



GOTHENBURG STUDIES IN SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

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14

BODIES OF  
VITAL MATTER

PER BINDE



ACTA UNIVERSITATIS GOTHOBURGENSIS



# BODIES OF VITAL MATTER

Notions of Life Force and Transcendence  
in Traditional Southern Italy

PER BINDE



ACTA UNIVERSITATIS GOTHOBURGENSIS

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**List of errata**

P. 127, paragraph 3, line 6: "del Bianco" should be "de Esaro".

P. 226, fig. 6: "Dead plants" should be "Seeds".

P. 294, reference no. 5: "Cappanari" should be "Cappannari".

P. 297, the reference "Priori ... 1970..." should be: "Profeta, Giuseppe, 1970. Le leggende di fondazione dei santuari (Avviò ad un'analisi morfologica). Lares 36: 245-58."

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## ONE

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# INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to investigate beliefs and practices relating to vitality, illness and death in traditional Southern Italy. My prime argument is that many of these beliefs and practices relate to just a few interconnected sets of notions. A basic presumption for the analysis of the material is that vital force is construed as a quality or substance which can be lost as well as gained. A first set of notions concerns losses leading to weakness, illness or death, caused by another person's appropriation of vitality. A second set includes ideas of how force of life might be gained from external sources, thereby reinvigorating the body. A third set concerns the inevitable situation in which physical life can no longer be sustained and death occurs. Transcendence beyond the carnal realm is symbolically achieved; a new and incorruptible body is created, or death is construed as giving new life. The study covers such topics as the occult transfer of mother's milk, the evil eye, beliefs about menstruation and witches, the cult of saints, Easter celebrations, death rituals, burial customs and the celebration of All Souls Day.

### *Location*

Southern Italy is here intended as the area usually referred to in Italy as *il mezzogiorno* ('the South'), that is, the regions of Abruzzo, Molise, Campania, Puglia, Basilicata, Calabria and Sicily. This area is commonly considered – by Italians themselves as well as by social scientists – to be relatively socially and culturally homogenous, making it apposite to speak of the South as distinct from Central and Northern Italy. Sardinia, which is sometimes included in the *mezzogiorno*, is excluded from this study since the social organisation and cultural traditions of this island are markedly different from the rest of the South.<sup>1</sup>

The main body of written ethnographic information on which this essay is built describes states of affairs at various points in time in the period approximately between the unification of Italy (1861) and World War II. For want of a better term, the Italy of the south of this time will be referred to as 'traditional', to distinguish it from post-war and present-day Italy. Certainly, this period was characterised by a

gradual modernisation, in which the impact of demographic changes, agricultural reforms and market economy slowly eroded older patterns of living and thinking. Compared to the post-war era with its radical changes, however, this period appears as quite 'traditional', characterised by a way of life which today has to a great extent disappeared. Anthony Galt writes in his study of a community in Puglia (1991c: 44f):

'... a process of radically changing reality had formed most Locorotondesi. As in the countryside, the lines of demarcation in that experience of change stand out clearly as the Second World War, and the passage from the 1950s to the 1960s, which many experienced as a time of discontinuity between the last decade of a locally felt traditional way of life, and integration into a modernity which became more national in character.'

In discussing ethnographic data that are not contemporary, the past tense will be used. The reader is asked to keep in mind that this does not necessarily imply that the matters discussed are something of the past. The past tense is simply used for convenience as I have no intention, in this work, to assert whether a particular custom or belief, documented in the past, also exists today in a similar fashion.

When quoting verbal expressions in South Italian dialects, I will simply retain the phonetic transcriptions used in the source documents.

### *Sources*

The study of the societies of Europe offers unique possibilities for the social anthropologist. Few other parts of the world are so well documented, in many cases offering the anthropologist access to an immense amount of historical and other kinds of information on economy, demographic conditions and 'folk customs'. This information can facilitate thematic investigations that transcend the horizon of the local community and the confines of the present and allow the anthropologist to venture into the study of societies of the past and of long-term cultural processes.

This study makes use of some of the contents of this huge storehouse of information. It is principally based on ethnographic information extracted from two bodies of texts. The condensed picture of the traditional Italian society of the South is derived from the works of historians, sociologists and social anthropologists. The main body of information on beliefs and practices relating to vitality and death has been obtained from Italian folkloristic texts, complemented with data extracted from a variety of other sources, such as anthropologi-

cal essays and articles, travel books and religious publications. Some of this material concerns more recent times, and I have included information from these sources when the ethnography describes conditions or ways of thinking and acting that were essentially the same in 'traditional' society.

Between 1989 and the present, I have spent several months traveling in Southern Italy. During these field trips I participated in a number of saints' feasts<sup>2</sup> and the Easter celebrations, events that have an extraordinary atmosphere, dense with intense emotion. I also visited numerous places of interest with regard to this work, such as sanctuaries and cemeteries, and had the opportunity to converse with informants about traditional and contemporary ways of life. These field experiences, complementing the information from written sources, have been of great value in my interpretation of South Italian society and culture.

The extensive use of folkloristic material is both advantageous and a source of problems. The greater part of this body of data consists of texts written in the decades around the turn of the century. The information found in these texts is both extensive and detailed. Italian folklorists and ethnographers collected information on 'popular traditions', and they put on record the various sides of life among people in a certain community or region. In some works there is an ambition to render a more comprehensive picture of that life, while others simply list items of information. The ethnographers aimed to document for generations to come the Italian folk life of their own time, a documentation which could serve as a source for future comparative or other types of secondary studies — such as this one.

Basically, these sources are reliable. The ethnographers were usually well educated men of humanistic interests and with a local patriotic zeal. Most of them had thorough knowledge of their field of interest, gained through decades of interaction with informants, with whom they conversed in the local dialects. Pure misunderstandings of facts should be rare in their reports. Whenever these scholars ventured into analysis and interpretation of their material, they relied on theories of cultural diffusion, survivalism and current brands of social psychology which to present day anthropologists appear as old-fashioned. In the light of modern anthropology, their explications appear to be, if not directly misleading, rather irrelevant. However, it is not the folkloristic explanations that are of interest to this work; my concern is rather the data that these texts provide. By a careful sifting of these sources, basic information on what people thought and did have been extracted and put to analytical use.

In traditional times, especially before the turn of the century, most South Italians had little contact with the world beyond their own community.<sup>3</sup> There was a strong sense of local patriotism in the towns and villages that counteracted the adoption of practices of other places and enforced adherence to local custom. Furthermore, in certain spheres of activity, such as folk medicine and techniques for dealing with occult powers, knowledge was typically transmitted in a pragmatic fashion between individuals in the local community. When knowledge is circulated in such an informal way, without the aid of written text, it is liable to modification in accordance with various accidental circumstances and local contexts; new beliefs and practices can easily emerge as a *bricolage* of elements already employed. For these reasons, local communities tended to develop a version of the South Italian cultural tradition that showed a significant amount of unique variation in both beliefs and practices.<sup>4</sup> John Davis (1973: 89) reports on a community in Basilicata in the 1960s: 'Pisticci is still in many ways an isolated, idiosyncratic society with its own dialect, its own marriage customs, religious cults, myths and traditions.'

