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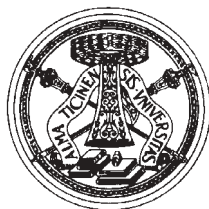
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ESTEBAN NOCE

*Barbarians and Christian Identity in the corpus
of Chromatius of Aquileia*



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INDICE DEL FASCICOLO I

Articoli

| | |
|---|-------|
| J.A. FERNÁNDEZ DELGADO, <i>La dicción formular hesiódica. Estado de la cuestión</i> [<i>The Hesiodic Formular Diction. State of the Question</i>] | » 5 |
| B. ECKHARDT, <i>Vereins- und Stadtkult im Heiligtum der Artemis Kalliste in Athen</i> [<i>Association and City Cult in the Sanctuary of Artemis Kalliste in Athens</i>] | » 31 |
| B. DEMULDER, <i>The Philosopher Coming out of the Corner. Philosophical Friendship in Plato's Gorgias and Some Echoes from Plutarch to Damascius</i> | » 43 |
| U. LAFFI, <i>Le espulsioni da Roma di immigrati provenienti da comunità latine e italiche in età repubblicana</i> [<i>On the Expulsions from Rome of Immigrants Coming from Latin and Italian Communities during the Republican Age</i>] | » 85 |
| C. ROSILLO-LÓPEZ, <i>The Role and Influence of the Audience (corona) in Trials in the Late Roman Republic</i> | » 106 |
| A. CANOBBIO, <i>Elementi senecani nell'epistola 3.5 di Plinio il Giovane</i> [<i>Senecan Elements in Plin. epist. 3.5</i>] | » 120 |
| R. GONZÁLEZ FERNÁNDEZ - P.D. CONESA NAVARRO, <i>La dinastía Severa y el nomen Aurelius. Septimio Severo y la gens Aurelia</i> [<i>The Severan Dynasty and the nomen Aurelius. Septimius Severus and the gens Aurelia</i>] | » 137 |
| M. ROCCO, <i>Ottaviano Augusto nella panegiristica tardoantica. Dal deus praesens latino-ellenistico alla teologia politica cristiana</i> [<i>The Image of Augustus in the Late Antique Panegyrics. From the Latin-Hellenistic deus praesens to the Christian Political Theology</i>] | » 153 |
| S. RENDINA, <i>Giuliano e i possessori renani. Aspetti della proprietà fondiaria in una zona di frontiera</i> [<i>Emperor Julian and Rhineland possessores. Aspects of Agricultural Property on the Roman Frontier</i>] | » 187 |
| E. NOCE, <i>Barbarians and Christian Identity in the corpus of Chromatius of Aquileia</i> | » 207 |

Note e discussioni

| | |
|--|-------|
| F. BONO, « <i>Illustre e caro professore...</i> ». <i>Le lettere di Edoardo Volterra a Emilio Gabba</i> [« <i>Illustre e caro Professore...</i> ». <i>The Letters of Edoardo Volterra to Emilio Gabba</i>] | » 231 |
| A. LA PENNA, <i>Il tredicesimo altare</i> [<i>The Thirteenth Altar</i>] | » 248 |
| A. GIOVANNINI, <i>Consuls et proconsuls. À propos d'un ouvrage récent sur les pouvoirs militaires des consuls</i> [<i>Consuls and Proconsuls. Regarding a Recent Study on the Consuls' Military Competence</i>] | » 250 |
| E. CASTRO-PÁEZ - G. CRUZ-ANDREOTTI, <i>La controversia sobre la corrección de ἐπὶ πῶν por ἐπὶ πῶν en las ediciones del libro III de Estrabón. Una reflexión desde la perspectiva histórico-cultural</i> [<i>The Controversy over the Correction of ἐπὶ πῶν by ἐπὶ πῶν in the Editions of Strabo's Book III. Some Reflections from a Cultural-Historical Perspective</i>] | » 258 |
| E. DE LONGIS, <i>Tibi comparasti famam nominis sempiternam. Uno scambio epistolare tra Theodor Mommsen, Francesco Corradini e Karl Schenkl</i> [<i>Tibi comparasti famam nominis sempiternam. An Exchange of Letters between Theodor Mommsen, Francesco Corradini and Karl Schenkl</i>] .. | » 272 |

Recensioni

| | |
|---|-------|
| PH. AKAR, <i>Concordia. Un idéal de la classe dirigeante romaine à la fin de la République</i> (I. Cogitore) | » 285 |
| H. BALTUSSEN (ed.), <i>Greek and Roman Consolations: Eight Studies of a Tradition and Its Afterlife</i> (S. Audano) | » 286 |
| F. BORDONE (ed.): <i>Eutropio, Storia di Roma</i> , intr. di F. GASTI (A. Borgna) | » 294 |
| P.A. BRUNT, <i>Studies in Stoicism</i> , ed. by M. GRIFFIN and A. SAMUELS with the Assistance of M. CRAWFORD (M.C. De Vita) | » 298 |
| P. CAPONE, « <i>De consortibus eiusdem litis</i> ». <i>Storia di un titolo del Codice di Giustiniano</i> (L. Pellicchi) | » 303 |
| F. COARELLI, <i>Argentum signatum. Le origini della moneta d'argento a Roma</i> (D. Foraboschi) .. | » 310 |
| CH. D'ALOJA, <i>L'idea di egualitarismo nella tarda repubblica romana</i> (L. Fezzi) | » 313 |

| | | |
|---|---|-----|
| P. EICH - E. FABER (hrsg.), <i>Religiöser Alltag in der Spätantike</i> (M.C. De Vita) | » | 315 |
| D.F. ELMER, <i>The Poetics of Consent: Collective Decision Making and the Iliad</i> (S. Acerbo) | » | 317 |
| J. ESPADA RODRÍGUEZ, <i>Los dos primeros tratados romano-cartagineses: Análisis historiográfico y contexto histórico</i> (C. Vacanti) | » | 321 |
| R. FÄRBER, <i>Römische Gerichtsorte, Räumliche Dynamiken von Jurisdiktion im Imperium Romanum</i> (J.-M. David) | » | 327 |
| P. FUNKE - M. HAAKE (ed.), <i>Greek Federal States and Their Sanctuaries. Identity and Integration</i> (G.F. Chiaï) | » | 329 |
| G. GARBINI, <i>Vita e mito di Gesù</i> (L. Troiani) | » | 331 |
| S. GAVINELLI, <i>La Vita sancti Gaudentii nei codici carolingi</i> , con trad. it. di G. BENEDETTO (F. Veronese) | » | 337 |
| M. GIUSEPPETTI, <i>L'isola esile: studi sull'Inno a Delo di Callimaco</i> (L. Michelacci) | » | 340 |
| CH. KREMMYDAS - K. TEMPEST (eds.), <i>Hellenistic Oratory. Continuity & Change</i> (F. Roscalla) | » | 343 |
| G. LABBÉ, <i>L'affirmation de la puissance romaine en Judée (63 a.C.-136 p.C.)</i> (D. Kossmann) | » | 345 |
| W. LAPINI, <i>Testi frammentari e critica del testo. Problemi di filologia filosofica greca</i> (M.C. De Vita) | » | 349 |
| B. LIETZ, <i>La dea di Erice e la sua diffusione nel Mediterraneo: un culto tra Fenici, Greci e Romani</i> (C. Santi) | » | 351 |
| N. LURAGHI (ed.), <i>The Splendors and Miseries of Ruling Alone. Encounters with Monarchy from Archaic Greece to the Hellenistic Mediterranean</i> (C. Franco) | » | 352 |
| G. MARCONI, <i>Ennodio e la nobiltà gallo-romana nell'Italia ostrogota</i> (F. Gasti) | » | 355 |
| N. MINDT, <i>Martials 'epigrammatischer Kanon'</i> (E. Merli) | » | 358 |
| T.J. MOORE - W. POLLEICHTNER (hrsg.), <i>Form und Bedeutung im lateinischen Drama / Form and Meaning in Latin Drama</i> (M.M. Bianco) | » | 361 |
| F. MUCCIOLI, <i>Gli epiteti ufficiali dei re ellenistici</i> (C. Franco) | » | 364 |
| R. PARKER (ed.), <i>Personal Names in Ancient Anatolia</i> (M. De Pietri) | » | 367 |
| CH. PIETSCH (hrsg.), <i>Ethik des Antiken Platonismus. Der platonische Weg zum Glück in Systematik, Entstehung und historischem Kontext</i> (F. Fronterotta) | » | 371 |
| G. PIRAS (a c. di), <i>Labor in studiis. Scritti di filologia in onore di Piergiorgio Parroni</i> (M. Galzerano) | » | 374 |
| A. PLISECKA, <i>'Tabula picta'. Aspetti giuridici del lavoro pittorico in Roma antica</i> (U. Bartocci) | » | 377 |
| A. POWELL (ed.), <i>Hindsight in Greek and Roman History</i> (B.F. van Oppen de Ruiter) | » | 385 |
| C. SALSOTTO (a c. di), <i>Le più antiche carte dell'archivio di San Gaudenzio di Novara (secoli IX-XI)</i> (G. De Angelis) | » | 388 |
| V. SAUER, <i>Religiöses in der politischen Argumentation der späten römischen Republik. Ciceros Erste Catilinarische Rede – eine Fallstudie</i> (F. Santangelo) | » | 391 |
| D. ŠTERBENC ERKER, <i>Religiöse Rollen römischer Frauen in 'griechischen' Ritualen</i> (A. Mastrocinque) | » | 393 |
| CH. TSOCHOS, <i>Die Religion in der römischen Provinz Makedonien</i> (V. Gasparini) | » | 395 |

Notizie di Pubblicazioni

| | | |
|--|---|-----|
| M. BECKER, <i>Eunapios aus Sardes. Biographien über Philosophen und Sophisten</i> (F. Ferrari) | » | 399 |
| J.M. BLÁZQUEZ, <i>Oriente y Occidente en el Mediterráneo. Estudios de arqueología, historia y arte</i> (B. Mora Serrano) | » | 399 |
| B. CAMPBELL - L.A. TRITLE (eds), <i>The Oxford Handbook of Warfare in the Classical World</i> (C. Wolff) | » | 401 |
| A. COPPOLA, <i>Una faccia una razza? Grecia antica e moderna nell'immaginario italiano di età fascista</i> (F. Cannas) | » | 403 |
| J. FERNÁNDEZ UBIÑA - A.J. QUIROGA PUERTAS - P. UBRIC RABANEDA (coords.), <i>La Iglesia como sistema de dominación en la Antigüedad Tardía</i> (A. Marcone) | » | 406 |
| H.-J. KLAUCK, <i>Lettere di Giovanni</i> (S. Audano) | » | 407 |
| S. NICOSIA, <i>Ephemeris. Scritti efimeri</i> (F. Massa) | » | 409 |
| R. RAFFAELLI - A. TONTINI (a c. di), <i>Lecturae Plautinae Sarsinates, XVI. Pseudolus</i> (F. Cannas) | » | 411 |
| C. SANTI, <i>Totemismo e mondo classico</i> (Ch. Cremonesi) | » | 413 |
| Publicazioni ricevute | » | 415 |

BARBARIANS AND CHRISTIAN IDENTITY IN THE *CORPUS* OF CHROMATIUS OF AQUILEIA

ABSTRACT. The article reflects on the image of the barbarians that Chromatius of Aquileia constructed and transmitted. It argues that the specific characteristics of the barbarians that emerge from Chromatius' *corpus* do not bear any relation to the greater or lesser danger that the barbarians could have posed for the city in the first decade of the 5th century, as it has been sustained elsewhere, but rather that their presence was not relevant to the objective of the bishop's preaching, which was to contribute to the consolidation of the unique Christian identity of his congregation.

