary relationship with these procedures. These virtual cemeteries are not the manifestation of a diminished willingness to preserve the memory of the dead. On the contrary, thanks to them, the number of generations that are given the opportunity to visit the deceased and to remember them is extended indefinitely, for example, by purchasing a virtual flower or by means of other ritual acts. The creation of memorial spaces is an effective means of sharing grief and lessening the pain caused by the loss of our loved ones.

However, in view of the persistent difficulties involved in deleting digital data, both for the living and the dead, this could all paradoxically make one's right to be forgotten, one's legitimate request to be forgotten, problematic.¹²²

Certainly, the juxtaposition of digital death and physical death together with the problem of managing digital inheritance constitute a challenge of no small importance, which could force us to redefine the conceptual lines with which we face understanding and managing death.¹²³

This does not only concern widespread phenomena such as the practice of live streaming funerals, but also the issue of keeping a physically dead but digitally revitalised person alive.

Is digital space taking the place of the third space we spoke about earlier and will it become a digital coda of earthly life?¹²⁴ It is likely that the commemorative and ritual practices that are unfolding thanks to the digital dimension will change the ways in which the Souls of the dead are dealt with. The chances the Souls in Purgatory have to optimise the care for their own souls will increase through the effective and punctual attention imparted to them by their loved ones. This will mean increasing their chances of a faster passage to Heaven. And even the living will benefit from being able to care for the souls in Purgatory more easily and accessibly. The graves of the dead can be at our disposal on our mobile phone screens, even if they are not physically close.

Is the consequence of all this the elimination of cemeteries in our towns and cities? Have we gone from the need to create cemetery areas outside inhabited areas,¹²⁵ from cemeteries within and surrounding churches to digital cemeteries which cancel out cemeteries as concrete architectural structures? Obviously, this is not the case, and we can instead see the opposite trend almost everywhere. It is precisely in an age of constant temporal acceleration that the awareness of the need to preserve our historical memory manifests itself. This is confirmed, for example, by the concern demonstrated in placing individual graves and entire cemeteries under cultural heritage protection. The meaning of such actions is not primarily to preserve the memory of the deceased as individuals. Faced with the progressive and rapid transformation of entire areas, of new buildings and the substitution of green spaces for living spaces, people feel uncertain about their roots and feel the need to create a relationship of continuity with the past. Excessively altering the *vital world* of individuals does not occur without generating significant consequences. In its extreme form, neglecting and

damaging collective memory, forcing people to adopt excessive changes in their perceptive and residential mobility habits generates dissatisfaction and a refusal to take care of the *common good*. An important antidote to this is the commitment to preserve whatever remains and may be used to revitalise people's sensitivity to their local environment. Wherever we can avoid eliminating even the most fragmentary remains of our past, we must do so.

Those who return to their hometown, after some years away, share the common experience of no longer recognizing it. One could argue that "life has moved on!" and that progress cannot wait for those who would like to go back to a postcard image of the past. The error behind this kind of reasoning is in the belief that there is a contradiction between innovation and preservation. Preserving aspects of our past certainly does not contradict with an ethic of progress. Rather, it springs from the awareness of the importance that rites hold for people's existence. Living spaces have the function of guaranteeing inhabitants a possibly pleasant existence in which their sense of belonging does not infringe upon their individuality. It is not only religious rituals that contribute to building a family environment suited to people's needs, but also more secular ones such as participation in carnival events, rock concerts or watching films screened at the town cinema. Deritualizing everyday life ultimately means reducing it to a mere field of technological exercise thus dehumanizing it.¹²⁶

In conclusion, the practice of devotion to the dead is only one aspect of memory we must tend to in order to compensate for the effects of our era.¹²⁷ Nonetheless it is a central element. It is a sign of love and respect for our loved ones. The most ancient sign of humanity is manifested in devotion to the dead. Let us remember that in Athens one could not hold public office unless it was proven that the graves of one's family were kept in a dignified state. One was not considered able to care for the living with dignity, if one was unable to give the deceased the dignity they deserved.¹²⁸

11. Antea was not a *Mezaràt*¹²⁹

In the seventies, the American philosopher Thomas Nagel published an essay entitled "How does it feel to be a bat?" that made him famous.¹³⁰ Nagel's intent was to show that we have no chance of knowing how a bat experiences the world. Obviously, Nagel's focus was on the fact that humans are not bats

and therefore do not have the sensory devices used by bats to perceive their surroundings. I have at times felt about Antea as Nagel did about bats. Obviously, there is a fundamental difference between the case described by Nagel and our case, since Antea was a human being and therefore, we can assume that our way of seeing and feeling the world is analogous to Antea's in many ways. However, in dealing with Antea, we have noticed a great difference between her way of seeing the world and ours, if only for the five hundred years that separate us from her. In particular, we have felt inadequate, for example when venturing into comparisons between our grandparents and Antea, or when talking about Antea's emotions as if they were our own, transferring, for instance, what we mean when we speak about freedom to how a woman who lived 500 years ago in a context radically different from ours would have conceived the world. For example, was what we perceive today as constraint the same for Antea?

Reflecting on Antea, however, has also led us to consider numerous fundamental questions regarding our civil life, such as the presence and function of the Sacred, the function of the religious dimension in modern societies, the relationship between past and present, collective memory and the essence of religious experience.

A question that seems inevitable to me is the concept of religion as the basis of an analysis of Antea's experience. What was religion for Antea? The "religious" dimension was a natural fact into which she had been raised and brought up.¹³¹ Many of us – at least the older ones of us – grew up in this way, in the Catholic faith, as a way of living and thinking handed down to us by our parents and our environment. For Antea this was probably even more profound, in the sense that the "religious" dimension permeated a version of everyday life in which no dimension was external to the religious one. There were, so to speak, no alternative offers on the market!