For this study, which is topical in character rather than based on the investigation of a particular South Italian community, the easy access to ethnographic information from hundreds of communities has been of great advantage. The themes in focus are investigated with regard to their many and varying manifestations in different communities. The study of the beliefs and symbolic practices of a multitude of local communities can be likened to a kind of anthropological laboratory work, where variations help to elucidate a common cultural base. Through this kind of study, patterns will emerge which would be difficult to discern within the scope of a single community.

The folklorists focused on issues such as 'superstitious beliefs', 'folk medicine', folktales, handicrafts, the local celebration of Christian festivals, practices concerned with marriage and death, and other spheres of interest that were taken to be part of 'folklore' and 'popular customs'. Hence these scholars paid little attention to those other realms of social life that are of crucial interest to present-day social anthropologists, such as kinship and economy. This bias would pose serious problems if we were to reconstruct, on the sole basis of such sources, everyday life and the details of the social and economic organisation of communities. This, however, is not the intention of this study. What is offered here is a thematic study of notions relating to vitality and death; most of the issues of particular interest are among those topics that the diligent folklorists have focused upon, and there is thus an abundance of documentary material relating to

them. The social and economic organisation of the area will be considered only more generally, so as to provide the context without which these beliefs and practices cannot be properly understood; as was mentioned earlier, the lacunae of information regarding social organisation and economy will be filled in with data from other sources. However, a heavy emphasis on the peasantry and the uneducated strata of the population is predominant in folkloristic studies; therefore, this essay will be concerned primarily with these sectors of the population.

Another characteristic feature of the older folkloristic sources is a particular style of reporting. While much information concerns events that the scholar witnessed with his own eyes, we sometimes come upon statements of the type: 'in the village *N* it is believed that in case of *x*, *y* should be done'. Hence we do not know whether the folklorist had witnessed activity *y* as a response to *x* or otherwise could be certain of its performance; consequently, we do not know with certainty whether *y* was ever actually done. While this uncertainty would pose a serious problem to a study of social organisation, in which the discrepancy between norms and behaviour, between ideals and practice, may be of crucial importance, it poses no fundamental dilemma for the present study. We are concerned with explicit as well as implicit notions, and the features of a notion are the same whether it sustains actual practices or exists only as a figure of thought that might be more or less clearly expressed verbally.

To conclude, there are problems inherent in the anthropological use of folkloristic sources. To this particular work, however, some of these problems are not crucial and others can be circumvented by using complementary bodies of data. The advantages of using these overwhelmingly rich sources compensate for the disadvantages. As several scholars in European anthropology have pointed out, there is a need for complements to the traditional anthropological method of participating observation in small local communities.<sup>5</sup> Europe is no *terra incognita*; the anthropologist is not the first scientist to investigate its countries and communities. There is already rich documentation by scholars in history, economy, sociology, demography, religion and ethnography, and the anthropologist should look at these sources as valuable repositories of information.

### *Assumptions*

Over time people in societies produce what we may call cultural representations, symbols or collective knowledge, crucial for their

organisation of social life and understanding of the world. Institutions, practices, beliefs, rituals and myths are produced collectively. Although each individual assigns his own private meanings to these, the social and cultural meanings can be re-constructed by the anthropologist interpreting the ethnography.

In anthropology there is no consensus on how this more precisely should be done or as to what are the fundamental forces in the creation of collective representations. In interpreting the present ethnography, which to a large extent consists of descriptions of beliefs and practices, I will use terms that relate to processes of thought; notions, ideas, intuitions and implicit assumptions. These elements of thought give rise to beliefs about particular phenomena in the world as well as inspire to practices used for accomplishing specific tasks. Such knowledge is not produced by empirical and experimental science, but by a 'science of the concrete' in which immediately perceptible and salient features of entities are tied into webs of associations.<sup>6</sup> Beliefs can be understood as answers to such questions as: why has this mother no milk for her baby, why is this person ill and what happens to a person after death? Customary practices provide accepted ways of, for instance, increasing lactation, curing illness and assisting the deceased in their other-worldly existence.

I believe that the character of collective knowledge can be illuminated through the concept of tradition, as it has been elaborated by Edward Shils (1981). A tradition of knowledge is handed down from the past to the present, from one generation to the next, but it is also subject to constant modification. The average person might be content with receiving rather practical knowledge. If a practice is recommended by others as a relevant means to an end, if it is construed as being based on experience accumulated by a multitude of persons in the remote or near past and if its results are tolerably good — or at least if it does not bring about misfortune — the practice will be accepted, so will be the beliefs that account for its efficacy. The average person will not invent new means to a particular end if efficient adequate means are already given in the stock of collective knowledge. Similarly, new and original ideas about phenomena in the world that become accepted by others are rare. Rather, ideas and beliefs already given tend to be accepted. The potential for acceptance is greater if a practice or belief is held by persons in positions of authority or those who are regarded as having expertise. Acceptance also relies upon a sense of piety towards the past — a notion that past generations had access to greater knowledge than people have now, and that they lived a life that was better in significant aspects. Discussing beliefs in



sorcery, witches and spirits in a Sicilian community, Charlotte Gower Chapman (1973: 207) writes:

... [people] emphasize the past and its traditions. It is generally recognized that in former times witches were more powerful, and spirits more numerous and beneficial to mankind. Old books and things said to be part of the knowledge of the ancients are believed to contain wisdom beyond the scope of modern men. Like all other learning and custom, these beliefs make the present dependent on the past and bind men to their traditions.

Knowledge as a body of tradition is therefore to a large extent accepted and handed down to others in original or close to original form without being actively and critically considered. In a society like the 'traditional' South Italian one, numerous customary beliefs and practices belong to the stock of knowledge for many generations. General presumptions about man and the world, which may be implicit or explicit and on which more specific notions rely, usually remain unaltered for long time. When such paradigms of thought change, radically new views on man and his place in the universe are implied. Examples of basic presumptions that are going to be discussed in this study are the idea of health as dependent on the balance between different types of bodily humours and beliefs in divine and demonic beings.

Nevertheless, tradition also changes. Some knowledge is lost or ceases to be transmitted, since the potential recipients do not wish to learn it or because the teaching of it for some reason is restricted. An amount of new knowledge is created, but seldom is it truly new; typically it builds upon previous knowledge. Other knowledge is more or less modified over time. The process of modification is complex and can be studied from two principal perspectives.