Introduction

In this article I approach the figure of the barbarian. However, I do not deal with any of the important and extensively discussed questions connected to it: migrations or invasions, modalities of settlement, relationship with the imperial authority, the extent of the Romanization of the barbarian mentality both before and after their entry into the Empire, the responsibility that the barbarians may have had for the crisis in the Roman Empire, the founding and functioning of the Romano-Germanic kingdoms and many other issues¹.

The aim of this current research is instead to observe and explain the particular way in which the movements of the barbarians in the north of the Italian peninsula was reflected in the oeuvre of Chromatius of Aquileia, bishop of the north Adriatic metropolis from the year 388 to 407/8 according to the traditionally accepted chronology². In close connection to my previous research into his writings, I will argue that the specific characteristics of the barbarians that emerge

¹ For an in-depth exploration of this and other questions see, among others: W. Goffart, *Barbarians and Romans A.D. 418-584. The Techniques of Accommodation*, Princeton - New Jersey 1980; B. Luiselli, *Storia culturale dei rapporti tra mondo romano e mondo germanico*, Roma 1992, pp. 359-871; W. Pohl (ed.), *Kingdoms of the Empire. The Integration of Barbarians in Late Antiquity*, Leiden - New York - Köln 1997; W. Pohl - H. Reimitz (eds.), *Strategies of Distinction. The Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300-800*, Leiden-Boston-Köln 1998; H.W. Goetz - J. Jarnut - W. Pohl (eds.), *Regna and Gentes. The Relationship between Late Antique and Early Medieval Peoples and Kingdoms in the Transformation of the Roman World*, Leiden-Boston 2003; R. Corradini - M. Diesenberger - H. Reimitz (eds.), *The Construction of Communities in the Early Middle Ages. Texts, Resources and Artefacts*, Leiden-Boston 2003; W. Goffart, *Barbarian Tides. The Migration Age and the Later Roman Empire*, Philadelphia 2006; P. Heather, *Empires and Barbarians. The Fall of Rome and the Birth of Europe*, Oxford 2009; S. Gasparri - C. La Rocca, *Tempi barbarici. L'Europa occidentale tra antichità e medioevo (300-900)*, Roma 2012. For the specific case of Italy P. Delogu - S. Gasparri (a c. di), *Le trasformazioni del V secolo. L'Italia, i barbari e l'Occidente romano. Atti del Seminario di Poggibonsi, 18-20 ottobre 2007*, Turnhout 2010.

² Regarding this vd. nt. 43.

in the *corpus* of Chromatius – composed of his *Sermons* and his *Tractatus in Mathaeum* – do not bear any relation to the greater or lesser danger that their presence could have posed for the city, as it has been sustained elsewhere, but rather to their non-existent functionality for what I understand to be the objective of his preaching: to contribute to the consolidation of the unique Christian identity of his congregation.

To this end, I first mention the many incursions carried out by the barbarians on North Italy during the first decade of the 5th century, paying particular attention to the effects on Aquileia. Next, I approach the work of the main contemporary ecclesiastical leadership of the region with the aim of observing the impact that such a historical conjuncture had on their writings. Following this I set out the passages from the work of Chromatius in which the barbarians are mentioned, seeking to establish the specific characteristics that they assume in his *corpus*. Then I describe the current *status quaestionis* in relation to the subject approached and analyze whether the hypotheses that have been presented up to this point to provide an account of such specificities turn out to be plausible or not. Finally, and as a consequence of this, I develop my own analysis regarding the presence of the barbarians in the work of Chromatius.

Barbarians in North Italy at the Beginning of the 5th Century

The frequent barbarian incursions in the extreme northeast of the Italian peninsula during the first decade of the 5th century are well known³. In the autumn of the year 401, after crossing the undefended Julian Alps, the Visigoths of Alaric routed the Roman defenses at the Battle of River Timavo. Shortly after, on the 18th of November of the same year, they reached Aquileia. Their journey continued towards the west. After being defeated in April in Pollentia and in August in Verona, they withdrew from Italy towards Illyricum, without it being possible to determine whether or not their march entered the territory of the metropolis again. On another three occasions the region was the site of movements of contingents of barbarians during this decade: at the end of 405 or the beginning of 406, when the multi-ethnic groups penetrated the region under

³ Concerning the presence of the barbarians in the territory of Aquileia and their impact on the life of the city, Y.M. Duval, *Aquilée sur la route des invasions (350-452)*, «AAAAd» 9 (1976), pp. 275-288; R. Bratož, *La chiesa aquileiese e i barbari (V-VII secolo)*, in *Aquileia e il suo patriarcato. Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studio (Udine 21-23 ottobre 1999)*, Udine 2000, pp. 103-107; R. Bratož, *Aquileia tra Teodosio e i longobardi (379-568)*, «AAAAd» 54 (2003), pp. 504-508; R. Bratož, *La chiesa aquileiese e l'Illyrico Occidentale al tempo di Cromazio*, in P.F. Beatrice - A. Peršič (eds.), *Chromatius of Aquileia and His Age. Proceedings of the International Conference Held in Aquileia, 22-24 May 2008*, Brepols 2011, pp. 120-124.

the command of Radagaisus; in 408, when Alaric again led the Visigoths from Illyricum to Italy; at the beginning of 409 when Athaulf, brother-in-law of Alaric led the Goths and the Huns.

What were the consequences of these movements for Aquileia? Regarding those of the years 405-406, 408 and 409, the researchers show that, being in a marginal position for the objective of the invaders – which was central Italy, and fundamentally, Rome – and lacking any contradictory testimony, it must be assumed that the enemy armies didn't show any interest in the city⁴. The situation is somewhat different concerning the advance of Alaric's troops in the years 401-402, given that individuals contemporary with these events report that the territory of Aquileia was not left unaffected by their activity. Indeed, Rufinus indicated that the *pestifer morbus* had affected *agros, armament* and *uiros*⁵; such that, in the context of the Origenist controversy, Jerome accused his old friend Rufinus, inhabitant of Aquileia in times of the approach of Alaric, of having preferred to suffer the «siege of the barbarians» rather than to move to «peaceful Rome» to confront its judgement⁶. Neither one nor the other, however, insinuated that the invaders would have been able to take the metropolis. This has led most researchers to conclude that, beyond the calamities that the region might have experienced, Aquileia found itself relatively on the margins of the trials that other imperial cities were submitted to at the hand of the barbarians⁷.

As is known, the luck that the city enjoyed was very different several decades later. In the spring of 452 the Huns of Attila left Pannonia, crossed the Alps and, once arrived at the gates of Aquileia, submitted the city to a long siege. Finally, in the month of July, the metropolis fell into the hands of the invaders. Despite medieval sources presenting the violence which followed the capture as the event which heralded the city's definitive destruction⁸, modern historians turn to various archeological⁹ and

⁴ Duval, *Aquilée sur la route* cit., pp. 285-286; Bratož, *La chiesa aquileiese e i barbari* cit., pp. 105-107; R. Bratož, *Aquileia tra Teodosio* cit., pp. 506-507; Bratož, *La chiesa aquileiese e l'Ilirico* cit., p. 124; L. Villa, *Dalla vivacità tardo-imperiale all'oblio delle invasioni barbariche*, in L. Fozzati (a c. di), *Aquileia. Patrimonio dell'umanità*, Udine 2010, p. 223.

⁵ Rufin. *Hist. Prol.* 7-8. I extensively cite this passage in nt. 31.

⁶ Hier. *Adv. Rufin.* 3.21.9-11: *Et tantum romanae urbis iudicium fugis ut agis obsidionem barbaricam quam pacatae urbis uel is sententiam sustinere*. I refer to the edition of P. Lardet in *CCSL* 79.

⁷ Duval, *Aquilée sur la route* cit., pp. 276-277; Bratož, *La chiesa aquileiese e i barbari* cit., p. 105; R. Bratož, *Aquileia tra Teodosio* cit., p. 504; Bratož, *La chiesa aquileiese e l'Ilirico* cit., pp. 120-121; Villa, *Dalla vivacità tardo-imperiale* cit., pp. 223.

⁸ Related to this vd. Bratož, *La chiesa aquileiese e i barbari* cit., nt. 52, for an exhaustive list of documents which evoke the sacking of Aquileia by Attila as a catastrophic event for the city. The author critically evaluates the image transmitted by these texts in pages 112-122 of the cited work.

⁹ Indeed, in spite of some zones of the *forum*, of the forensic basilica, of the southern post-Theodorian basilica and its baptistery, of the northern post-Theodorian basilica and of the bishop's residence presenting signs of having been burned, probably on the occasion of the sacking by the Huns (P. Lopreato, *Aquileia. Lo*

literary¹⁰ arguments to sustain that the city recovered relatively quickly from the passing of the Huns¹¹. This, however, is a matter which goes beyond the objectives of this paper.