Antea was probably not interested in the heated discussion which consumed the Enlightenment, that is, whether the existence of God could be demonstrated by rational argument. What prevailed was the fact that her desire for Transcendence was satisfied in the religious dimension.

I have often wondered what Antea's way of living a *religious* life was like, and I have tried to imagine what her everyday life was like. To this respect, it seems important not to allow myself to be misled by the hagiographic account, which, in its attempt to find analogies with the *living female saints*, might

mislead one to flatten Antea's life to preconceived models. And perhaps to inadvertently adopt the value system and prejudices present in the hagiography. Biographies are processes that do not follow prepared outlines and that are therefore difficult to predict and, in all likelihood, will not repeat themselves: they represent individual destinies.

The reader will have noticed that we have followed an eclectic methodology, certainly not aimed at the critical analysis of Antea's hagiography. That was not our purpose, nor did we have the necessary information to do so.

It is one thing, however, to ask what the religious dimension was for Antea. It is another to ask what the most adequate interpretative model to understand Antea in the religious context of her time was. Which approach enables us to better understand Antea in the context of her era? It seems useful to us to use some elements of a functional sociology of religion approach. This allows us to consider religious phenomena as *communicative systems*, abstracting from *models of self-consciousness*: we do not know what Antea really thought and felt and, wherever we have tried to thematise these aspects, we have done so from a fictional perspective. That is, we have assumed that, on the basis of our knowledge and sensitivity, Antea would have acted and thought in a certain way in a given situation. Using the model of the so-called *living female saints* to consider Antea has allowed us to have a comparative system that is useful for understanding the mystic of Noveledo.

However, rather than considering religion as a tool for solving an individual's specific problems, a functionalist approach considers it in its social function. Although religion may be superfluous to individuals, it is not superfluous to society's communicative system. From this perspective, religion allows for the establishment of loyal relationships among the members of a group, while loyalty to doctrine takes second place.¹³² A functionalist approach to Antea's character allows us to explain what her role as *living saint* might have been between the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth century. However, it does not allow us to fully understand Antea's traits, to grasp the distinctness that made her a different and unique individual when compared to others. In short, it is like considering her a *mezarat*, a bat, rather than a human being.

Our interest in Antea is mainly linked to the fact that our paths have crossed. Obviously, not all living female saints interest us in the same way and to the same extent. It is our

feelings that make an object special, not the object itself. In fact, we do not grieve for the death of all the dead people in this world, but of those who had an important meaning for our lives.¹³³ We could argue that our emotional closeness to Antea might also be an element that hinders rather than facilitates our understanding. On the contrary, we believe that our emotional involvement is a vehicle for understanding, a way of “reading the world”. Emotions are a source of knowledge which are no less important than cognitive sources.

In imagining Antea’s daily life, we felt that rituals must have played an important role.¹³⁴ We have asked ourselves to what extent, for example, Antea’s moral values were nourished by liturgical singing, prayers, maternal education, the sacrament of confession and sermons heard in church. We have thought of Noveledo as the context in which Antea could practise rites in their simplicity and purity, and perhaps derive great benefit from them thanks to the freedom she enjoyed, while in the context of the noble courts she would have had to submit to behavioural rules imposed on her by court etiquette.

We have assumed that Nature was central to Antea, perhaps because we ourselves have experienced the extraordinary and explosive luxuriance of flora in the township, before greenery gave way to building development in the 1970s. In Antea’s childhood and adolescence, God was first and foremost nature. He was Spinoza’s God of substance as “unlimited, eternal and infinite” that she perceived daily when looking after the animals and working in the fields or meadows to *make hay*. Nature was the same nature Christ based the themes of his parables on,¹³⁵ which Antea would have heard many times from her mother or during the Masses at Madonna di Ponte. The young Antea’s religiosity would still have been linked to a natural religion, profoundly different from that of her mature period, which would instead have been enriched by the experiences accumulated during her frequent travels, by exchanging opinions with the people she met and by conversations with the spiritual father. Her relationship with religion will therefore have to be considered in the terms of its changing nature, and it would be a hagiographic distortion to consider it an unchangeable constant which accompanied Antea from early childhood to death.¹³⁶

I agree with Georg Simmel’s thoughts on this point.¹³⁷ He describes religion as a journey along a path, which acquires substance and *tonality* during an encounter between the *human subject* and three elements: *nature*, the *sense of destiny* and the

human world. I have insisted on the fact that her experience in Noveledo was primarily linked to the first of these elements and that mystical ecstasy was a central factor. The soteriological and social aspects probably prevailed in later phases.

Antea presumably had her first *self-transcendent* experiences¹³⁸ in Noveledo, those experiences that everyone has when they transcend the confines of the self. It is the experience we have when we are so fascinated by something outside of ourselves that we move away from the Self to open ourselves up to an *Other* in an absolute and exclusive way. For example, it is what we feel during a hike when at the end of a tiring climb to reach a mountain peak, we finally get there and in turning to consider the ground covered, we admire a wonderful landscape that seems to have no limits.

However, Antea's self-transcendental experience cannot have been limited to her relationships with nature, which must inevitably have diminished in number over the course of her life. On the contrary, that experience must have touched other areas, manifesting itself in different ways. It may have revealed itself, for example, in moments of absolute generosity in which she helped the needy by depriving herself of everything, or when she prayed for the souls of the dead, or even when she put herself at the service of the elite of the time. In those cases, self-transcendence meant unconditional help, overcoming the Self's boundaries and overflowing into a Love for Others.