The details of transmission, modification and creation of knowledge can be elucidated in a micro-perspective. Here, the varying powers of the mind and imagination among individuals, and cognitive abilities involving symbolization, categorization, association and subconscious information processing, are relevant. A macro-perspective captures changes in a society's stock of knowledge over a long stretch of time, and endogenous and exogenous factors influencing change can be studied.<sup>7</sup>

In this essay, however, I am not concerned with the properties of the transmission and modification of knowledge but rather with the stock of knowledge itself – beliefs, customary practices and legends, and the notions and presumptions on which they rely. This knowledge does not form a logically coherent system; it is permeated with obscurities, ambiguities and logical contradictions.<sup>8</sup> Beliefs and prac-

tices were brought to the fore contextually, and therefore the sometimes apparent incongruities among them were not very problematic. As it has already been pointed out, the informal way of transmitting knowledge in the communities worked towards diversity. Through the intuitions, imagination, hunches and creative thinking of individuals, new versions of old beliefs and practices were developed and new expressions of old notions and basic presumptions were created. Differences in the way of life – social organisation and subsistence economy – among the communities of the South provided different and local ‘diets’ in ‘food for thought’, nurturing the process of changing received knowledge. Of this material – constantly produced by the intellectual and imaginative powers of the human mind – some parts ‘caught on’ among the people in the community. It appeared to others, through their experience, reason or intuition, as useful, interesting or good in some other way. It became part of local tradition and sometimes spread over a larger area. As Shils (1981: 205) puts it:

Most of what exists at any moment and which is given from the past has not been arbitrarily accumulated. It is not the outcome of a long series of arbitrary or accidental acts of selection. By acts of judgment less explicit and deliberate than the decision as to whether to retain or demolish an old building which can still be used with less cost than would be required for the construction of a new one, human beings adopt and adapt the practices and beliefs of their predecessors.

While inconsistencies and contradictions are created by the relatively independent development of collective thoughts on certain subjects, webs of associations bind together diverse parts of the tradition, not in the form of a logical argument, but by way of resemblances and analogies. In this way a general tone of harmony and integration is created, which as an intuitive impression in everyday life is perhaps more important in making beliefs and practices persuasive than increased logical consistence would have been. Here the world of sensory experience and bodily memory<sup>9</sup> creates in the individual a profound and intuitive personal involvement; it situates beliefs and practices in the unique configuration of experiences and sentiments that has been created during a person’s life.

### *Overview*

The organisation of the study is as follows: Chapter Two points out features of social organisation that connect with notions of distribution of vital force, with which we will later be concerned. Chapter

Three outlines basic conceptions of the human body and vitality. Chapter Four focuses on the ideal of sharing, the voluntary offering on the part of those who have plenty to those who suffer from scarcity, in the contexts of vital force. Donations of items of food supposed to stimulate the secretion of mother's milk or to bring vital powers to those weak from illness, are discussed, as are offerings of food to members of a household that recently has suffered a death. We will also consider beliefs and practices, in which a supposed seizure of mother's milk is correlated with instances of unequal dividing of food in a shared meal.

Having thus gained insight into the importance of sharing in relation to distribution of vital force, we are ready in Chapter Five to discuss a number of beliefs and practices relying on a notion of appropriation of vital force. Those who suffer a scarcity are attributed an involuntary power of extracting what they desire from those who have plenty but fail to voluntarily share. I will argue that beliefs in 'thefts' of mother's milk, in the evil eye, in the power of nursing infants to cause the death of other children, in the harmful influence of menstruating or pregnant women, as well as of the dead in some particular contexts, all relate to this notion.

In Chapter Six we turn to a consideration of ideas of wilful seizure of vitality: the activity of evil, blood-sucking witches. This subject requires a discussion of the dualistic worldview of Roman Catholicism, which also serves as an introduction to the following argument. The topic of Chapter Seven is grace-giving saints, who are the structural opposites of evil witches: while the latter ruthlessly take, the former generously give. Notions in which grace is connected with human bodily vitality are central to the discussion. I shall argue that the common assumption, among anthropological students of Mediterranean Catholicism, of the relation between believer and saint as being one of exchange, is only partially relevant. The relation is far more complex, including ideas of the free gift and self-sacrifice.

Chapter Eight continues the exploration of the cult of saints, now with an emphasis on the relation between grace and creative forces of nature. I also consider the yearly re-enactment of the Passion of Christ in the light of that association. Hence, Chapters Four through Eight all concern notions of distribution of vital force: by means of sharing, involuntary appropriation, wilful seizure, altruistic giving and sacrifice.

In Chapters Nine and Ten, the focus of attention is shifted from notions concerning vital force to notions of life in a more existential sense. This shift from *vitalità* to *vita* implies that ideas of collective

family immortality, rather than individual well-being and survival, come into focus. The first of these two chapters deals with the construction, inspired by a vision of an eternal family, of transcendent beings out of mortal, transient humans. The triad of body, soul and mourners, in death practices, is viewed from this perspective. The notion of family as an entity ideally persisting in eternity is also fundamental to the beliefs and practices discussed in the following chapter. These, however, reveal an idea of another way of achieving family transcendence. The family renews itself cyclically; a potential for life — a 'seed' of life — is handed over from the passing to the emerging generation. Finally, in the concluding chapter, I summarise and discuss the main findings of the study.

## TWO

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# FEATURES OF SOCIAL ORGANISATION

It is beyond the scope of this inquiry to give a comprehensive account of traditional South Italian society and the considerable diversity that existed and continues to exist among different areas of the South. What follows is a brief sketch of the southern social landscape – an account which draws on the work of historians, agrarian economists, sociologists and social anthropologists – delineated with the intention to outline the principal features of the social environment in which the notions of life and death were situated.<sup>1</sup>

### *Modern History and Economic Changes*

The feudal system of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies (the state that encompassed roughly the regions of present-day Southern Italy) survived longer than in most other parts of Europe. Its abolishment came about as a result of foreign intervention: in continental Southern Italy during the decade of French rule between 1806 and 1815 and in Sicily in 1812 by the pressure of the British who protected the island from the French forces.

In feudal times, few peasants owned land. Most of the land suited for agriculture or pasture was the inalienable property of nobles or ecclesiastical bodies, or was under communal ownership. The peasants worked on domains of the feudal aristocrats or the Church, to which they also had limited rights of use, and they cultivated small and scattered plots of land on precarious terms of tenancy. They were allowed to pasture their animals on communal land, where they also collected wood and wild fruits. Few peasants lived in permanent settlements on the land they worked; instead they dwelled in villages or towns. A vast majority of communes were subject to baronial jurisdiction, although the non-aristocratic population was represented in the *università*, the local feudal council.

The effects of the land reforms of the early nineteenth century were far-reaching.<sup>2</sup> Parts of the feudal holdings were given as free property to the barons, while other tracts were handed over to the communes as public land, meant to be assigned to landless peasants.