Barbarians in the Discourse of the North Italian Bishops

We now direct our attention to the discourse of contemporaneous bishops from the region, seeking to observe whether the barbarian appears in their writings and, that being the case, in what manner.

The term *barbarus* was used repeatedly by Zeno of Verona in his sermons. Nevertheless it must be noted that in no instance did he employ the term to designate the populations that, in his time, inhabited areas beyond the borders of the Roman Empire. On the contrary, he used it to describe Nebuchadnezzar¹², to denigrate Old Testament Egypt¹³ and to describe the customs of the *Phariseus ina-*

scavo a S-O del foro romano. Gli ambienti tardo antichi e la basilica forense. Relazione delle campagne di scavo 1977-1979, «AN» 51 [1980], cc. 50-52; M. Mirabella Roberti, *Monumenti di Aquileia dopo Attila*, in S. Blason Scarel [a c. di], *Attila Flagellum Dei? Convegno internazionale di studi sulla figura di Attila e sulla discesa degli Unni in Italia nel 452 d.C.*, Roma 1994, pp. 188-192; L. Bertacchi, *Nuova pianta archeologica di Aquileia*, Udine 2003, pp. 35, 57), we mustn't forget that, as Yuri Marano points out, during the second half of the 5th century, or even later, the city was still in a good enough condition to erect two of its great basilicas, the Monastero and the Fondo Tullio, as well as being able to decorate the Great Baths with marvellous mosaics (Y.A. Marano, *La città tardoantica*, in F. Ghedini - M. Bueno - M. Novello [a c. di], *Moenibus et portu celeberrima. Aquileia: storia di una città*, Roma 2009, p. 28; Y.A. Marano, *Urbanesimo e storia ad Aquileia tra V e VI secolo d.C.*, in G. Bonetto - M. Salvadori [a c. di], *L'architettura privata ad Aquileia in età romana. Atti del convegno di studio (Padova 21-22 Febbraio 2011)*, Padova 2012, pp. 576-578, 582).

¹⁰ The instructions given in the year 458 by the Bishop of Rome Leo I, to his counterpart in Aquileia, Nicetas, concerning the mandate that the men who returned from captivity under the barbarians should be given back their wives, in the case that these had entered into a second marriage, as well as their *mancipia, agri, domus y possessione*, illustrate the fact that the city was recovering its vitality only a few years after the Hun invasion (G. Cuscito, *La lettera di S. Leone Magno a Niceta di Aquileia. Contributo alla comprensione storica del mito di Attila*, in Blason Scarel, *Attila Flagellum Dei cit.*, pp. 220-224).

¹¹ Thus, as Cristina La Rocca has maintained, the story of the total destruction of Aquileia by Attila and of the subsequent migration of its episcopacy and population to Grado was probably the most representative case of the efforts of the intelligentsia of the Early Middle Ages to emphasise the continuity of the institutions and the life of the urban communities, simply transferred to other spaces, in the face of the first advance of the Huns and later of the Longobards. Such a reconstruction permitted «di presentare la nascita di Venezia come un vero e proprio lieto fine per la vicenda, creando per la nuova città un antico *pedigree*, senza soluzioni di continuità» (C. La Rocca, *Città scomparse in area veneta nell'alto medioevo: dati archeologici, fonti scritte e memoria storiografica*, in G. Brogiolo - P. Delogu [a c. di], *L'Adriatico dalla tarda antichità all'età carolingia (Atti del convegno di studio: Brescia, 11-13 ottobre 2001)*, Firenze 2005, pp. 288-289).

¹² Zeno *Tract.* 1.11.9; 1.22.4; 1.53.7; 2.15.5. For all the references to Zeno, I follow the edition of B. Löfstedt in *CCSL* 22.

¹³ Zeno *Tract.* 2.26.8.

*nis*¹⁴. Could this circumstance correspond to the fact that – although it is difficult to locate this with precision – Zeno’s episcopate had probably ended before the year 380¹⁵, thus not coinciding with the last decades of the 4th century nor, above all, with the first decade of the 5th century, when the barbarian question became truly pressing for North Italy? Only an in-depth analysis of the work of Zeno and the historical moment in which it was composed could determine this¹⁶.

Multiple allusions to the barbarians as a contemporary problematic emerge, however, in the work of Ambrose, bishop of Milan from the year 374 to 397. The quantity and extent of his writings make it impossible to deal with the question in any depth here¹⁷, therefore I shall just mention two examples. At the beginning of 378, in his first funeral oration dedicated to the memory of his brother Satyrus, the bishop described his death as an act of divine compassion: «He was taken, so that he would not fall into the hands of the barbarians; he was taken, so that he would not see the ruin of the entire globe, the end of the world, the funerals of those dearest to him, the death of the citizens, or finally, the desecration of the virgins and widows, which is crueller than any death»¹⁸. A decade later, in his *De officiis*, Ambrose included the following among the varied actions that could win the affection of the people: the liberation of prisoners in enemy hands, removing death from men and dishonor from women, the restoration of children to their parents and parents to their children, returning the citizen to his motherland¹⁹.

As time passed, the discourse of the north Italian bishops shows that the bar-

¹⁴ Zeno *Tract.* 1.52.2-5.

¹⁵ It is extremely difficult to pin down precisely the chronology of his episcopate. In his introduction to the *Tractatus*, Gabriele Banterle designates the year 357 as *terminus post quem*, when Athanasius referred to the sixth bishop of Verona, Lucilius, as still living, in the third chapter of his *Apologia ad Constantium imperatorem*, and as *terminus ante quem* the epistle from Ambrose of Milan to Syagrius of Verona about the virgin Indicia, in which Zeno is described as deceased. However, the dating of this epistle is quite controversial, being located by various authors between the years 380 and 396 (G. Banterle [a. c. di]: San Zenone di Verona, *I Discorsi*, Milano-Roma 1987, pp. 9-10). Ch. Pietri - L. Pietri (eds.), s.v. Zeno, in *PCBE* 2 (1999), p. 2376, it is hardly mentioned in the text «[...] après 356-après 360? [...]».

¹⁶ Up to the present I have not discovered any research whose specific objective is the analysis of the figure of the barbarian in the work of Zeno of Verona. Some general references regarding his work and the historical context can be found in C. Truzzi, Zeno, *Gaudenzio e Cromazio. Testi e contenuti della predicazione cristiana per le chiese di Verona, Brescia e Aquileia (360-410)*, Brescia 1985, pp. 31-64.

¹⁷ Vd. C. Corbellini, *Ambrogio e i barbari: giudizio o pregiudizio?*, «RSCI» 31 (1977), pp. 343-353; M. Pavan, *Sant’Ambrogio e il problema dei barbari*, «RomBarb» 3 (1978), pp. 167-187; C. Lheureux-Godbille, *Barbarie et hérésie dans l’oeuvre de saint Ambroise de Milan (374-397)*, «MA» 109/3-4 (2003), pp. 473-492, all these texts contain abundant passages from various writings by Ambrose referring to the barbarians.

¹⁸ Ambr. *Exc. Sat.* 1.30: Raptus est, *ne in manus incideret barbarorum*, raptus est, *ne totius orbis excidia, mundi finem, propinquorum funera, civium mortes, postremo ne sanctarum virginum atque viduarum, quod omni morte acerbius est, conluvionem videret*. I follow the edition of O. Faller in *CCEL* 73.

¹⁹ Ambr. *Off.* 15.1-19. Edition by V.M. Testard in *CCSL* 15.

barian problem becomes a more and more concrete question, even having an impact on daily life. For example, in sermon 17, Gaudentius of Brescia, contemporary of Chromatius²⁰, laments the fact that, due to the *importunitas barbarorum*, not all the bishops who had hoped to be able to, could attend the dedication of the new local basilica and the delivery of the relics of the saints²¹. On another occasion, the author warned the Christian that, while he does not heed the pleas for assistance from the poor, which fall on deaf ears, in the same way God would not listen to those who pleaded «facing the barbarian threat»²².

In addition, the sermons of Maximus of Turin, delivered between the years 395 and 415²³ contain abundant references to the disturbing presence of the barbarians²⁴. Sermon 83 is representative, in which he calls on his congregation to trust in the protection of Christ and in the weapons of prayer, mercy and fasting, without fearing the tumult of war, or the enemy hordes that – he declared – the devil had gathered around him²⁵. He added: «He who fears Our Lord the Savior cannot fear the barbarians; neither can he who observes the precepts of Christ fear the enemy attack»²⁶. In sermon 85, he gave an account of the general disorder in which the defense of the walls was prepared, at the same time that he exhorted the faithful to, chiefly, *in nobis portas armare iustitiae*²⁷. Those who, fearing the danger, were willing to flee the city were the object of reprimands from Maximus in sermon 82, in which he urged them, once more, to distance themselves from sin as a strategy to remain safe and to defeat the enemy²⁸. A new reproach was addressed in sermon 72 to those who, driven by fear, returned to the idolatrous practices of old «asking the demons for victory»²⁹. Finally, the bishop reprimanded his congrega-

²⁰ Pietri-Pietri (eds.), s.v. *Gaudentius* 3, in *PCBE* cit., p. 887, frames his episcopate «[...] après 379-avant 410», specifying later that the death of his predecessor Philastrius «survenue au plus tôt en 387, au plus tard en 396».

²¹ Gaudent. *Serm.* 17.11-17.

²² Gaudent. *Serm.* 13.150-154: *Egreditur de ecclesia Christianus – si tamen Christianus – et surdis auribus precantem pauperem praeterit. Ita nos deus exaudiet obsecrantes, ita inter pericula imminantium barbarorum auxilio protegi divino merebimur*. For all references to Gaudentius, I refer to the edition by A. Glueck in *CSEL* 68.

²³ A. Mutzenbecher (ed.), *CCSL* 23, Turnhout 1962, pp. XXXII-XXXV. More vaguely, Pietri-Pietri (eds.), s.v. *Maximus* 10, in *PCBE* cit., p. 1469, indicates regarding Maximo's episcopate «[...] 397 - entre 408 et 423».

²⁴ On the barbarians in the work of Maximus of Turin, vd. E. Piazza, *La predicazione di Massimo di Torino. Il ruolo del vescovo tra nemici spirituali e barbari*, «AFSFCat» 8 (2009), pp. 121-134.

²⁵ Max. Taur. *Serm.* 83.3-11. For all references to Maximus, I use the edition of A. Mutzenbecher in *CCSL* 23.