Having said this, we know very well that it would be rather presumptuous to assume to confine Antea's religious experience, which is the most intimate, elementary and raw experience that a person can have, to a formula.¹³⁹

We have imagined Antea as a Blessed for the afflicted, for the suffering, and particularly attentive to those who lived on the margins of society: the *Underdogs*, like the people of Noveledo, accustomed to the hard life of working in the fields. But perhaps this diminishes Antea's religious impetus, which was so radical as to leave no space neither to regrets nor to preferences that might have given more importance to the Self than was due. The radicality of renunciation that is expressed through mystical choice is irrevocably absolute and, as Hans-Urs von Balthasar says in his splendid pages, it is not a means aimed at achieving an end, but rather "the expression, the very fullness of Christian love."¹⁴⁰

12. Forgetting Antea? The dilemma of secularisation

Reflecting on Antea has led us to consider the function of religion as a social binding agent. We have seen how the Brissago Statutes give us important information about society in Antea's time and the role assumed by religion. As is observed by the historian Virgilio Gilardoni,¹⁴¹ Antea operated in a period when the rural class was increasingly put under pressure by the emerging class of artisans' spasmodic search for new space. The result was the often violent reaction of local families and lords, and religion was called upon to take a stand and mitigate conflict, a task which in fact both parish priests¹⁴² and *living female saints* took on.

A process that has discontinuously accompanied the period we are considering is that of *secularisation*, understood as the *loss of meaning of religion*. Antea's era was still linked to a pre-secular society, in which religion permeated people's lives. The matter of secularisation becomes important when reflecting on the differences between the society Antea lived in and today's ones. In the Brissago Statutes, we find some juridical and political aspects which seem to prefigure the emancipation of the "political" figure from the "religious" one, demonstrating the gradual passage from one dimension to another. The process of secularisation is in fact a complex and varied process, not reducible to an elementary subtraction of the "religious" from the "political."¹⁴³ Precisely to avoid this simplification, the definition of contemporary societies as *post-secularised societies* was preferred.¹⁴⁴ Unlike in *secularised* societies, the religious dimension must be reconsidered as essential for their functioning. The Freudian future of an illusion¹⁴⁵ has been replaced by the illusion of a future without religion.

It would be interesting to analyse how in secularised (or post-secular) societies religious rites have been transformed into rites in which the religious element was transformed or even replaced. Think of how religious pilgrimages, still widespread in the 1970s, have been replaced by bus trips for pensioners forced to trade quick visits to sanctuaries for endless commercial demonstrations of clay pots and stainless steel crockery.

The issue of the progressive transformation of rituality should not only be interpreted as a *secularisation* of rites in that there was a waning of their religious significance. It must also be considered in terms of the progressive abandonment of the "ritual" dimension in favour of the *internalisation* of the "religious" dimension.¹⁴⁶ This trend was accentuated with the Protestant reform and received a strong push with the

disintegration of the sacrament of confession.¹⁴⁷ Consequently, in the late Middle Ages, an *antagonistic* relationship began to emerge between religion, which was considered a *personal and intimate fact*, and religious forms that continued to view the fulcrum of the religious dimension in *collective rituality*. It is difficult to establish how Antea should be placed in the progressive internalization process of the religious dimension. However, the marked competence that she demonstrated in the field of counselling and caring for souls might indicate the transition to a phase in which religion was more an *internal form* than ritual expression.

It is also for this reason that the image of a *political Antea* does not fit the Noveledo mystic, at least not if the aim is to suggest that Antea was “the prince’s advisor”, in the sense that Machiavelli attributes to the term. The role of *living female saints* as healers of the souls of the powerful should, however, be analysed in its many variations.

If anything, Antea was *political* in the sense attributed to the term by Hannah Arendt, who thought that the most important role of politics consisted in the care of the Common Good and in the constant concern to include the Other in decision-making processes.¹⁴⁸

It was perhaps Antea’s closeness to the afflicted that prompted commentators to deprecate the “people’s” inappropriate use of the appellation “Blessed”, which we will continue to call her. As we have already said, although no process of canonization took place, Antea Gianetti was and remains for us Beata Antea of Noveledo.¹⁴⁹ All the more so because the canonization procedures were also the result of reasoning that had little to do with judging the subject in question’s actual holiness. Fourteenth and fifteenth century canonisations preferred to promote characters distinguished by high-ranking birth and the Church was very careful to play its “best cards” when facing the elitist pressure of the Renaissance that was at its gates. In that context, poverty was significantly marginalised from the register of virtues useful for promoting canonical sainthood.¹⁵⁰

What is the point of dealing with Antea in the third millennium? Can Antea ever be a role model in post-secular societies? Can we identify positive qualities in Antea’s character that make her a possible point of reference even for non-believers? What does Antea teach us about our spiritual life?

The ethical aspects that emerge in the figure of Antea are many, starting with the most evident ones which relate to consoling the afflicted and her skill in the attention and care of

people. These abilities were the result of faith, but also of the sufferings she underwent. In fact, it is only those who have experienced suffering that can console and offer respite. From this point of view, the splitting of Antea into what we have called her *two souls* can only be an analytical or, if you like, hagiographic fiction. The mystical-meditative soul and the entrepreneurial soul complement each other and form a unit in the mystic of Noveledo's persona.

Writing this text, we have sometimes also wondered if what we were telling was Antea's story or ours. In fact, it is a bit of both, and therefore probably even the text you are reading is a hagiographic text, since its purpose is to bring you closer to Antea's character as we imagine it to be, and even as I wish it had really been.