Church land was expropriated and sold on auction. For some noble families who had become indebted and relatively impoverished, the possibility to sell off land came as a relief, enabling them to convert land into much needed capital. For others who were wealthier, the free commerce in land gave them the opportunity to buy more land, and the abolishment of feudalism actually led, in an early phase, to an increase in the amount of land owned as private property by aristocrats.<sup>3</sup> Large areas of former aristocratic and church lands were bought by the rural bourgeoisie — that is, former administrators of the feudal lords, tax collectors, money lenders, lawyers, public officers and successful merchants, as well as fortunate, enterprising and competent tenants and shepherds — people who saw land as a secure investment which also brought prestige. The communal lands became the subject of a long and intense struggle between the communes, peasants, barons and bourgeoisie, and it was most often members of the latter class that succeeded in getting hold of the land. The effect of land reforms was essentially that the poor peasants remained nearly as landless as ever, that many of the noble families, especially those who succeeded in developing their agricultural enterprises, continued to own large estates, and that increasingly large areas of land came under the ownership of a bourgeoisie that persistently and successfully strove to expand the area of their landholdings while improving agriculture.

A significant step in this expansion was taken in the two decades that followed the unification of Italy, when the new state confiscated and sold off over a million hectares of communal land and a similar amount of land that had remained in the hands of religious congregations and ecclesiastical bodies.<sup>4</sup> Since no adequate credits were offered, most of this land ended up not, as many had hoped, in the hands of peasants, but was bought by existing landowners. In general, the agriculture of Southern Italy became more effective. An example of this is the establishment, on the better soils in the interior and on areas of the coast that were unsuitable for intensive cultivation, of more than 10 000 primitive but rational farms (the so called *masserie*), equipped with buildings, animals and farm machinery. In the coastal zones intensive cultivation — mostly in the form of vineyards, olive plantations and almond or citrus groves — was greatly improved, principally in the period from 1860 to 1880. In these two areas of rapid agricultural development, the peasants increasingly became day labourers, and their living conditions improved. However, in the mountainous areas and the areas in the interior with poor soils, arable land was in most parts rented in small plots to peasants

in precarious contracts of tenancy and sharecropping. The rapid growth of the population intensified competition between peasants for land and led to the cultivation of poor soils that were best suited for pasture. The living conditions among these peasants remained as poor as ever.

This first phase of the post-feudal agrarian transformation of Southern Italy started to lose impetus about 1880, when a new trend emerged: the fragmentation of landholdings and the concomitant increase in peasant ownership of land. This trend was intensified from about 1915 up to the establishment of the fascist regime and accelerated again after World War II.

Among the landowners, the law of partible and equal inheritance meant, since the rate of birth was significantly greater than the rate of mortality, that land was progressively divided up among heirs. Furthermore, an agrarian crisis, in part created by the policy of protectionistic trade adopted by the Italian state in 1878 and leading to the war of trade with France in 1888, led to diminishing profits for many landowners, especially those who relied on the production of wine. The splitting up of landed estates through inheritance together with lower profits made many holdings simply too small to provide a satisfactory income; numerous owners sold or rented out their land.

These transactions were stimulated by chiefly two other factors. First was a disinterest in agriculture among many of the owners of land, who were of the third descending generation from those who had acquired and developed these holdings in the first phase of the agricultural transformation. Among the elder generation were many expert agriculturalists who took a personal interest in farming and managed the daily chores of their enterprises themselves. However, a great many of their descendants, among whom higher education was common, were more inclined to make a professional career in other sectors, foremost in the bureaucracy. They therefore sold land or became absentee owners.

Second, an increasing demand for land resulted in rising prices. This demand was related to the rapid growth of the population, which occurred despite large emigration. Continental Southern Italy had a population of 6.9 million in 1871, which had increased to 10.1 million by 1936.<sup>5</sup> Between 1800 and 1900, the population of Sicily increased from 1.5 to 3.5 million; by 1950, it had reached 4.5 million.<sup>6</sup> In the virtual absence of industrial development in the South,<sup>7</sup> many wished to invest in land:

<sup>5</sup>Members of the growing small bourgeoisie – every lawyer, doctor, merchant, public official or *carabiniere* – felt that by buying some piece of land, they

stabilized their economic condition and, in any case, gained higher social status. There is no need to add that these new landowners, most of whom had their main activity away from the land, were by far more *rentier*-minded and detached from agriculture than the old ones.<sup>8</sup>

Over time an increasing number of peasants managed to buy themselves a small lot of land. One important factor behind this was emigration. The opportunity to leave the misery of the South for better prospects in Northern Italy or in Western European and transoceanic countries led to massive emigration, beginning in about 1880. In the first 15 years of the 20th century, about four million Southern Italians left their land, foremost for the United States;<sup>9</sup> from the end of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th century some nine million South Italians emigrated.<sup>10</sup> Over the period 1902-1913, 33.8% of the population of Abruzzi emigrated to transoceanic countries; the corresponding figures for Calabria, Basilicata and Sicily were 36.8%, 34% and 26.4%, respectively.<sup>11</sup>

The proportion of able-bodied, unskilled men among emigrants was larger than in the population at large. At times, when emigration was particularly great, and led to a reduction of the number of workers in a certain geographic area, it had the effect of favouring the conditions of those who remained. The wages for day-labour could actually increase owing to the shortage of labourers, and landowners could reluctantly be forced to sign sharecropping contracts that were more favourable for the tenants than they had been before. In areas where the situation was the reverse, where demographic expansion was greater than emigration, the peasants became more and more involved in competition between each other. A common strategy for gaining a secure income was to become a direct cultivator by way of contracts of tenancy or share-cropping, rather than being one of many day-labourers for which work was scarce. These attempts were facilitated by the increasing number of landowners who, for reasons outlined above, wished or were forced to be absent from their domains. As direct cultivators, rather than day-labourers, these peasants were in a better position to stabilise their economy and later buy small pieces of land. It was not only savings earned in Italy that allowed peasants to buy land, however. Many emigrants were able to send substantial sums of money to their families back in Italy, and many returned with a handsome capital; in the 50 years that followed the turn of the century, about four million South Italian emigrants returned.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, since the 1930s, the Italian government has provided peasants with both capital and incentive to acquire small farms.