²⁶ Max. Taur. *Serm.* 83.13-15: *non potest timere barbarum, qui timuerit saluatorem; nec potest metuere hostis impetum, qui Christi praecepta seruauerit*.

²⁷ Max. Taur. *Serm.* 85.28-29.

²⁸ Max. Taur. *Serm.* 82.17-35.

²⁹ Max. Taur. *Serm.* 72.44-45: *a daemonibus uictoriam flagitantes*.

tion in his sermon 18, for buying objects resulting from the barbarians' looting, urging them to acquire these, but for the purpose of restoring them to the owners, in such a way they would be acting *ut christianus et ciuis*³⁰.

The Barbarians in the Work of Chromatius

It is not surprising, of course, that the barbarian question had also taken shape in the work of Chromatius. There is indirect and direct evidence of this. Regarding the former, I must refer to Rufinus and his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, in which the author translated and expanded the homonymous work of Eusebius of Caesarea motivated by the desire of the Bishop of Aquileia to provide relief to the tormented members of his community, as Rufino himself points out in the prologue:

This too, you impose on me, Chromatius, father deserving of veneration, that you seek a type of medicine for the present situation, in which the gates of Italy are torn down by Alaric, leader of the Goths, a destructive sickness has spread and devastated great swathes of land, troops and men; you who pleads for the people entrusted unto you by God, and begs some remedy from mortal ruin, by means of which to keep these anguished souls far from thoughts of unexpected evil and occupied by higher duties, you impose this on me: that I translate into Latin the *Historia Ecclesiastica* that Eusebius of Caesarea, the most erudite scholar, had written in Greek³¹.

Undoubtedly, the concerns of Chromatius and the Christian community were also reflected in his own writings. Within his *corpus* the image of the barbarian appears in different ways. In some passages, the allusions are explicit. In these instances, the reference to the barbarian is direct and is accomplished through the use of different forms of the adjectives *barbarus* or *barbaricus*. This type of allusion can be observed in sermons 12, 16 and 43, the last of uncertain authorship. In sermon 37, contrastingly, the reference is implicit, the image of the barbarian being glimpsed in the evoking of a situation marked by oppression, war and captivity. Below, we will look at each one of these passages.

³⁰ Max. Taur. *Serm.* 18.48-70. For other references to the barbarian in the sermons of Maximus of Turin, vd. Max. Taur. *Serm.* 69.92-97; 70.42-46; 72.21-25; 81.44-52,64-70,80-81; 84.27-31; 86.72-75. The barbarian also appears in 87.36-39, a sermon considered apocryphal by Mutzenbecher.

³¹ Rufin. *Hist. Prolog.* 6-13: *Quod tu quoque, venerande pater Chromati, medicinae exsequens genus tempore, quo diruptis Italiae claustris Alarico duce Gothorum se pestifer morbus infudit et agros armenta viros longe lateque vastavit, populis tibi a Deo commissis feralis exitii aliquod remedium quaerens, per quod aegrae mentes ab ingruentis mali cogitatione subtractae melioribus occupatae studiis tenerentur, iniungis mihi ut ecclesiasticam historiam, quam vir eruditissimus Eusebius Caesariensis Graeco sermone conscripserat, in Latinum verterem.* I use the edition of Th. Mommsen in *GCS Neue Folge* 6.2.

Sermon 12

In his comment on *Romans* 5.9, Chromatius states that, it being the Son himself who had created man, Christ had not «acquired» but «rescued» humanity, given that «that which belongs to you is rescued, while that which does not belong to you is acquired»³². Following that he illustrated the use of these terms with two examples. The first related to the possession of material goods: «If a person acquires a piece of land or a slave which he did not have previously, it is said that he acquires it. If, on the other hand, he acquires what he once had but had lost, it is not said that he acquired but that he rescued it, because he has recovered what was formerly his, and rescued that which he previously owned»³³. The second example alluded to the captivity that the Romans were submitted to by the barbarians: «This is the reason why the Romans freed from barbarian captivity, once ransom is paid, are not called ‘acquired’ but ‘rescued’»³⁴. He continued:

Therefore, because Man too had been the work of Christ (indeed, Man was created by Him by the will of the Father at the beginning of the creation of the world), Man is quite rightly shown as rescued rather than acquired by Christ because He rescued what had been His, and what He himself had created. Indeed, Man had some time before fallen under the sway of the Devil, like barbarian captivity, because being estranged from God, he had been held prisoner by the deceit of the enemy³⁵.

Thus, even when the allusion to the barbarians in sermon 12 does not relate to an empirical problem, or a concrete threat, it allows us a glimpse of the fear that the proximity of the barbarian provoked among the Christian community of Aquileia: the eventual possibility of falling into their hands was comparable to the absolute ruin which the triumph of the devil had meant for Man before his redemption by Christ.

³² Chromat. *Serm.* 12.19-21: *Non dixit «emit» sed redemit; quia quod redimitur proprium est, quod autem emitur alienum.* For all references to Chromatius, I follow the edition by R. Étaix y J. Lemarié in *CCSL IXA* y *CCSL IXA Supplementum*.

³³ Chromat. *Serm.* 12.21-24: *Vt puta: si quis agrum uel seruum comparet, quem ante non habuit, emere dicitur. Si autem eum comparet, quem habuit et amisit, non emere, sed redimere dicitur, quia suum redimit, et eum redimit quem habuerat.*

³⁴ Chromat. *Serm.* 12.24-26: *Vnde Romani qui de captiuitate barbarica, dato pretio, liberantur, non empti, sed redempti dicuntur.*

³⁵ Chromat. *Serm.* 12.26-33: *Quia ergo et homo Christi opus fuerat (ab ipso enim iuxta uoluntatem Patris in exordio mundi figuratus est homo), recte homo redemptus potius quam emptus a Christo monstratur, quia eum redemit qui suus fuerat, et quem ipse creauerat. Incurrerat enim homo dudum dominationem diaboli, ueluti barbaricam captiuitatem, ut recedens a Domino originali inimici fraude caperetur.*

Sermon 16

At the end of his sermon *In nocte magna*, after energetically exhorting the faithful to take part in the Easter Vigil celebration, Chromatius urged his congregation to offer their prayers up to God to plead for liberation from the dangers that beset the community:

And because this is the night in which a long time ago the first-born of Egypt were struck down and the children of Israel were liberated, we pray to God with all our heart, with all our faith, that He will protect us from the attacks of our enemies and all fear of adversaries. That He does not consider our merits but His own mercy, as before, not for their own merits but his own compassion, He deigned to liberate the children of Israel³⁶.

The nature of the danger evoked emerges immediately: «That He protect us with His customary compassion, that He drives back the barbarians, that He does for us what Saint Moses said to the children of Israel: the Lord will fight for you; and you shall hold your peace»³⁷.

Sermon 43

In lines 12-14 of the text in question the author formulates the following question: «What, therefore, is most significant: striking down the barbarian nations in a physical battle or submitting to the legions of spiritual vices?»³⁸. Does this passage constitute a third explicit allusion by Chromatius to the barbarians? The answer is complex, since the authorship of this passage is uncertain. Ambrose is mentioned as its author in the only manuscript it is conserved in. However, Joseph Lemarié and Raymond Étaix saw in it a composed sermon, whose compiler had utilized a paragraph from sermon 19 of the Bishop of Aquileia³⁹ as well as another from the treatise of Jerome on Psalm 95, and they attributed it to Chroma-

³⁶ Chromat. *Serm.* 16.70-76: *Et quia haec est nox in qua dudum primogenita Aegyptiorum percussa sunt et filii Israhel liberati sunt, oremus Dominum toto corde, tota fide, ut nos de omni incursione hostium, de omni metu inimicorum liberare dignetur. Non respiciat ad merita nostra sed ad suam misericordiam, qui etiam dudum filios Israhel non pro merito ipsorum, sed pro sua misericordia liberare dignatus est.*

³⁷ Chromat. *Serm.* 16.70-79: *Tueatur solita miseratione, repellat barbaras nationes, faciat in nobis quod sanctus Moyses dixit ad filios Israhel: Dominus pugnabit pro uobis et uos tacebitis.*

³⁸ Chromat. *Serm.* 43.12-14: *Quid ergo potissimum est gentes barbaras corporali certamine deicisse, an legiones nequitiarum spiritualium deuicisse?*

³⁹ The textual parallelism is the following: Chromat. *Serm.* 43.8-11: *Sed quemadmodum uidemus in illorum uictoria regum, interitus hostium erat, captiuitas miserorum; in hac uero dominicae crucis uictoria, salus est omnium gentium, redemptio peccatorum, spes resurrectionis, uitae aeternae praesidium;* Chromat. *Serm.* 19.132-135: *In uictoria regum illorum interitus gentium erat, euersio urbium, depredatio prouinciarum. In hac autem crucis uictoria redemptio gentium est, salus urbium, libertas prouinciarum, totius mundi securitas.*

tius⁴⁰. In spite of this, they paid particular attention to lines 12-18 which contain the allusion to the barbarians, indicating that their authenticity «*reste très dou-teuse*»⁴¹.

Sermon 37

Finally, the image of the barbarian can be seen in the context of the expressions that refer to situations of oppression, war and captivity contained in sermon 37, in which Chromatius comments on *Matthew* 8.23-26, a tale of the tempest calmed. The bishop points out that, following the example of the disciples for whom the natural elements were pacified after humbly appealing to Jesus, the Christians should direct their prayers to heaven to be liberated from danger:

Truly, whenever we are oppressed by tribulations and anguish as by the tempests of the sea, we must move our Lord and Savior to compassion with our prayers and faith in our merits, so that He deigns to help and protect those who seek His mercy, as He himself said through his prophet: *call upon me in your days of tribulation and I shall deliver you and you shall glorify me*. Therefore let us invoke the Lord, with all our heart and faith, so that He shall free us from all oppression, hunger, war, death, captivity, from all danger, so that we can glorify His name in all things, and so that bearing the fruits of good deeds, we may approach the gate to the heavenly kingdom⁴².

The use of expressions employed in the passages in which references to the barbarians are explicit – *captiuitas*, *liberare*, *totocorde*, *tota fide* – leads us to infer that, although implicit, this passage too contains a reference to the barbarians.