Although everyone is free to remember or forget who and what they want, I believe that Antea should not be forgotten. She is a part of our town's history which everyone is free to attribute the importance they wish to, according to their convictions and history. Antea's importance will also depend on the space that each of us will allow her to occupy in our memory. For me, Antea is the Blessed whom Noveledo's elderly folk spoke of and when they went to Mass on Sundays, they made the sign of the cross in front of the enclosure where she used to meditate. For others, Antea might be an interesting case to be explained with psychological categories. For others still, she will be a character that merits historical investigation. And for others, she may be the possible object of literary invention.¹⁵¹

We are not aware of any actual devotional phenomena towards Antea,¹⁵² and who knows if the Antea's sites will ever become destinations for devotion: often the presence of special places linked to the lives of the saints have amply nourished human imagination.¹⁵³

Although today the custom of giving saints' names to children is not so widespread, just a few decades ago this custom was closely related to the field of holy devotion.¹⁵⁴ I wonder if anyone in Brissago will think of calling their daughter Antea? Antea is not a common name. In the last twenty years, less than 20 girls per year have been given the name Antea in Italy (Istat data).

To conclude, how should we imagine Antea Gianetti? I cannot help but imagine her with tenacious religiosity, yet docile in her interpersonal relationships. Rebellious and determined. Resolute, yet sweet and empathetic. A woman for whom illiteracy certainly did not correspond to emotional illiteracy.

But what did Antea look like? Can the available images help us understand her better?

The engraving we have of *Madonna Antea, the wonderful servant of God* seems the most significant to me: it represents her with an attentive, severe but trusting gaze, turned upwards, as if *waiting*. It may represent the end of the period that began with the young Antea's first experiences of self-transcendence. The Transcendent God does not reveal Himself here for a mere moment, as happens in the magical moment of mystical ecstasy. In fact, Antea's gaze is very different from that of mystical ecstasy representations. Here her gaze attentively looks upon the Absolute, expressing neither fear nor ecstasy, yet it seems to represent the topical moment that Max Scheler described as the moment in which the Foundational Being presents itself to the human being *in the same act* in which the human being realises it is being founded.¹⁵⁵ It is the moment in which the sweet relationship, expressed by the *state of grace*, forms between the Self and the Other from Self.

Antea's tale could be an opportunity to start exploring the history of religiosity in Brissago. The purpose of our *website* is also to help write that history together with those who wish to. It is Antea herself who has already shown us the way: although she had to give up convent life, as an adult she chose to carry out missionary work, as did several living female saints, because she believed that the missionary role should prevail over that of conventual reclusion. Like the living female saints, Antea thus brought about a real revolution in terms of religious and civil customs. She fostered various works of mercy and assistance that were the prelude to social services, such as hospitals, which were made possible by the charitable commitment of those devotees who aspired to a reward in the afterlife.¹⁵⁶

But let us not forget there were many people who made their contribution to the Church and to the Brissago community both before and after Antea. I will mention some of them from memory, but the list will certainly have to be added to: Mrs. Angela Bianchini and the "*crociatine*" movement⁴, Don Giuseppe Pisoni, who after spending several years in Brissago decided to go to South America, at the age of over seventy, to

⁴ Translator's note: This refers to a group of girls who would meet to pray and lead Sunday school on Sunday afternoons. They were identified by a sash worn during Sunday processions.

take care of children in the favelas, the Sisters of *Casa San Giorgio della Congregazione delle Piccole Figlie di San Giuseppe*, who have taken care of our elderly folk for decades.

It is these people, and many others whose names we do not even know, who have been able to continue the path set by Antea. They were male and female mystics who did not even know they were such. They are the people described by the theologian José M. Castillo in the last chapter of one of his fundamental books,¹⁵⁷ and it is with his words that we wish to end our contribution:

“The Gospel in its entirety can only be understood and experienced by mystics, to the extent that these mystics are *simple*. I am referring to mystics who come off as normal people and therefore do not attract anyone's attention. These are *good people* even in the hardest circumstances of life, in the hardships of salaries that do not reach the end of the month, in the uncertainty of precarious jobs, in the loneliness of those who live a different culture, in the weight of a coexistence in which no one understands you, in hopelessly incurable illnesses, in old age lived without bitterness or resentment, in the anonymity of those who are not important people, nor do anything to attract attention... When in spite of all this and everything else imaginable, a person does not tire of simply being a good person, in that case, that person is a mystic.”¹⁵⁸