The effect of this second phase of agricultural transformation was that most land, with the exception of the large estates on the plains of Puglia and in Western and Interior Sicily, was divided into a patchwork of properties of very small to medium sizes. Many of the former were cultivated with ancient and inefficient methods; the soil was broken with a scratch plough or by hoeing.<sup>13</sup> In the 1950s there were 22.6 private properties per 100 inhabitants in Southern Italy (excluding properties of less than 1/2 hectares; the figure for Central Italy was 5.4).<sup>14</sup> Many of the landholdings were so small that they did not permit a family to live on agriculture alone, even if several separate fields were owned. Due to the varying abilities and needs of the household — typically established neolocally and consisting of a single nuclear family — at different times of its existence in accordance with its developmental cycle, land was frequently bought and sold, or was leased, rented or sharecropped on a wide variety of terms.<sup>15</sup> Another factor that stimulated the commerce in small plots of land was the prestige attributed to land-ownership — numerous transactions in land were essentially transactions in prestige.<sup>16</sup> The extensive commerce in land meant that not only was land fragmented, but the plots of land owned by a household were typically also scattered and could be located far from each other. The system of land ownership in Southern Italy has been characterized as perhaps the most complicated and confused in the Western world.<sup>17</sup>

Small scale and fragmentation was characteristic also of other economic sectors. The industrial units were typically small workshops operated as family businesses with the assistance of a few workers recruited among kin and friends.<sup>18</sup> The service sector was even more atomistic, crowded with individuals operating shops, stalls, barber shops, tailor shops, lotteries and so on, often as a part-time activity beside farming. There was a strong reluctance to seek partnership, and the ideal was to run a business on one's own. Under-employment as a result of over-establishment and the absence of an adequate demand for services was the rule.

This state of affairs led to a fragmentation of economic activities of the individual and the household. In a society in which land was scarce and usually poor, and over-population and under-employment were common, life was often a struggle to make ends meet by a viable *combinazione* of activities, mixing agricultural work with petty commerce, day-labour, part-time wage labour and what other opportunities that were at hand to earn a few lire. John Davis reports on Pisticci in Basilicata: 'Pisticcesi say that life is a struggle. There was no one at

Caporotondo who could afford to allow himself to be carried along passive on the ebb and flow of his domestic cycle.<sup>19</sup>

Despite the economic improvements of the 20th century, many South Italians continued to live in deep poverty until a few decades ago. F. G. Friedmann wrote in the early 1950s that: '...Calabria and Lucania still exhibit the most shocking poverty... The peasant's home is still a hovel which he shares with his wife and a litter of children, and a mule is still his only possession.'<sup>20</sup> Descriptions of the poverty in the South are found in both the work of social scientists<sup>21</sup> as well as a number of novels, among which Carlo Levi's *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* and Enzo Silone's *Fontamara* are perhaps the most wellknown. The typical diet of peasants and the poor was based on bread, complemented with legumes and vegetables; meat was rarely eaten. During times of economic crisis and crop failure, many families suffered from hunger. Many houses were poor and overcrowded — the typical peasant family lived in a house with only one room — and sanitary arrangements were often lacking.<sup>22</sup> Poor diet and poor housing conditions contributed to bad health; tuberculosis and other respiratory diseases were widespread, and malaria was brought under control only in the 1940s. At the time of the unification of Italy, 87% of the population in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies did not know how to read and write, meaning that illiteracy was close to 100% in many parts of the South.<sup>23</sup> Still in the mid-1950s, illiteracy was high: in the community in Basilicata studied by Edward Banfield, one-third of the men and two-thirds of the women could not read or write.<sup>24</sup>

### *The Communities*

Most South Italians lived in densely populated towns, and this holds true also for the majority of the population who subsisted on agriculture.<sup>25</sup> Isolated farmhouses in the countryside were generally few and were mostly found in the littoral areas, in Western Sicily and in the areas bordering Central Italy.<sup>26</sup> From his town, which might range in population from perhaps a few hundred inhabitants to several tens of thousands, the peasant travelled to the scattered fields that he cultivated himself or where he was offered work; the trip to the fields and back could take him several hours each day. As noted, in previous times, many communities were rather isolated from their surrounding world, and there was a strong sense of local patriotism. The *campanilismo* (local patriotism) of the South, however, has been described not so much as an expression of pride in one's own village or town as a depreciation of other communities.<sup>27</sup> Co-operation between

communities was usually rare, and there was, with the exception of the upper social strata, little intermarriage between towns.<sup>28</sup> Joint activities on a community level were infrequent. These were often limited to the celebration of religious feasts, among which the most important was typically that of the patron saint, a focal symbol of community identity.

Some communities were populated by two distinct groups of people with occupational differences – such as fishing people and peasants, artisans and farmers, or miners and non-miners – who lived in separate areas of the town and each forming its own parish, honouring different patron saints. Usually there was perpetual conflict between these groups. The parishes were essentially endogamous, and the inhabitants of each considered themselves as better than those of the other and deprecated them by saying, for example, that they were all thieves and the women were all whores.<sup>29</sup> As is vividly described by Giovanni Verga in his famous short story *Guerra di santi* ('The War of the Saints'), the celebration of a parish saint could be an occasion when this hostility came to the fore and erupted into open violence. In larger towns with a more mixed population, there could be numerous parishes honouring their own patron saints, but the antagonism between these seems to have been less pronounced. The parishes did not organise themselves as separate communities in conflict, but expressed their belonging to a single community by all celebrating the same town patron beside their own parish patrons.

Living in a town, even a small one, had a strong positive value in contrast to staying on the countryside. It was generally held that in town lived people who were civilised, while those living on the countryside were crude, stupid and uncivilised.<sup>30</sup> This might seem a bit paradoxical, since peasants living on the countryside were generally better off than those living in the townships.

Because of variations in the size of populations and in the character of the local economies, in addition to fluctuations over time in the period with which we are concerned, it is difficult to draw a typical picture of social stratification in the local communities. However, a general trend can be observed, that affected particular communities to varying degrees. In the beginning of this period, distinct and endogamous social strata were recognised in the communities – for instance, wealthy landowners, an intermediate class of merchants and artisans, and peasants.<sup>31</sup> The peasant stratum was relatively homogeneous, and social mobility was low. At the end of the era, social stratification had become less distinct, social mobility was greater and the

peasant stratum had decreased in homogeneity and become much more internally diversified. This development is, of course, an effect of the agricultural and economic transformation outlined above. Manlio Rossi-Doria observes:

'Before 1880 peasants ... were in similar conditions, so that their class as a whole had a remarkable homogeneity. After 1880, the growing subdivision of bourgeois property and the gradual change of landowners into *rentiers* opened the road to change for individual peasants. More and more day laborers became tenants, sharecroppers, or other kinds of *coloni*. Their earnings and savings as direct cultivators permitted many of them to buy a piece of land, to build a house, and to have some animals. But in doing so, each one became different from the other. They became more and more involved in the competition for a job and for more and better land to cultivate, adhering less and less to class solidarity and community participation as they became more exclusively interested in personal or family progress.'<sup>32</sup>