Running back over what has been argued so far, it can be concluded that: 1) the barbarians constituted a significant element in the historical conjuncture of North Italy in the first decade of the 5th century, concurrent with the last years of the episcopate of Chromatius; 2) this situation aroused concern among the bishops of the region, which shaped their preachings; 3) the Bishop of Aquileia was not oblivious to these circumstances, making some allusions to the barbarian

⁴⁰ Actually, Joseph Lemarié and Raymon Étaix refer to it as «un nouveau texte fragmentaire que nous avons proposé de restituer à Chromace» (*CCSL IXA Supplementum*, p. 611).

⁴¹ *CCSL IXA Supplementum*, p. 615.

⁴² Chromat. *Serm.* 37.37-48: *Nos uero, quotiescumque tribulationibus et angustiis, uelut maris tempestatibus premimur, Dominum ac Saluatorem nostrum, instantia precum et fide meritorum, ad miserandum excitare debemus, ut sperantibus in misericordia sua, opem auxiliunq[ue] ferre dignetur, ut ipse ait per prophetam: inuoca me in die tribulationis tuae, eripiam te et magnificabis me. Quapropter inuocemus Dominum toto corde et tota fide, ut nos ab omni pressura liberare dignetur, fame, bello, morte, captiuitate, ab omnique periculo, ut nomen ipsius per omnia magnificare possimus, et dignis bonorum operum fructibus onusti, ad portum patriae caelestis peruenire mereamur.*

in his homilies – three or four in accordance with whatever conclusion is reached about sermon 43 – although maintaining complete silence in what remains to us of his *Tractatus in Mathaeum*. Thus presenting the peculiarities of the presence of the barbarian in the work of Chromatius, we shall see which hypothesis has been able to explain them best.

Barbarians in the Work of Chromatius of Aquileia: status quaestionis

The studies in which it is possible to perceive any interest in the analysis of the barbarian in the work of Chromatius of Aquileia are very few and far between. In addition, hardly any of them have the consideration of this question as their main objective, and even within these researches, there are no more than a few paragraphs dedicated to dealing with the matter that concerns us here. Perhaps the only approach specifically interested in examining the barbarians in the work of Chromatius is a brief article by Nico De Mico published in 2008. Its content, however, does not satisfy the reader enticed by the promising title *Cromazio e gli aquileiesi di fronte ai barbari*. Almost completely ignoring even the mere presentation of sermons related to the barbarians and making statements with no grounding in the heuristic resources contemporary with the events⁴³, perhaps its main merit is that of pointing out that the Bishop of Aquileia «non poteva restringere il suo impegno solo alle cose spirituali e per questo intervenne attivamente e capillarmente sul sociale»⁴⁴. On highlighting this circumstance De Mico amended the assessments made by Carlo Truzzi who had claimed two decades earlier that the presence of the barbarians in the life of Aquileia during the episcopate of Chromatius had produced «scarsa eco» in his writings because he had been «tutto preso dai problemi della vita spirituale»⁴⁵.

The approaches to this question by Marcella Forlin Patrucco and Rajko Bratož

⁴³ It is pointed out, for example, that the bishop «con ogni probabilità allargava il pensiero alla possibilità di un avvicinamento ai sopravvenuti stranieri» (N. De Mico, *Cromazio e gli aquileiesi di fronte ai barbari*, in S. Piussi [a c. di], *Cromazio di Aquileia 388-408. Al crocevia di genti e religioni*, Milano 2008, p. 88 nt. 13) and that he had died «in esilio nel 407, a Grado, dove aveva cercato scampo dalla ferocia delle scorrerie barbariche» (De Mico, *Cromazio e gli aquileiesi* cit., p. 88 nt. 15). Regarding this last question, it must be noted that the date of death of Chromatius of Aquileia is far from certain. The most prudent course is to indicate that he was still alive in the year 406, when John Chrysostom addressed an epistle to him (*PG*, nr. 155) in gratitude for his mediation in the conflicts taking place in the courts of Constantinople. Pier Franco Beatrice has recently observed that Chromatius attended the Synod of Diospolis, suggesting extending his life at least until 415 (P.F. Beatrice, *Chromatius and Jovinus at the Synod of Diospolis: A Prosopographical Inquiry*, «*J ECS*» 22/3 [2014], pp. 437-464).

⁴⁴ De Mico, *Cromazio e gli aquileiesi* cit., p. 86.

⁴⁵ C. Truzzi, *Zeno, Gaudenzio e Cromazio* cit., p. 93.

have been a little more in-depth, although still without having the presence of the barbarian in the writings of the Bishop of Aquileia as a principal object of analysis. Upon analyzing the sermons of the north Italian bishops of the period, Forlin Patrucco has attempted to unveil a relationship in each existent case between discourse and the specific local conjuncture, comprising geographical as well as political and military factors. From this perspective the author maintains that Aquileia benefited from an «efficace apparato difensivo, consolidato dalla presenza di forti contingenti di milizie stanziati nella vicina Concordia»⁴⁶, as well as a location «in posizione sostanzialmente marginale rispetto allo scenario effettivo delle operazioni belliche»⁴⁷. As a consequence, for the urban population «al riparo delle mura non sembravano pertanto sussistere rischi reali»⁴⁸, Chromatius had been able to focus his discourse on the barbarians «sul piano religioso e culturale», a circumstance which would be displayed, in her opinion, in the request to Rufinus for the translation of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*⁴⁹ and of his instigating his congregation to pray trustfully for divine mercy in the face of danger⁵⁰.

Rajko Bratož dedicated no more than a few lines to the consideration of the presence of the barbarians in the work of Chromatius when he studied the relationship between them and the church of Aquileia during the 5th to 7th centuries. After briefly introducing sermons 12, 16 and 37, he indicated that, even if the «molto generiche e non riportabili a casi concreti»⁵¹ allusions that the bishop made to the barbarians verified the present nature of various forms of violence, they also testified that «la stessa esistenza della chiesa aquileiese non ne fu minacciata»⁵². During the first decade of the 5th century, he states, the barbarians had pillaged the territory of Aquileia without causing severe damage⁵³, which explains, according to the author, why «nella storiografia locale, ed europea, se ne fa appena menzione»⁵⁴.

Thus, according to Forlin Patrucco and Bratož, the apparent indifference of Chromatius towards the barbarians could be explained by the fact that Aquileia was far removed from the calamities that other imperial cities experienced at their hands. Being, in essence, a theoretical rather than a concrete threat, the barbarian question had occupied a marginal position in the discourse of the bishop, one ap-

⁴⁶ M. Forlin Patrucco, *Vescovi e germani nell'Italia Settentrionale (IV-V secolo)*, in B. Scardigli - P. Scardigli (a. c. di), *Germani in Italia*, Roma 1994, p. 259. Regarding Aquileia's system of defense, vd. J. Bonetto, *Difendere Aquileia, città di frontiera*, «AAA» 59 (2004), pp. 151-196.

⁴⁷ Forlin Patrucco, *Vescovi e germani* cit., pp. 259-260.

⁴⁸ Forlin Patrucco, *Vescovi e germani* cit., p. 260.

⁴⁹ Forlin Patrucco, *Vescovi e germani* cit., p. 259.

⁵⁰ Forlin Patrucco, *Vescovi e germani* cit., p. 260.

⁵¹ Bratož, *La chiesa aquileiese e i barbari* cit., p. 109.

⁵² Bratož, *La chiesa aquileiese e i barbari* cit., p. 109.

⁵³ Bratož, *La chiesa aquileiese e i barbari* cit., pp. 105-107.

⁵⁴ Bratož, *La chiesa aquileiese e i barbari* cit., p. 112.

proached from a spiritual and cultural perspective, according to Forlin Patrucco, or generic and abstract according to Bratož.

Such a hypothesis should be thoroughly analyzed. Regarding the quantitative aspect, it might be argued that the references to the barbarians in Chromatius' work are not as rare as it has been claimed. Indeed, the visibility that the barbarians acquired in the homilies of the Bishop of Aquileia is not as meager as could be supposed at first glance, if it is compared with the homiletic production of the bishops temporally and spatially proximate to Chromatius. Comparing the proportion of sermons in which Chromatius, Gaudentius and Maximus⁵⁵ make references to the barbarians: Chromatius mentions them in 3 of his 44 sermons (6.81%) – in 4 out of 45 (8.88%) if we accept his authorship of lines 12-14 of sermon 43 – while Gaudentius mentions them in 2 of the 18 homiletic texts that make up his *Tractatus*⁵⁶ (11.11%) and Maximus in 10 of his 111 discourses⁵⁷ (9%). Of course, the lowest proportion corresponds to the sermons of Chromatius, but the slight disparity reveals that the barbarian presence in his works did not significantly differ from the position that it occupied in the preachings of other contemporary bishops from the region.

The problem with the hypothesis focused on a lineal relationship between Chromatius' references to the barbarians and the lack of a barbarian menace is not that it is incorrect, but that it would only resolve the quantitative aspect of the barbarians' presence in the bishop's work, ignoring certain qualitative peculiarities which are indeed worthy of attention.

None of the scholars referred to have dealt with a significant issue that I have already pointed out: that although present in his *Sermons*, the absence of the barbarians in the *Tractatus in Mathaeum* is total. As a means of comparison, I would like to draw attention to the fact that towards the year 389 Ambrose alluded to various barbarian groups in his *Expositio Euangelii secundum Lucam*: he mentioned the

⁵⁵ I will leave Zeno of Verona out of this comparison because of the fact already highlighted that, in his work, the term *barbarus* is not employed in the same way as it is by Chromatius, Gaudentius and Maximus. As for Ambrose of Milan, he is excluded due to the fact that, even though much of his writing seems to have been the result of a process of editing carried out by the bishop, prior to publication, of some texts whose origins were in his sermons, his *corpus* does not offer a consistent group of sermons addressed to the people. On this subject, vd. A. Olivar, *La predicación cristiana antigua*, Barcelona 1991, pp. 272-273.

⁵⁶ Neither the *Praefatio* nor the *Tractatus* 18 and 19 are entered into the record, given that they do not constitute sermons but rather personal communications from the author to, respectively, *Benivulus*, *Germinius*, and *Paulus*. On these, vd. Pietri-Pietri, s.v. *Benivulus*, *Germinius* and *Paulus* 5, in *PCBE* cit., pp. 298-299, 925, 1671.