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- ¹ *Breve narrazione di alcune azioni di Antea Gianetti da Bressago raccolte dal Padre Gerolamo Villani sacerdote della Compagnia di Gesù scritti in Como l'anno 1617 ad uso delle Madri cappuccine di Torino Borgo Po*, cit. in Bolognini (2011), p. 157.
- ² Boesch Gajano (2020), p. 94.
- ³ Sull'importanza della *Legenda Aurea* come testo di riferimento per tutta la tradizione agiografica successive al Duecento, cf. Benvenuti (2005), p.205.
- ⁴ Ivi, p.43 sg.
- ⁵ da Varazze (2007). Si veda anche Rochini, Chiapparini (2022), p. 45.
- ⁶ Fino al Trecento i termini di *santo* e *beato* furono considerati sinonimi e interscambiabili, cf. Benvenuti (2005), pp. 200-201. Siccome collochiamo in via euristica Antea nella matrice delle *sante vive*, usiamo entrambi i termini come avveniva ancora nel Trecento, appunto come interscambiabili. Tendenzialmente quando usiamo il termine *santa* però vogliamo sottolineare la vicinanza di Antea alle *sante vive*, mentre quello di *beata* ha per noi un'accezione più biografica.
- ⁷ Deloos (1976).
- ⁸ von den Steinen (1968).
- ⁹ Goullet (2005), p. 251. Il riferimento è a Genette (1982), p.559.
- ¹⁰ Boesch Gajano (2020), p. 235.
- ¹¹ Ivi, p. 236.
- ¹² Ibidem.
- ¹³ Rochini, Chiapparini (2022), p. 52.
- ¹⁴ Zarri in Benvenuti (2005), pp. 245-247. Ma si veda anche Rochini, Chiapparini (2022), pp. 448-450, e anche van Kessel (2002).
- ¹⁵ Zarri (1985). Ma anche Cantimori (1967).
- ¹⁶ Cf. il capitolo *Le sante vive* in Zarri (1990), pp.87-164.
- ¹⁷ Sul rapporto madre-figlia si veda Duby-Perrot (1991), p.54.
- ¹⁸ Frigerio, Pisoni (1984), p.79.
- ¹⁹ Ivi, Cap.70.
- ²⁰ Van Kessel in: Duby Perrot (1991), p. 203.
- ²¹ Ariès (1960).
- ²² Frigerio, Pisoni (1984), Cap. 185, p. 177.
- ²³ Frenken (2002), p. 17.
- ²⁴ Esistono documentazioni su ticinesi che risiedevano a Firenze, appartenenti però alle élites, che si esprimevano con un mix di volgare, toscano e varietà del linguaggio diplomatico. Cf. Silvia Morgana, *La lingua*, in Ostinelli, Chiesi (1985), pp. 451-462. Vedi p. 461.
- ²⁵ Diversamente sarebbe singolare ad esempio il fatto che alla Corte di Mantova Antea si fosse premurata di regalare alcune copie della biografia di una sua quasi contemporanea, Beata Giovanna della Croce. Ne riferisce Bolognini (2011), p. 169. Inoltre Benvenuti (2005), p. 208-211, spiega diffusamente l'uso del volgare nel Tre-Quattrocento, che subì una vera e propria impennata grazie all'uso di testi sacri in volgare. Benvenuti ne sottolinea anche l'effetto di alfabetizzazione sui laici. (Ivi, p. 209).
- ²⁶ Rusconi (2002), p. 81.
- ²⁷ Delcorno (1987), p. 47.
- ²⁸ Frigerio, Pisoni (1984), p.78. Da leggere l'ottima introduzione, anche in particolare per gli aspetti della religione, pp.78-80.
- ²⁹ Frigerio, Pisoni (1984), p. 78: Sulla funzione del canto nella liturgia andranno anche considerati i "santorali", cf. Ronchini, Chiapparini 2022, p. 72.
- ³⁰ Serres (2019), p.104.
- ³¹ Gilardoni (1979), p. 389.
- ³² P. Ariès, G. Duby (1985), p. 344 sgg.

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- ³³ Gilardoni (1979), p. 393.
- ³⁴ Sul *chiacchiericcio* vedi Frigerio, Pisoni (1984), p. 164. A Sesto Antea divenne oggetto di chiacchiericcio per la sua incontenibile generosità.
- ³⁵ Sul rapporto fra devozione dei santi e iconografia si veda Chiesi (2003), p. 32-33
- ³⁶ Le Goff (1982), p. 5. Su questo aspetto si soffermano in molti. Si veda ad esempio Frigerio, Pisoni (1984), p. 152 sgg. e anche Dubois in Ostinelli (2015), nota 1, riferita a p. 292.
- ³⁷ Louis Beirnaert, *Le symbolisme ascensionnel das la liturgie et la mystique chrétienne*, in: Beirnaert (1964), p. 391-416, p. 393.
- ³⁸ *Genesi*, 28,10-22.
- ³⁹ Cf. *Confessiones*, 13,9 e *Enarrationes in psalmos*, cit. in Beirnaert (1964), p. 407.
- ⁴⁰ *Eccl.*18-26. Seguiamo qui i suggerimenti di Beirnaert (1964), pp. 409-410, ma sulla verticalità religiosa cf. anche H. Rosa (2016), pp. 435-452.
- ⁴¹ Paolo Ostinelli, *Chiese, istituzioni ecclesiastiche e vita religiosa*, pp. 387-422, p. 418 in: Ostinelli, Chiesi (2015).
- ⁴² Gilardoni 1979
- ⁴³ dove poteva incontrare a Incella almeno una cappella del XV secolo e più in alto l'oratorio di Porbetto, anch'esso in uno stato più minuscolo di quello attuale.
- Tuttavia andrebbe fatto uno studio sistematico e ricostruire quali fosse la situazione relativa agli edifici e ai monumenti religiosi nel periodo il cui Antea si trovava a Brissago, cercando di tracciare una sorta di "mappa del Sacro" a Brissago nella seconda metà del Cinquecento.
- ⁴⁴ Spaemann (2010b), p. 35.
- ⁴⁵ Boesch Gajano (2020).
- ⁴⁶ Il campanile come forte presenza identificativa dei paesi compare soltanto con il romanico. Cf. Ostinelli, Chiesi (2015), p. 396: "L'epoca del romanico vide la costruzione, l'ampliamento o la trasformazione secondo i nuovi canoni architettonici di una grande quantità di edifici sacri. Le chiese dell'XI e XII secolo erano più grandi, si distinguevano decisamente dalle altre costruzioni negli abitati per l'accuratezza dell'opera muraria e della decorazione, e i campanili diventarono i punti di maggior visibilità nel paesaggio antropizzato: non solo "sacralizzarono" il territorio, ma furono anche uno dei trami più forti per l'identificazione dei singoli come membri della comunità dei villaggi."
- Non sappiamo se le meridiane, di cui a Noveledo ne ritroviamo una proprio all'entrata della frazione, fossero presenti nella quotidianità di Antea. Si veda: Gaggioni (2017).
- ⁴⁷ Le Goff (1987), pp. 32-34, che colloca nel XIV secolo questo cambiamento della percezione del tempo.
- ⁴⁸ Ivi, p. 35. Sebbene Le Goff collochi già dalla metà del XIV secolo la questione della "perdita di tempo", ritengo che ciò non faccia parte dell'orizzonte temporale di Antea.
- ⁴⁹ Heidegger (1976), pp. 4-5.
- ⁵⁰ Le Goff (1987), pp. 20-21.
- ⁵¹ Benvenuti Papi (1988), cf. p. 206-207.
- ⁵² Ovviamente la Weil colloca il discorso del radicamento e del passaggio dalla campagna alla città in un periodo storico diverso da quello che stiamo trattando.
- ⁵³ Oberg (1960).
- ⁵⁴ Benvenuti Papi (1988), p. 205.
- ⁵⁵ Zarri (1990), p. 38.
- ⁵⁶ Zarri (1990), pp.102-103.
- ⁵⁷ Zarri (1990), p.14.
- ⁵⁸ La devozione dei defunti risale a Odilone di Cluny (994-1048). Le Goff (1982) fa risalire la nascita del purgatorio ai secoli XII e XIII. Sulla questione si veda anche il *Catechismo della chiesa cattolica*, III, 1030-1031
- ⁵⁹ Cf. Zarri (2005)