A similar diversification also affected other social strata. Land ownership ceased to be of crucial social significance when persons of all social strata became owners of land, a position that brought prestige to people over a continuous scale depending on the relative size and quality of the holdings. The distinction between peasants and the intermediate social stratum became blurred in a process in which more and more peasants became rather well-to-do. Sydel Silverman sums up:

'... [P]ersons are ranked along a continuous range. Status is not determined by membership in discrete categories: a "landlord" might be just a slightly better-off peasant, a "peasant" is often a part-time nonagricultural worker, agriculturalists are also townsmen, and so on. In this situation, there can be no sharp boundaries between economic and social groupings. An individual's rank is decided by his own particular combination of arrangements at any given time — the quantity of land owned, the occupations practised, and other attributes.'<sup>33</sup>

In this situation, a basic social distinction emerged from the consideration of whether or not a man had to perform manual work, since this was an inspeetable and indisputable indication of relative wealth.<sup>34</sup> Physical labour, especially in agriculture, was generally despised and considered degrading; this view was also shared by most of those who had to work the earth themselves, while total freedom from work — to live in leisure with a high income from landholdings or from some other enterprise, the daily matters of which were cared for by employees — carried high prestige.<sup>35</sup> The privileged position of not having to perform manual labour could be expressed by allowing the fingernail of the little finger to grow ostentatiously long, by spending the days lounging in public spaces

dressed in expensive suits and by adopting a relaxed and slow-paced mode of walking, gesticulating and talking which contrasted sharply with the goal-oriented and excited bodily movements and way of speaking associated with manual labour.<sup>36</sup> It should be emphasised, however, that the prestige associated with idleness did not imply that laziness was a virtue; on the contrary, this character trait was despised among those who had to work since it impeded a man in to provide well for his family, and a hardworking man gained a certain prestige among his peers through his industriousness.

### *Household, Family and Kinship*

The South Italian household – which, in those areas where large estates were absent, was the basic unit of production – has long consisted predominantly of a nuclear family, although households consisting of more complex families (stem, extended or joint) have been quite common in certain areas.<sup>37</sup> There was a positive correlation between household wealth and household complexity.<sup>38</sup> It has been argued that, under certain economic circumstances, this correlation is caused by a more advantageous balance between expenses and income for complex families, the members of which could co-operate in agricultural or artisan work and avoid the fragmentation of family patrimony through inheritance.<sup>39</sup> However, this appears not to be the case under certain other economic circumstances, where instead the correlation has been seen as following from the circumstance that greater wealth allowed a household core to realise ideals of kinship solidarity by welcoming poor and unable relatives.<sup>40</sup> As mentioned, the household of a nuclear family was established neolocally, and the marriage age was most often low, especially for girls.<sup>41</sup>

In the household there prevailed an ideology of strong solidarity. In a society characterised by weakness of formal social organisation, the sense of belonging that it inspired in the individual was unparalleled by other institutions. It has been observed that ‘an adult hardly may be said to have an individuality apart from the family: he exists not as “ego” but as “parent”,<sup>42</sup> and that ‘children were perceived as organic parts of *la famiglia* rather than as persons’.<sup>43</sup>

The earnings of the able-bodied members of the household were pooled in a common economy to cover regular expenses and finance long-term projects, such as buying new land or educating a son. Under the formal autocratic leadership of the father, its members were expected to shed their individual interests and sacrifice themselves for the common good of the family. In practice, however, the

mother often had considerable influence over important family matters, such as the household economy and the choice of marriage partners for the children. The family has been described as 'father-dominated, but mother-centred'.<sup>44</sup> Some sources, however, describe how the ideology of family concord was under severe pressure by forces that tended to fragment the nuclear family. Typically this seems to have been the case in settings characterized by deep poverty and an economy of wage labour, and to have entailed conflicts between the individual interests of adult children (especially sons) and the interests of the other members of the family.<sup>45</sup>

Relatives belonging to different households were also ideally supposed to feel togetherness and solidarity. An often used metaphor for this trans-household belonging, used also for the attachment between household members, was that of the blood relationship. Individuals with a common ancestor are, as in English, called *consanguini* ('consanguines'); a father may call his son *sangue del proprio sangue* ('blood of the own blood'), while members of the family are said to *essere dello stesso sangue* ('be of the same blood'); *la voce del sangue* ('the voice of the blood') is an expression that refers to a supposed instinct that predisposes a person to recognise and love his relatives, and the expression *il sangue non può divenire acqua* ('blood must not become water') is used when speaking of relatives who, although they quarrel among themselves, nevertheless unite to assist and defend each other in times of need. Hence family belonging is expressed in biological terms; although individuals have separate bodies, they share the same vital essence of blood, they are part of a family depicted as an organic entity.

The notion of *parenti* ('relatives') could, however, be rather vague. Generally this term denoted bilaterally related consanguines and affines, but there was often a patrilineal bias expressing a stronger sense of belonging with blood relatives of the male line, brought forward also by the inheritance of the surname from the father. We find considerable variation between communities as to the genealogical distance within which persons were considered as relatives, as well as to the classification of kin.<sup>46</sup> The general vagueness concerning the spans of kinship permitted a certain contextuality in deciding whether or not a person was a relative; a man could try to invoke notions of kin solidarity in order to gain assistance from a distant relative and, conversely, a person could choose to consider a rather close relative as distant in order to avoid kinship obligations.<sup>47</sup>

Ideally, relatives should help one another, and it was common to ask one's kin for help in specific matters, such as in borrowing money

or providing recommendations for employment. It is clear, however, that many times such help, especially when it entailed considerable effort for the household concerned, was denied, and we find proverbs expressing the burden felt to follow from kinship obligations.<sup>48</sup> In the case of baptisms, weddings and funerals, all relatives were supposed to be invited; a refusal to invite or to participate when invited was understood as a serious break of kinship solidarity.

In some areas, patrilaterally related families tended to live close to each other in neighbourhoods. This was a result of the parental family's practice of providing houses for sons when they married and of a preference for acquiring or building these houses close to the parental home, which was inherited by the youngest son.<sup>49</sup> In other areas, matrilateral kin clustered in a similar way, since daughters were instead provided with houses as inheritance or as marriage endowment, as an advance inheritance.<sup>50</sup> In both cases, the related families formed a closely knit neighbourhood characterized by kinship solidarity.

Each household was assigned by the members of the neighbourhood or the community a specific degree of honour, about which there was general agreement. Principally, a household achieved honour through the capacity of its adult members to conform to ideal family roles.<sup>51</sup> Significant changes in the household's honour affected the honour of close relatives belonging to other households. Therefore, in the case of grave dishonour in one household, relatives could apply pressure to the adult male household members to act to restore their honour or could feel forced to act themselves. The most common type of grave dishonour for a family was illicit sexual access by another man to a daughter or to the wife; this man committed an *offesa di sangue* ('offence to the blood'). In the case of an unfaithful wife, the offence stained the family's honour and defiled its blood so gravely that honour and purity of blood could be restored only, at least in theory, through a washing in blood by killing the offender or the wife or both — it was said that *sangue lava sangue* ('blood washes blood').<sup>52</sup> In the case of the pre-marital relation of a daughter, an acceptable alternative to violent retaliation was to settle the matter through marriage between the man and the girl.