⁵⁷ *Sermons* 7, 8, 45, 87, 90 and 109 are not included, as they are considered illegitimate by Mutzenbecher, along with those whose authorship corresponds, according to the editor, to Jerome and Basil, respectively (sermons 46 and 47). Conversely, sermons 14, 61b, 61c, 97 and 104 (indicated as dubious) are included.

Goths and the Armenians together on two occasions – as being governed by Christ on the first occasion⁵⁸ and as believers in the gospel on the other⁵⁹. He also noted that «the Huns rose up against the Alans, the Alans against the Goths, the Goths against the Taifals and the Sarmatians», from which resulted great calamities not only for the peoples involved, but also for those far away from the conflict⁶⁰.

Furthermore, the conclusion that Forlin Patrucco and Bratož reached, which is that the supposed scarcity of references to the barbarians in the work of Chromatius corresponds to the diminished threat level that their actions meant for the city, assumes as its premise that said *corpus* does not deal with matters that did not pose a serious threat for the metropolis. Such a premise, however, is revealed to be false at the moment in which other social groups that did not pose great danger to the local Christian community, such as the Jews and the heretics, acquired both in the *Sermons* and in the *Tractatus in Mathaeum* a notable quantitative importance. We find, actually, references to the Jews in 21 of the 44 sermons (47.72%) – 21 of 45 (46.66%) if sermon 43 is considered to be authentic – and in 34 of the 62 texts which the *Tractatus in Mathaeum* (54.83%)⁶¹ is composed of, while 34 out of the 44 homilies (77.27%) – or 34 of 45 (75.55%) – and 50 of the 62 (80.64%) exegetical texts contain allusions to heresy or demonstrate the preoccupation of the author with communicating to his congregation the specificities of orthodox dogma⁶². However, as I have maintained starting from the reconsideration of the heuristic resources invoked in the framework of the debates around Judaism⁶³

⁵⁸ Ambr. *In Luc.* 2.517-518.

⁵⁹ Ambr. *In Luc.* 10.158.

⁶⁰ Ambr. *In Luc.* 10.109-115: *Chuni in Halanos, Halani in Gothos, Gothi in Taifalos et Sarmatas insurrexerunt, nos quoque in Illyrico exules patriae Gothorum exilia fecerunt et nondum est finis. Quae omnium fames, lues pariter boum atque hominum ceterique pecoris, ut etiam, qui bellum non pertulimus, debellatis tamen pares nos fecerit pestilentia!* In another passage from the same work (*In Luc.* 4.122), Ambrose employs the term *barbarum*, not in reference to the contemporary groups but rather paraphrasing *Colossians* 3.11.

⁶¹ For the composition of these quotes, vd. E. Noce, *Judaísmo e identidade cristiana en el corpus de Cromacio de Aquileya*, «Sefarad» 72/1 (2012), pp. 8, 30-44.

⁶² E. Noce, *Herejía e identidad cristiana en el corpus de Cromacio de Aquileia*, «AHAM» 44 (2012), pp. 174-181.

⁶³ From among the abundant bibliography, I refer here to the most important contributions to the debate: G. Brusin, *Un grande edificio culturale a Monastero d'Aquileia*, «BA» 4/34 (1949), pp. 351-357; G. Brusin - P.L. Zovatto, *Monumenti paleocristiani di Aquileia e di Grado*, Udine 1957, pp. 308, 344 nt. 333; F. Luzzato, *Ebrei in Aquileia*, «RaMIsr» 16/6-8 (1950), pp. 140-146; Zevi Avneri, *Lucerne giudaiche trovate in Aquileia*, «RaMIsr» 27/10 (1962), pp. 466-468; J. Lemarié (ed.): Chromace d'Aquilée, *Sermons* I, Paris 1969, p. 56 nt. 1; F. Vattioni, *I nomi giudaici delle epigrafi di Monastero di Aquileia*, «AN» 43 (1972), cc. 125-132; L. Cracco Ruggini, *Il vescovo Cromazio e gli ebrei di Aquileia*, «AAAd» 12 (1977), pp. 353-381; F. Thelamon, *Les vaines illusions des juifs incrédules selon Chromace et Rufin d'Aquilée*, in J.M. Poinssotte (ed.), *Les chrétiens face à leurs adversaires dans l'occident latin au IV^e siècle*, Rouen 2001, pp. 97-114; C. Sorinell, *Identité civique et christianisme. Aquilée III^e au VI^e siècle*, Rome 2005, pp. 174-175 nt. 13; L. Cracco Ruggini, *Cromazio di fronte a pagani ed ebrei*, in Piuissi, *Cromazio di Aquileia* cit., pp. 184-191; G.F. Grassi, *Le dediche*

and heterodoxy⁶⁴ in Aquileia, in the current state of the documentation, despite little evidence, it can be confirmed that a Jewish community existed, although it is not possible to characterize it in any particular way, or to confirm whether it assumed any threat for its Christian counterpart⁶⁵; moreover, even while it is clear that the vitality of certain heresies at other geographical points of the Empire constituted, for Chromatius, a matter worthy of attention, there is no evidence that in Aquileia there was a heretical community that could have threatened the hegemony of the local orthodoxy⁶⁶.

Therefore, I believe that in explaining the supposed scarcity of allusions to the barbarians in the works of Chromatius as a consequence of the minimal danger that they represented to Aquileia, the researchers have ignored the fact that said scarcity is not absolute but relative, given that its proportion is close to that observed by the other contemporary bishops from the region. And this is the circumstance which should be explained: Why is it that a social actor – the barbarians – with a proven presence in the history of Aquileia during the episcopate of Chromatius deserves such minor attention in his writings in comparison with others – Jews and heretics – whose influence on the daily life of the city had been of such minor significance? The hypothesis through which we seek to respond to this question should, in the interests of plausibility, respond to another problem which has been neglected up to now: Why is it that all the references to the barbarians, implicit or explicit, are contained in the *Sermons* of the bishop, while they are totally absent from his *Tractatus in Mathaeum*?

A satisfactory response can be given to both questions if we bear in mind that,

di Orientali nella Basilica di Monastero di Aquileia, «AN» 80 (2009), cc. 417-436; C. Sotinel, *L'èveque chrétien devant la diversité religieuse de la cité: Chromace et Aquilée*, in Beatrice-Peršič, *Chromatius of Aquileia* cit., pp. 163-176.

⁶⁴ The most significant works on the subject are Lemarié, *Sermons* cit. I, pp. 55-56; Y.M. Duval, *Les relations doctrinales entre Milan et Aquilée durant la seconde moitié du IV^e siècle. Chromace d'Aquilée et Ambroise de Milan*, «AAAd» 4 (1973), pp. 189-192, 200-206, 232; Cracco Ruggini, *Il vescovo Cromazio* cit., pp. 353-354, 363, 376-378; G. Cuscito, *Cromazio di Aquileia (388-408) e l'età sua. Bilancio bibliografico-critico dopo l'edizione dei Sermones e dei Tractatus in Mathaeum*, [s.l.] 1980, pp. 40-47; G. Trettel (a c. di): Cromazio di Aquileia, *Commento al Vangelo di Matteo I*, Roma 1984, pp. 9-12, 21-24; Truzzi, *Zeno, Gaudenzio e Cromazio* cit., pp. 78, 133-134; G. Cuscito, *Fede e politica ad Aquileia. Dibattito teologico e centri di potere (secoli IV-VI)*, Trieste 1987, pp. 35, 78-83, 89-90; G. Cuscito (a c. di), *Cromazio di Aquileia. Catechesi al popolo*, Roma 1989, p. 22; G. Cuscito, *L'ambiente di cultura e di fede nell'età di Cromazio alla luce della recente storiografia*, «AAAd» 34 (1989), p. 23; J. Granados - J. Nieva (eds.): Cromacio de Aquileya, *Comentario al Evangelio de Mateo*, Madrid 2002, pp. 9-10, 14, 16, 22; Sotinel, *Identité civique* cit., pp. 222-227; Cracco Ruggini, *Cromazio di fronte* cit., pp. 184-185.

⁶⁵ Noce, *Judaísmo e identidad* cit., pp. 19-47; E. Noce, *Cromacio de Aquileya y el judaísmo. Reconsideración del estado de la cuestión a la luz de los testimonios literarios y materiales*, in A. Sapere (ed.), *Nuevas aproximaciones a la Antigüedad Grecolatina II*, Buenos Aires 2013, pp. 28-42.

⁶⁶ Noce, *Hereja e identidad* cit., pp. 181-184; E. Noce, *Del haereticus como enemigo externo al haereticus como cristiano imperfecto en el corpus de Cromacio de Aquileya*, «SocPrecap» 3/2 (2014), pp. 1-22.

as Isabella Sandwell has highlighted, «Christian texts can be seen as discourse that, through its formulation of categories and ideas of selfhood, constructed the ways in which individuals came to understand themselves and their roles in the world»⁶⁷. Understanding of the norms and beliefs that each preacher sought to impose on his listeners is particularly important. Such an entirety cannot be perceived, as Martine de Reu has pointed out, by reducing the study of sermons to a mere textual analysis: with the aim of developing a thorough understanding, it is necessary for the researcher to consider not only the written documents, but also a series of non-textual elements fundamental for their interpretation, among them the characteristics of the public and society that the message was directed at⁶⁸.

Undoubtedly, these ideas can and should be applied to the preachings of Chromatius: his discourse possessed, actually, a marked performative character, operating not with the aim of reflecting historical reality but of constructing it based on the Christian ideal. Thus, in this paper from now onwards I will cease to consider the presence or absence of the barbarians in the work of the Bishop of Aquileia – as well as their distribution within the *corpus* itself – as a consequence of their material impact on the history of the city, and I shall attempt to understand this in terms of the usefulness that their image could or could not have taken on for what I understand to be the main objective of the episcopal deeds of Chromatius: to define before a particular congregation and in a specific conjuncture the definitive features of a Christian identity.

Christianity and the Christians of Aquileia during the Episcopate of Chromatius

The key to interpreting the aforementioned characteristics of the barbarian presence in the work of Chromatius lies, as I understand it, in the particular local socio-religious conjuncture of his episcopacy. The new faith had made itself publicly visible in the city a few years after the Edict of Toleration by Constantine in the year 313, when in the era of Bishop Theodore a religious complex composed of two parallel halls was erected in the southeast area of the city⁶⁹. Furthermore,

⁶⁷ I. Sandwell, *Religious Identity in Late Antiquity. Greeks, Jews and Christians in Antioch*, Cambridge 2007, p. 13.