⁶⁰ Andrebbe fatta una accurata cartografia delle “ideologie” religiose nel tempo di Antea così da valutare almeno approssimativamente quale potesse essere il suo pensiero. Vi sono parecchie pubblicazioni che andrebbero integrate, come ad esempio Benvenuti (2005), Vauchez (2014), Chiffolleau (1981).

⁶¹ Duby, Perrot (1991), p.199.

⁶² Zarri (1990), p. 54.

⁶³ Cantimori (1967), p.10.

⁶⁴ Ibidem. Cantimori (1967) attua un’operazione analoga a quella di Ginzburg (2019).

⁶⁵ Petrocchi (1996), p. 81.

⁶⁶ Della presenza di questi sentimenti anche nei cosiddetti eretici si veda D. Cantimori (2009).

⁶⁷ Tralascio quindi di fare una lista delle opere che avrebbero potuto, indirettamente o direttamente influenzare il misticismo di Antea, ma val la pena citare almeno il trattato anonimo *Del Beneficio di Cristo* che dovrebbe essere considerato quale “scritto tipico del movimento italiano di rinnovamento dottrinale ed ecclesiastico, religioso e morale nel Cinquecento.” Evito di affrontare la questione se Antea fosse vicina alla *devotio moderna*, più vicina al pragmatismo libero da sovrastrutture teologiche di Antea che non il misticismo. Mi immagino la devozione di Antea come una devozione pratica e diretta, legata ai riti e ai gesti quotidiani. Una devozione individuale, scandita da moduli mistici e ascetici e probabilmente orientata dal *De Imitatione Christi* e sicuramente dalla Sacra Scrittura. Devozione in cui l’”orazione mentale” è fortemente presente, come lo è la ricerca di ottenere una quiete assoluta, una “pace tranquillissima”, un amore ardentissimo e stupendo, lontano dalla dura quotidianità in cui non era raro l’uso della violenza. Sono parecchi gli autori che sottolineano il ruolo della *devotio moderna* nel Quattrocento italiano, ad esempio Petrocchi (1996).

⁶⁸ (Byatt)1999.

⁶⁹ Leppin (2021). Mi riferisco in particolare alla prima parte del capitolo 10 dedicata a “Devotio moderna: Die Popularisierung mystischer Ideen”, pp. 279-290.

⁷⁰ Sul ruolo delle immagini si veda: J-C. Schmitt (2002). Per quanto riguarda la situazione ticinese si veda Chiesi (2003), p. 32.

⁷¹ In una delle due immagini che conosciamo di Antea, quella a colori, il pittore si sforza, con dubbio successo, a rappresentarla in stato estatico.

⁷² Sul rapporto delle mistiche con la lingua scritta si veda: Giovanni Pozzi, L’alfabeto delle sante, in: Pozzi, Leonardi (1988), pp. 21-42, in part. p. 23.

⁷³ Tuttavia l’interpretazione della mistica come distacco dal mondo sociale rappresentato dalla santa che medita nel silenzio, se può valere per Antea a Novaledo, certamente non corrisponde più, già a partire dal Duecento, alla tendenza generale in Europa e a quella nuova spiritualità che vuole emanciparsi dalle costrizioni imposte dalla vita coniugale e familiare.

Sul matrimonio e l’estasi mistica sono celebri le pagine di Teresa D’Avila.

Sulla D’Avila si veda la voce Teresa d’Avila in enciclopedia.delledonne.it

⁷⁴ Chiesi (2003), p. 25.

⁷⁵ James (2022), p. 333.

⁷⁶ Niklaus Schatzmann, Mentalità religiosa e processi di stregoneria, in Ostinelli, Chiesi (2015), pp. 423-438.

⁷⁷ Ibidem.

⁷⁸ Benvenuti (2005), p. 205 parla di “processo di omologazione del linguaggio con cui si descrissero (...) la santità e la stregoneria”.

Ma sul fenomeno delle streghe e delle sante vive si veda il capitolo III dedicato alle sante vive di Zarri (1990), in part. p.114 sgg.

⁷⁹ Marcello Craveri, Sante e streghe. Biografie e documenti dal XIV al XVII secolo, Feltrinelli, Milano 1980.