The vendetta and the feud were institutions which essentially concerned honour. The vendetta was often preceded by a minor conflict that had developed into a series of reciprocal and increasingly grave acts of insult, theft, destruction of property and physical assault, in which the original reason for discord became of lesser and lesser importance. Instead the honour and reputation of the men involved

and of their families became more and more important and, in the end, it was this that was at stake. A man lost honour if he was unable to defend his property and family interests against others and a reputation of being brave and ready to retaliate had a significant strategic value.<sup>53</sup> In some communities, such an escalating conflict was called a *vendetta*, even if homicide was not the final outcome.<sup>54</sup> The ultimate aggression was reached when one of the families sought vengeance in blood and killed a member of the opposing family. The *vendetta* mobilized relatives belonging to different households into common action. Especially in Sicily, groups of kinsmen could unite against other groups in feuds, involving hostile actions and reciprocal killings, that could continue over many decades and sometimes came to an end only with the extinction of one of the parties.<sup>55</sup>

### *Relations with Non-Relatives*

A description by Sydel Silverman (1968: 15) of extra-kin relations, quite typical of those found in the social scientific literature on Southern Italy,<sup>56</sup> depicts communities as characterized by:

'... the prevalence and isolation of the nuclear family, the absence of functioning groups beyond the family, the instability of political alignments, the rarity of local formal associations, and the weakness of the community entity ... the mistrust of persons outside the immediate family, the sceptical attitude toward cooperation, the absence of a concept of "common good", the unwillingness to identify oneself with either a "public interest" or a special-group interest.'

Looking in more detail at this common rendering of relations with non-relatives, and with a starting point in the weakness of local formal associations, it is clear that trade unions and co-operatives have long been less numerous and also weaker than in most other parts of Italy.<sup>57</sup> Political allegiances have tended to centre around local influential men concerned primarily with local issues, who could shift their affiliation from one political party to another overnight when it suited their own interests. These politicians gained a following through personal influence and promises of satisfying the interests of individuals rather than groups. Hence politics was mainly non-ideological, and neighbouring communities with similar socio-economic characteristics could show enormous variation in the voting for different political parties.<sup>58</sup> As mentioned earlier, community-wide activities were typically limited to the celebration of the patron saint and certain other religious feasts.



While in this way formal associations are described as being few and weak, social relations outside the household and the kin are often described as having consisted to a great extent of what George Foster (1961) has called 'dyadic contracts', that is, an informal relation between a pair of individuals, sustained by a series of balanced exchanges of material goods, physical assistance (such as exchange of days of work) and other forms of favours. These relations were talked about as being based on friendship: 'when people exchange favours voluntarily, they call each other "friend"'.<sup>59</sup> Two persons who considered each other 'friends' could be partners in a specific or more general enterprise; they might not necessarily feel personal affection but instead have a certain trust in each other. Hence friendship has been described, using Eric Wolf's (1966a: 10f) distinction, as 'instrumental' rather than 'emotional'.<sup>60</sup> Trustworthy friends were seen as rare and worth 'more than a treasure', but false friends were said to be 'worse than an enemy'.<sup>61</sup>

Besides 'trust', a key value in these social relationships was respect for the other party – he should be treated with courtesy and not be forced to do things, and intrusion should not be made into his private matters. The respect for the integrity and privacy of others also extended to members of the community more generally. In the presence of intriguing officials, there was a strong reluctance to reveal information about others; not so much, it seems, for reasons of solidarity, but because of respect for the right of other households to manage their own affairs in whatever way they wished as long as it was not to the immediate detriment of one's own household. In a Calabrese village, the saying 'mind your own business' was referred to as the 'eleventh commandment'.<sup>62</sup> The subjective aspect of this ideology was that of self-reliance; a strong positive value was attached to the ability of a man to manage his own business and provide well for his household without having to depend on others.

'Dyadic contracts' could be established between persons of unequal social standing, who assumed the roles of 'patron' and 'client'. The 'patron' was supposed to give his 'client' advantages by using his influence among the higher strata of society, while the 'client' was expected to speak well of his 'patron', supply him with information on local events and be ready to assist him in undertakings he considered below his dignity. Both types of 'dyadic contracts' were conditional – if one of the parties failed to reciprocate, the relation was terminated.

Existing dyadic relations could be strengthened into a formal and lasting connection by means of *comparatico* (godparenthood), and new

relations could also be established in this way. This implied that the relationship was extended to concern two families. The godparents were selected among social equals or superiors, and the so established fictitious kinship, prescribed by the Church, could not be broken. The families united by *comparatico* were not to quarrel with each other and were supposed to show mutual respect and help. Generally, this seems to have been observed.<sup>63</sup>

Individuals could also enter into formalized friendships; the term *comparatico* denotes both the spiritual relation created by baptism and a ceremonially declared friendship.<sup>64</sup> In the institutionalized friendship, the two persons were to be loyal to each other for the rest of their lives. The ceremony in which this kind of *comparatico* was declared could take numerous forms, and in some of these blood was mingled. To declare a *comparatico di sangue*, or a *patto di sangue* (blood pact), each person drew a little of his blood and the drops were mixed.<sup>65</sup> Hence the notion of shared blood, which was of importance in the concept of relatives, also entered into these relations of mutual solidarity.<sup>66</sup>

Relationships outside the household and kin group had a slightly different character among the higher social strata than among peasants and artisans. The need to establish contacts, valuable for reasons of commerce and career, made distant relatives more important and promoted the establishment of dyadic 'friendship' between men. An individual could thus establish an extensive network of relatives and 'friends', amongst whom could be found equals in social standing as well as persons both beneath and above his own position. Through all these connections, he could have access to an even more extensive set of potential contacts.<sup>67</sup> Among these classes, men were frequently members of local 'clubs', which had few other functions than to provide their membership with occasions to maintain their ties of 'friendship' and to establish new ones; essentially these clubs had only one express ideology: to hail the blessing of having trustworthy friends.<sup>68</sup> In general, the prevalence of dyadic relations can be seen as a response to the household being the basic unit of production in large areas of Southern Italy. Persons representing households engage in relations that essentially concern the practical matters entailed in running the 'business' of a household.