⁶⁸ M. De Reu, *Divers chemins pour étudier un sermon*, in J. Hamesse - X. Hermand (eds.), *De l'homélie au sermon. Histoire de la prédication médiévale. Actes du Colloque international de Louvain-la-Neuve (9-11 juillet 1992)*, Louvain 1993, pp. 333-340.

⁶⁹ The bibliography concerning the Theodorian complex is extremely extensive. I refer here to G. Cuscito, *Signaculum Fidei. L'ambiente cristiano delle origini nell'Alto Adriatico: aspetti e problemi*, Trieste 2009, pp. 110-124, with an abundant bibliography. Regarding the complex question of Christianity in Aquileia before Constantine, vd. R. Bratož, *Il cristianesimo aquileiese prima di Costantino fra Aquileia e Poetovio*, Udine-Gorizia 1999.

four of the few local Christian epitaphs whose date is certain provide evidence that particular individuals had decided to identify themselves, at the moment of their deaths, as members of the Christian community before the eighth decade of the 4th century⁷⁰. We know, in addition, that in the second half of the century there was a *seminarium* in Aquileia in which Jerome, Rufinus and Chromatius himself, among others, took part⁷¹.

Despite this, several indications suggest that at the moment in which Chromatius assumed his episcopacy, the Christianization of the city and its inhabitants was still an undertaking in progress. Actually, in spite of the dating of each of the paleochristian basilicas in Aquileia being a matter of debate, it is possible to conclude that the Christianization of the urban landscape was very limited, at least until the period of Chromatius himself, with real progress not being visible until the beginning of the 5th century according to various researchers⁷². Moreover, as the epitaphs belonging to some members of the local aristocracy and the inscriptions conserved on the pavements of the basilicas in the city show, the commitment of Aquileia's aristocracy to the Christian faith seems to have been slight during the whole of the 4th century⁷³. The other side of this conjuncture was that the traditional religiosity in the metropolis and its vicinity conserved something of its vitality of old: actually, various votive stelae demonstrate that, over the course of the 4th century, some individuals still found themselves connected to deities such as Diana-Nemesis or Jupiter⁷⁴. As an expression of this reality, at the mouth of the River Timavo, at 25 kilometers from Aquileia, a mithraeum was kept in use until at least the Theodosian period, as far as it is possible to confirm from the coins recovered there⁷⁵.

⁷⁰ Sotinel, *Identité civique* cit., pp. 91. For those epigraphs, vd. G. Brusin, *Inscriptiones Aquileiae*, Udine 1993, nrr. 2913, 2935, 2936, 2937.

⁷¹ A. Scholz, *Il «Seminarium Aquileiense»*, «MemStorForog» 50 (1970), pp. 5-106.

⁷² It is impossible to give an account here of the huge number of studies which refer to the various basilicas of Aquileia. I therefore turn to Cuscito, *Signaculum Fidei* cit., pp. 110-148. For a more succinct approach to the subject, vd. E. Noce, *El historiador y sus fuentes: el aporte de los testimonios materiales para el análisis del discurso de Cromacio de Aquileya respecto del paganismo*, in G. Rodríguez - A.V. Neyra (eds.), *¿Qué implica ser medievalista? Prácticas y reflexiones en torno al oficio del historiador*, Vol. I. *El medioevo europeo*, Mar del Plata 2012, pp. 144-151, with an abundant bibliography.

⁷³ Sotinel, *Identité civique* cit., pp. 97-104; Ch. Pietri, *Une aristocratie provinciale et la mission chrétienne: l'exemple de la Venetia*, «AAAd» 22/1 (1982), pp. 127-132.

⁷⁴ I follow M. Verzár-Bass, *Continuità e trasformazione dei culti pagani ad Aquileia (II-IV secolo D.C.)*, «AAAd» 47 (2000), pp. 147-178. The author states that, similarly, the vitality of the cults of Belenus and Isis-Serapis throughout the 4th century can be sustained. The arguments presented, however, do not seem to me to be convincing (Noce, *El historiador* cit., pp. 155-156).

⁷⁵ S. Andreolotti et al., *Relazione sul rinvenimento dei resti di un Mitreo durante la distruzione della cavità n. 4204 presso le risorgive del Timavo*, «AttiMemCGEB» 5 (1966), pp. 19-27; G. Pross Gabrielli, *Il tempio ipogeo del dio Mitra al Timavo*, «ArchTries» 4/35 (1975), pp. 5-34.

These signs suggest that the Christianization of the city and its population was, in the time of Chromatius, certainly limited or even incipient. It is not surprising, therefore, to perceive in the work of the most celebrated bishop of Aquileia that, from his perspective, the Christianity professed by some members of his community displayed certain imperfections. In sermon 2 for example, Chromatius allows us to glimpse the possibility that among his congregation there were some who, in spite of having been welcomed into the Church, they did not deserve to stay in it, because they had not completely assimilated themselves into the local orthodoxy or because they conserved certain behavior inherited from their gentile past. Sermon 17 allows us to appreciate an example of this behavior: as in Turin⁷⁶, the Christians of Aquileia felt attracted to the pagan celebration of the Kalends of January⁷⁷.

This is the socio-religious context in the light of which the explanation can be found as to why Chromatius so repeatedly referred to the topics of the literature *adversus Iudaeos* and *adversus haereses* despite neither Jews nor heretics constituting, at a local level, a great concern for the bishop: their typified figures, as well as the figure of the unredeemed gentile, provided negative models in which the faithful could, on the one hand, perceive what was not tolerated within the Christian community and, on the other hand, take warning of the cruel fate that waited for them after death, according to the preaching of the bishop, if they did not strictly conform their own lives to the guidelines emanating from the ecclesiastical authority⁷⁸.

In the classical period the barbarian element, as a negative pole of the binomial identity Roman-barbarian, had played a marked role in the establishment of the essential characteristics of the *romanitas*⁷⁹. However, in the context of the post-Theodosian empire, this opposition gave way to another, made up of the Christian on its positive pole, and the non-Christian, the infidel, on its negative pole. The identity of the former, its specific characteristics in doctrinal, moral and attitudinal material, was defined from then on not through the confrontation of ethnic-geographical derived features but rather socio-religious ones. The importance of the contrasting figure of the Jew, of the heretic and of the unredeemed gentile therefore grew in the discourse of Chromatius. As a counterpart to this, and in spite of their historical relevance in North Italy during the period of his episcopacy, the interest the bishop had in the barbarian lessened, its image disappearing, given that it presented no utility for the transmission of the specificities of Christian identity.

⁷⁶ Max. Taur. *Serm.* 61c.67-72; 63.2-9,24-38; 98.2-24.

⁷⁷ For an analysis of sermons 2 and 17, vd. E. Noce, *Paganismo e identità cristiana en el corpus de Cromacio de Aquileya*, «MEFRM» 126/1 (2014), pp. 331-335.

⁷⁸ Noce, *Paganismo e identità* cit.

⁷⁹ On this, vd. Y.A. Dauge, *Le Barbare. Recherches sur la conception romaine de la barbarie et de la civilisation*, Bruxelles 1981; Luiselli, *Storia culturale dei rapporti* cit., pp. 133-150.

This being true, the hypothesis should overcome an evident objection: if, in accordance with his aims, Chromatius tended to ignore the barbarian, why, on occasion, did this figure become visible? And why did this occur in the *Sermons*, while remaining totally absent from the *Tractatus in Mathaeum*?

The Sermons, the Tractatus in Mathaeum and the Barbarians

Pauline Allen has quite rightly shown that «the homily formed the only spontaneous part of the liturgy, often providing also an antidote or a complement to the more formal or official literature»⁸⁰. Thus, if the researcher seeks to penetrate the performative wall interposed between the historical materiality and its cognitive activity, the sermons constitute an extremely useful literary genre. In the words of Allen, «If we are in search of lived Christianity or ‘practical divinity’ in these centuries, or if our concern is with the social extension of Patristics, we must start with the homily»⁸¹.

Regardless of the extent to which the discourses of Chromatius were a result of improvisation or elaborated before presentation to the public, as well as the eventual changes that they could have gone through on publication, the homiletic *corpus* of the Bishop of Aquileia is composed of pieces intended to be delivered before an audience. This circumstance is appreciated through the presence, in practically all of the sermons, of some form of the verb *audio*. In fact, expressions such as the following abound: «what it says about the Jews, our affection has heard in the present readings»⁸²; «as you have heard, in the present reading, my beloved brethren, we heard about Susanna, the noblest of women who offers us a model of modesty and an example of chastity»⁸³.

Conceived with an audience in mind, the sermons of Chromatius could not completely ignore the vagaries of daily life of the individuals they were directed towards, their desires and interests, fears and worries, even when dealing with worldly matters did not constitute the main interest of the bishop's sermons. So, imperatively and circumstantially, the daily life of the city and its inhabitants intruded into the homilies of Chromatius. The orator, for example, could not be aloof to the fact that a market day took place locally, an occurrence that would concentrate the at-

⁸⁰ P. Allen, *Homilies as a Source for Social History*, «StudPatr» 24 (1993), p. 2. Regarding the extent and limitations of such spontaneity, vd. Olivar, *La predicación cristiana* cit., pp. 589-640.

⁸¹ Allen, *Homilies as a Source* cit., p. 2.

⁸² Chromat. *Serm.* 9.37-39: *De populo uero Iudaeorum quid dicat, audiuit in praesenti lectione dilectio uestra...*

⁸³ Chromat. *Serm.* 35.2-4: *In praesenti lectione quam audistis [dilectissimi], nobis lectum est de Susanna nobilissima femina, quae nobis formam pudicitiae et exemplum praeibuit castitatis.*

tention of the people on preaching about the beatitudes in sermon 41. Perhaps to increase the number of his listeners⁸⁴, he introduced himself on that occasion as a trader in heavenly goods:

This meeting of the people and the busy markets gives us occasion, brothers, of offering the words of the Gospel [...]. Therefore, if the market itself has this aim, that every one, with a view to their own interests, either sells those things which he has in excess, or buys those which he lacks, it will not be inappropriate that I also offer a commodity that the Lord has entrusted to me, the heavenly teachings [...]. I wish, dear brothers, to offer to you from the Holy Gospel those precious pearls of the beatitudes. So, open the treasures of your heart, buy, collect avidly, possess with happiness⁸⁵.