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- ⁸⁰ Ibidem.
- ⁸¹ Giuseppe Martinola, *Processi ticinesi di stregoneria*, S.A. Tipografia editrice Lugano, 1943, p. 7.
- ⁸² Frigerio, Pisoni (1984), p. 79 sgg.
- ⁸³ Circostanza citata anche da Frigerio, Pisoni (1984), *ivi*.
- ⁸⁴ Schatzmann in Ostinelli, Chiesi (2015), p. 436.
- ⁸⁵ R.I. Moore, *The first European Revolution*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2000
Sul rapporto fra misticismo e falsa santità si veda Vismara (2003), in particolare il capitolo “misticismo e falsa santità”, pp. 96-97.
- ⁸⁶ Vismara (2003), p. 97.
- ⁸⁷ Boesch Gajano (2020), p. 290. Ma su tutta questa problematica si veda ad es. Chiara Frugoni, *La femme imaginée*, in Duby, Perrot, *II. Histoire des femmes en Occident, Le Moyen Âge*, Perrin 2002, pp. 441-520.
- ⁸⁸ Salvestrini (2007), p. 494.
- ⁸⁹ Frigerio, Pisoni (1984), p. 81. Il riferimento è a Cap. 124.
- ⁹⁰ M. A. Visceglia, p. 494-495 in Salvestrini (2007).
- ⁹¹ Nel suo saggio su Antea, Bolognini (2011), a p. 167 riporta il passaggio del manoscritto.
- ⁹² J.-C. Schmitt (1994), p. 58-59.
- ⁹³ J.-C. Schmitt (1979), pp. 18-19.
- ⁹⁴ Il termine è di Eusebio di Cesarea, citato da Boesch Gajano (2020), in: *Esemplarità e santità*, pp. 267-307, cf. p. 275.
- ⁹⁵ Cf. Jacobson Schutte (2001).
- ⁹⁶ Le Goff (1982), p. 5.
- ⁹⁷ Le Goff (1982) cita Ariès a p. 410.
- ⁹⁸ *Ivi*, p. 370.
- ⁹⁹ La rappresentazione iconografica delle anime del Purgatorio è sterminata. Si veda p.es. Vaurillon-Cervoni, *L’iconographie du purgatorie*, cit. in Le Goff (1982), p. 405. Di notevole interesse la rappresentazione della Madonna che nutre le anime con il suo latte, di cui c’è una interessante rappresentazione a Sigirino, V. Ottavio Besomi. *La Madonna di Sigirino. Una Madonna del latte e le anime del Purgatorio*, *Pagine d’Arte* 2008.
- ¹⁰⁰ Dante, *Purgatorio*, III, 145, in Dante Alighieri, *Commedia*, Vol. II. *Purgatorio*, Mondadori, Milano 1994, p. 100.
- ¹⁰¹ Così Le Goff (1982) sulla pia Lutgarda, p. 369-370. Sebbene non esistano certezze su quali testi abbiano potuto contribuire ad influenzare Antea su questo aspetto¹⁰¹, ritengo improbabile che non sia stata attratta da *Il trattato del Purgatorio* di Santa Caterina da Genova (1447-1510), testo che può essere letto come un trattato di mistica. Petrocchi (1996), p. 73: La dottrina del puro amore permea le pagine del Trattato del purgatorio.
- ¹⁰² J. Chiffolleau, *Sur l’usage obsessionnel de la messe pour les morts à la fin du Moyen Âge*, in Chiffolleau (1981), pp. 236-256.
- ¹⁰³ Le Goff 1982, p. 256.
- ¹⁰⁴ *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, Letouzey et Ané, Paris, 1902-1950, Art. *Purgatoire*, p. 1243.
- ¹⁰⁵ N. Zemon Davis, *Die Geister der Verstorbenen, Verwandtschaftsgrade und die Sorge um die Nachkommen. Veränderungen des Familienlebens in der frühen Neuzeit*, in: Zemon Davis (1989), pp. 19-51, p. 27.
- ¹⁰⁶ Borrani (1896), pp. 143-144.
- ¹⁰⁷ G. De Sandre, Gasparini, *La morte nelle campagne bassomedievali*, pp. 65-95, p. 81., in: Salvestrini et al. (2007).
- ¹⁰⁸ J.-C. Schmitt (1994), pp. 209-211.
- ¹⁰⁹ *Ivi*, p. 210.
- ¹¹⁰ Sulla linea di Le Goff (1982) che parlava di “società impregnate di religione”: “Quando la società è tutta impregnata di religione ... mutare la geografia dell’aldilà, e dunque dell’universo, modificare il tempo di ciò che viene dopo la vita, quindi la sintonia fra il tempo Terrestre, storico, e quello escatologico, tra il tempo dell’esistenza e il tempo dell’attesa, significa operare una lenta ma sostanziale rivoluzione mentale.” p. 4.