Moreover, after the solemn tone and the overly elaborate language of lines 21-30 of sermon 35, a characteristic of the female component of Chromatius' congregation becomes visible: their efforts made for the attainment of physical beauty, which merited the reproach of the bishop as well as the instigation to amend their conduct according to the Old Testament story of Susanna:

Why cover your face with whites or reds, as if you corrected the image of God in yourself, who made your face for you as He wanted it? Truthfully, that which is natural in you, is the work of God the creator, but what you add, is from the devil, who wants to adulterate in you the work of God. Why do you desire to embellish yourself with gold or with beautiful dresses, you who should be embellished by faith and holy customs? So, if you want to please God, follow the example of Susanna: be pure, be modest, be honorable in your habits, work for good, and in this way you will be sufficiently beautiful. And not only beautiful for God, but also in the eyes of men⁸⁶.

⁸⁴ The elevated style of sermon 41 as well as the use of unusual expressions in the sermons of Chromatius, among them *fratres*, *fratres carissimi* and *benedicti*, made Joseph Lemarié think that the audience for this homily was made up of subjects dedicated to an ascetic life (Lemarié, *Sermons* cit. II, pp. 233-237). Claire Sotinel, on the other hand, has maintained that this sermon was aimed at priests in training (Sotinel, *Identité civique* cit., pp. 222-227).

⁸⁵ Chromat. *Serm.* 41.5-24: *Dat nobis, fratres, conuentus hic populi et mercatus frequentia occasionem proponendi sermonis euangelici... Si ergo mercatus hanc ipse continet rationem, ut unusquisque pro utilitate sua aut uendat quae sibi superflua sunt, aut emat quae desunt, non incondite et ego proponam mercem, quam mihi commisit Dominus, praedicationem utique caelestem... Cupio, fratres carissimi, proponere uobis illas beatitudinum margaritas ex sancto pretiosas euangelio; aperite itaque cordis uestri thesauros, emite, percipite auide, feliciter possidete.*

⁸⁶ Chromat. *Serm.* 35.21-30: *Quid faciem tuam candoribus uel ruboribus obducis, quasi emendes in te Dei figurationem, qui tibi qualem uoluit faciem fecit? Illud enim quod in te naturale est, opus est Dei creatoris; quod uero de tuo addis, argumentum diaboli est, qui uult in te opus Dei adulterare. Quid te ornare desideras auro, uel uestibus pretiosis, quae ornatam esse debebas fide et moribus sanctis? Ergo si Deo desideres placere, sequere exemplum Susannae: esto casta, esto pudica, esto moribus honesta, esto operaria iusta, et satis es speciosa, et non solum Deo, sed etiam hominibus pretiosa.*

Let us finally⁸⁷ invoke sermon 3, in which Chromatius, using a digression in his presentation about the centurion Cornelius from *Acts* 10, warned his congregation about the unsuitability of their conduct, which was far from fulfilling their spiritual obligations. Certainly, the bishop made explicit that, unlike what had happened with Cornelius, whose prayers had been received by an angel of the Lord,

I don't know if any of us, who don't even observe fasts, or prayers, or alms, is deserving of hearing this from the angel. Recently a regular fast was prescribed: few fasted. You come to the church and have more time for conversations or for earthly business than for prayers⁸⁸.

Thus, I understand that, in spite of the lack of interest that the Bishop of Aquileia had for earthly happenings, two motives aroused the occasional appearance of the barbarians in his homiletic work. On the one hand, the catechesis and daily life come together in his sermons to the people: an aid was found in this, an instrument that enabled the congregation to comprehend the orator's message. If Chromatius wished to impart his instructions on a day in which the attention of the population was captivated by the market, what more appropriate resource than presenting himself as a merchant of heavenly goods? If he had to instruct about the captivity of man by the devil, how better than to turn to the comparison with confinement at the hands of the barbarians, a real and present fear for his listeners?

On the other hand, the bishop could not have been blind to the anxieties of his faithful flock. With the knowledge that only towards the middle of the 5th century did the barbarians effectively overpower Aquileia, the modern historian could commit the error of imagining, for the first decade of the 5th century, a community distant from and unconcerned by contemporary events, protected by the city walls and its effective defense system. But the effects of the military power of the barbar-

⁸⁷ This brief presentation of passages in which the details of daily life emerge does not include the famous reference to the Jews and Gentiles that *sollemnitatem huius uigiliae nostrae tamquam propriam celebrant* (Chromat. *Serm.* 16.61-69), because I do not see in this any reference to an empirical event, instead rather a rhetorical expression tending both to make of the Christian Easter vigil a celebration of cosmic proportions and to incite the faithful to participate in it (E. Noce, *Sollemnitatem huius uigiliae nostrae tamquam propriam celebrant: reconsiderando el testimonio de Cromacio de Aquileya respecto de la Vigilia Pascual, los judíos y los gentiles* (*Sermo XVI, 61-69*), «AHAM» 46 [2013], pp. 259-279). Cf. Cracco Ruggini, *Il vescovo Cromazio* cit., pp. 380-381; Truzzi, *Zeno, Gaudenzio e Cromazio* cit., p. 166; Thelamon, *Les vaines illusions* cit., pp. 112-113; Cracco Ruggini, *Cromazio di fronte* cit., p. 187; Sotinel, *L'évêque chrétien* cit., p. 173; Beatrice, *The Sign* cit., p. 37. For the same reason, I do not include Chromatius' *Sermo* 13, in which the bishop refers to Jews who *lapidant iustos* and *occidunt prophetas* (E. Noce, *Quasi et ipsi nunc lapident iustos et occidunt prophetas: reflexiones críticas respecto de la motivación histórica del sermo XIII de Cromacio de Aquileya*, «AntTard» 23 [2015], pp. 371-381).

⁸⁸ Chromat. *Serm.* 3.8-12: *Sed nescio utrum hoc aliquis nostrum audire ab angelo meretur, qui neque ieiuniis, neque orationibus, neque eleemosynis deseruimus. Indictum est legitimum ieiunium nuper, pauci ieiunauerunt. Proceditur ad ecclesiam et fabulis potius uel terrenis negotiis quam orationibus uacatur.*

ians located beyond the borders of the empire must have been – as Rufinus' prologue makes clear – well known and overwhelming for the local population: the metropolis was the entrance gate to Italy for the contingents of individuals who, coming from Illyricum, migrated towards the heart of the empire with the hope of finding there a new and safer place to live, travelers who undoubtedly brought with them stories about the destruction of their home cities, which were geographically or militarily less fortunate than Aquileia⁸⁹. It is therefore logical to conclude that the city's inhabitants could not be sure about their own well-being and survival: the proximity and latent threat of the barbarians must have constituted for them a serious concern, at least in determined moments of the episcopate of Chromatius. Whatever the aims of his preachings were, the barbarian question, as a pressing problem, could not be totally ignored by the preacher at moments in which his own parishioners had demanded from the pastor an explanation for and relief from this fear they experienced. In such circumstances, the barbarians forcefully made themselves present in his sermons.

In the light of this, the absence of the barbarian in the *Tractatus in Mathaeum* is relatively simple to explain. Written for a well-educated public, for individuals committed to a monastic life, or clergy in formation⁹⁰, its readership was capable of following the exegetical process of the bishop without needing to descend to the «wretchedness» of materiality: the resource of daily experience as a catechetical instrument was not necessary. In addition, it is plausible to suppose that for the readers of the *Tractatus*, removed from the world and its vicissitudes and complacently trusting in divine assistance, the barbarian question was not as urgent as it was for the public to whom the *Sermons* were addressed. The catechetical and conjunctural motives for referring to the barbarians were therefore lacking in the context of the *Tractatus in Mathaeum*. Consequently, in this work their image faded to the point of disappearing completely.

Conclusions

Four decades ago, Arnaldo Momigliano drew our attention to the relative indifference that the ecclesiastical intellectuals displayed towards the barbarians during Late Antiquity: «L'eccitamento più profondo nella vita del V e del VI secolo è dato non dal barbaro come tale, ma dalla costante tensione con il miracolo, con il diavolo, con il proprio passato pagano, con i vicini Giudei o eretici, e con la propria salvezza eterna»⁹¹.

⁸⁹ Bratož, *La chiesa aquileiese e l'Ilirico* cit., pp. 130-133.

⁹⁰ Vd. Sotinel, *Identité civique* cit., pp. 222-227.

⁹¹ A. Momigliano, *La caduta senza rumore di un impero nel 476 d.C.*, «ASNP» III, 2/2 (1973), p. 418.

Rarely do assertions of a general character adhere so closely to a particular case. Actually, as I have maintained throughout this paper, the *Sermons* and the *Tractatus in Mathaeum* of Chromatius of Aquileia provide evidence that, for him, the barbarian question was a minor problem. Whatever their destructive potential may have been, the barbarians did not constitute, from the bishop's point of view, an extreme danger: they might occasionally destroy cities and bodies, but they could not damage souls or steal away from the Christians their promise of salvation. The community, therefore, was safe.

Much more worrying was the imperfect condition of the Christianity of a certain number of the members of his parish. The persistence of deviance in dogma, practices and morals could, assured Chromatius, lead them to eternal death. In this sense then, the community was at risk.

As a consequence, the aim of his sermons was to define as clearly as possible those essential characteristics of the Christian identity in each of the aforementioned aspects. The archetypal figures of the Jew, heretic and unredeemed gentile, defined in virtue of socio-religious specificities – beliefs, practices and moral attitudes – provided negative models in which the Christian could see what would not be tolerated by their faith as well as the consequences that persisting in error would bring: eternal death. The barbarian, conversely, had nothing to offer to this fundamental objective: their identity was not defined by socio-religious characteristics, but rather by ethno-geographic ones. And for this reason their visibility was reduced to a minimum in the preaching of Chromatius, only surfacing when it proved useful to clarify the catechesis for the community or when the proximity of the barbarian was felt as a concrete threat to their lives, goods and freedom, demanding from the bishop words of hope and consolation in the face of particularly traumatic historical moments.

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