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- ¹¹¹ D’Alessandri (1909), p. 206.
- ¹¹² “Queste persone sono assai buone persone ma molto rudi.”, in visita pastorale di S. Carlo del 1570 p.121, in: Paolo D’Alessandri, Atti di S. Carlo riguardanti la Svizzera e suoi Territorii, Tipografia Artistica, Locarno, 1909
- ¹¹³ Etienne Delaruelle, La vie commune des clerics et la spiritualité Populaire au XI siècle, Torino, 1980, in Delaruelle (1980), p. 156.
- ¹¹⁴ A. Camus, Le Mythe de Sisyphe, Gallimard, 1942.
- ¹¹⁵ M. Nussbaum, La speranza degli afflitti. Il lutto e i fondamenti della giustizia, EDB, Bologna 2016.
- ¹¹⁶ Frugoni (2020).
- ¹¹⁷ Le Goff (1982), p. 249.
- ¹¹⁸ Seguo in questa parte la linea argomentativa di Ratzinger (2001), pp139-158, p. 150.
- ¹¹⁹ von Balthasar (1991).
- ¹²⁰ <https://notiziescientifiche.it/saranno-quasi-5-miliardi-gli-utenti-morti-di-facebook-entro-fine-del-secolo-secondo-studio/>
- ¹²¹ Ziccardi (2017).
- ¹²² Rodotà (2012).
- ¹²³ Remo Bodei, Limite, Il Mulino, Bologna 2016
- ¹²⁴ Ziccardi (2017), cf. il capitolo dedicato al “ripensamento dell’idea di morte e di lutto”.
- ¹²⁵ Cf. editto di Napoleone Bonaparte sottoscritto a Saint-Cloud il 12 giugno 1804.
- ¹²⁶ Spaemann (2010b), pp. 353-372.
- ¹²⁷ Sulla cosiddetta *Kompensationstheorie* si veda Joachim Ritter, Hegel und die französische Revolution, Suhrkamp Frankfurt 2015.
- ¹²⁸ Spaemann (2010b), p. 362.
- ¹²⁹ Mezarat, “mezzo topo” nel dialetto significa “pipistrello”. Lo prendo qui liberamente da un bel libro di Dario Fo in cui spesso parla dei viaggi che faceva da ragazzino per andare a trovare i parenti a Brissago. I “Mezarat” erano gli abitanti di Porto Valtravaglia, dove Fo viveva con i genitori. La maggior parte degli abitanti erano costretti a lavorare di notte, perché dovevano occuparsi di una grande vetreria i cui forni dovevano rimanere in funzione ininterrottamente. Cf.: Dario Fo, Il paese dei Mezarat, Feltrinelli, Milano 2002, pp.56-57.
- ¹³⁰ Thomas Nagel, Cosa si prova ad essere un pipistrello?, Castelvechi, Roma 2013.
- ¹³¹ La questione della «naturalità» della religione e della “religione naturale” è un tema toccato sia nella filosofia dell’idealismo tedesco come momento astratto nel movimento del concetto. Ma si vedano anche gli studi etnografici (p. es.: B. Malinowsky, Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays, Beacon Press, Boston, 1948).
- ¹³² Taylor (2002), p. 98.
- ¹³³ Nussbaum (2013).
- ¹³⁴ Ivi
- ¹³⁵ Weil (1949), pp.117-118.
- ¹³⁶ Bisogna tuttavia osservare che l’assenza dell’aspetto evolutivo nella vicenda biografica è una caratteristica delle agiografie altomedievali, mentre a partire dal XII secolo le cose cambiano e le agiografie comprendono ad esempio anche fasi non religiosamente esemplari della vita dei santi. Cf. Ronchini, Chiapparini (2022), pp.177-178.
- ¹³⁷ Georg Simmel (1995), p. 48.
- ¹³⁸ Su questo concetto insiste Hans Joas (2010), p. 11. Ma per una trattazione più teologica si veda Karl Rahner, Grundkurs des Glaubens, Herder, Freiburg i. B., 2014. In part. pp.150-151.
- ¹³⁹ Così Josiah Royce, The sources of Religious Insight, New York 1912, p. 6.
- ¹⁴⁰ Hans-Urs von Balthasar, Einleitung a: H-U. von Balthasar (a cura di), Die grossen Ordensregeln, Benziger & Co, Einsiedeln, 1948, p. 18-19.
- ¹⁴¹ Gilardoni (1979), pp. 288-292.

¹⁴² Ivi, p. 383.

¹⁴³ Irrinunciabile per la problematica della secolarizzazione è il volume di C. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, Harvard University Press 2007

¹⁴⁴ Una brillante critica alla tesi di Habermas esposta originariamente in occasione dell'assegnazione della Friedenspreisrede del 2001 si trova in H. Joas, *Religion post-säkular? Zu einer Begriffsprägung von Jürgen Habermas*, pp. 122-128, in *Braucht der Mensch Religion?*, Nella ed. Italiana citata sopra, p. 135-143. Di Habermas si veda Habermas (2019) e soprattutto (2022). Per approfondire la questione: Franz Gruber, Markus Knapp (a cura di), *Wissen und Glauben. Theologische Reaktionen auf das Werk von Jürgen Habermas "Auch eine Geschichte der Philosophie"*, Herder, Freiburg Basel Wien 2021. In particolare si veda la replica di Habermas, pp. 224-252.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. S. Freud, *Die Zukunft einer Illusion*, Epubli 2017.

¹⁴⁶ Taylor (2002), p.14-15.

¹⁴⁷ Con il concilio laterano del 1215 subentra l'obbligo di affidarsi a un confessore con la conseguente internalizzazione della forma religiosa e un'attenuazione del ruolo dei riti. Cf. Taylor (2015), p. 15.

¹⁴⁸ H. Arendt, *On Violence*, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1970,

¹⁴⁹ Sullo iato apertasi nel Trecento fra santità canonizzata e santità percepita cf. Benvenuti (2005), p. 200.

¹⁵⁰ Benvenuti (2005), p. 202.

¹⁵¹ Si vedano ad esempio il volume di D. Maraini su Chiara di Assisi, *Elogio della disobbedienza*, Rizzoli, Milano 2014, e il volume di Andrea Fazioli, *La beata analfabeta*, San Paolo 2012.

¹⁵² Sulla "popolarità" di Antea cf. Bolognini (2011), p. 163.

¹⁵³ Rocchini Chiapparini (2022), p. 82.

¹⁵⁴ Ivi, p. 159 e cf. Jean-Claude Schmitt, *L'invention de l'anniversaire*, Arkhê, 2009.

¹⁵⁵ Max Scheler, *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos*, Bouvier, Bonn, 1998, p. 91: "Das Urseiende wird sich im Menschen seiner selbst inne in demselben Akte, in dem der Mensch sich in ihm gegründet schaut."

¹⁵⁶ Benvenuti Papi (1988), p. 207.

¹⁵⁷ José M. Castillo, *Fuori dalle righe. Il comportamento del Cristo*, Cittadella Editrice, Assisi 2010.

¹⁵⁸ Ivi, p. 246. Il testo è stato leggermente modificato per fini stilistici.