A salient theme in the literature is what has been called the 'mentality of mutual distrust'.<sup>69</sup> This expression refers to a cluster of ideas that concerns the rivalry, deceit and selfishness that was presumed to characterize, or at least to be latently present in, extra-familial ties, as opposed to the ideal harmony, unselfishness and honesty that was

supposed to exist between relatives, especially those of the nuclear family. We are informed that it was assumed that people selfishly minded their own business without much concern for others, and that they were prone to cheat and steal whenever they had an opportunity to do so. Everyone should watch out carefully so as not to be cheated by others. Hence the sayings: 'a man cannot even turn his back on his own shadow',<sup>70</sup> and 'easy access makes a thief out of anyone'.<sup>71</sup> Social relations have been described as 'carefully calculated and manipulated, rarely relaxed'<sup>72</sup> Distrust of others is an aspect of Edward Banfield's (1958: 85) much discussed notion of 'amoral familism', which stems from his hypothesis that each individual follows the rule: 'maximize the material, short-run advantage of the nuclear family; assume that all others will do likewise'. The reciprocity of doubt has been seen to be a more or less explicit consequence of the competition among peasants and the middle class caused by the scarcity of land and job opportunities, and the overcrowding of enterprises in the service sector.<sup>73</sup>

The skill to be cunning and shrewd, to be *furbo*, was seen as a most valuable quality of a person; *furberia* was the chief tactical device by which one person could favour his own interests to the detriment of another person. N. T. Colclough (1971: 224) writes:

'A man is *furbo* if he succeeds in manipulating the mutual rights and obligations of a particular social relationship in his own favour. The institution of friendship is often used for this purpose. A man makes a series of short-lived friendships with the intention of exploiting the rights and privileges of the relationship without giving anything in return. If he succeeds he gains the reputation of being *furbo*.

The one who easily was cheated and tricked by others was ridiculed as *fesso* ('soft-witted') and received no sympathy since he had no one but himself to blame. More politely he could be called *troppo buono* ('too good') or *tre volte buono* ('three times good').<sup>74</sup>

Having reviewed some features of social organisation that have been regarded as quite typical of large tracts of Southern Italy, let us now turn to some features which have often been overlooked in the anglophone literature and which raise serious doubts as to the more general validity of the theory of 'amoral familism' and similar overly simplified ways of construing South Italian social life.

Peasants commonly volunteered as members of various local organisations concerned with religious matters, such as burial brotherhoods and committees for the organisation of religious feasts. At least in older times, such organisations were both quite numerous and had many members.<sup>75</sup> Parish churches could also be built with co-

operative efforts, in which peasants and more well-to-do citizens contributed labour, material and capital.

In the sociological and anthropological literature, there are few references to the fact, thoroughly documented in the Italian folkloristic sources, that South Italians commonly gave away money and food as donations and alms; one of the few notes to this effect is related by Gower Chapman (1973: 195), who states that 'generosity in the giving of alms' was one of the most important virtues in the Sicilian community she studied in the late 1920s. Members of religious committees for the arrangement of saints' feast were able to collect substantial sums of money for financing the celebrations.<sup>76</sup> In older times, the poor of South Italian communities, as well as itinerant beggars, subsisted primarily on alms; most households, except those who were extremely poor themselves, seem to have given alms of food regularly. To help those who were unfortunate by sharing with them one's own assets was seen as a Christian duty. Such acts of sharing should be unselfish, and one should not ask for anything in return; when alms were given to the poor, there was indeed no return, except for a certain prestige and the immaterial gain of religious merit. Furthermore, travellers and bona fide visitors to the community were typically treated with great hospitality, even if it was evident that they would not have the opportunity to reciprocate. Such hospitality was embedded in a religiously tinted ideology that it was a duty, for those who were able to do so, to assist those who were in need. It should be pointed out that South Italians, although there was a wide-spread anti-clerical discourse, perceived themselves as good Christians — the word *cristiano* was generally used when speaking of persons. Gower Chapman (1973: 28) writes: 'To be human is to be a Christian, and *cristianu* is the term most frequently heard when referring to a human being, as opposed to one of the lower animals.'

Notions of assistance and sharing were also strong in relations between neighbours.<sup>77</sup> It was common to borrow small sums of money, as well as household and other utensils. The women of the neighbourhood helped each other with the tending of children, with laborious domestic tasks and when extraordinary events, such as a birth or a serious illness of a household member, called for the assistance of others. Gifts of food were exchanged, as were customary dishes prepared at certain feast-days of the year. The appreciation of neighbours was the subject of proverbs that compared neighbours to close relatives.<sup>78</sup> Two Italian ethnographers describe relations between neighbours as follows:

'The persons of the neighbourhood are esteemed as though they were relatives, and at times also more than that... The neighbours help each other; in moments of need, they hasten to help at every lament and every cry... Among the people of the neighbourhood, there is a continuous exchange of favours and courtesies, of water, of salt, of bread, of utensils, and [it is said]: "with the table cloth that goes and comes, friendship is conserved". On the contrary, many times the negation or refusal of a small service is the cause of resentment, of bitterness that leads all the way to the quarrel'<sup>79</sup>

'... [B]eing neighbours does not necessarily imply friendship. It may be limited to simple formalities, these being either bilateral or unilateral: exchanges of fire, water, matches, yeast, domestic and agricultural utensils, traditional foods and dishes, gifts of fruit or pig's meat etcetera. From this formality may grow true friendship which can lead to spiritual kinship (*comparato*) as well as to actual kinship (marriages). The one who does not submit to such rules, who asks without giving something or brings trouble to the one who gives, automatically places himself outside of the neighbourhood. They say of them: "It's people who make no-one happy"...'<sup>80</sup>

Hence, while relations between neighbours sometimes involved balanced but delayed reciprocity, other relations can more aptly be said to have been characterized by a sharing of scarce assets, that is, by generalized reciprocity.<sup>81</sup> In generalized reciprocity the return is neither expected to occur within a certain time nor to be strictly equivalent in value. There is an expectation of reciprocity, but it is indefinite and diffuse. Reciprocation may take place when it is possible or convenient for the one who has received and may be urged should the donor himself experience acute need. Failure to reciprocate within a specific interval of time does not mean that the one who has given may not give more. In the long run, however, the assistance on behalf of one party is expected to balance that of the other party. As Evans-Pritchard (1969:85) remarked about the Nuer, the ideology of sharing can be seen as a response to scarcity of food and other resources crucial to survival:

'This habit of share and share alike is easily understandable in a community where every one is likely to find himself in difficulties from time to time, for it is scarcity and not sufficiency that makes people generous, since everybody is thereby ensured against hunger. He who is in need to-day receives help from him who may be in like need to-morrow.'

This view of relations between neighbours as often characterized by generalized reciprocity fits in well with the frequent reports of a social discourse stressing egalitarianism among South Italian peasants, stating that all were equals and no person was worth more than any other.<sup>82</sup> The idea of a basic equality is crucial to generalized reciprocity. If a person has a need and is helped by another, then the

other ought, in the long run, to be able to reciprocate. This can take place only if the persons are perceived to be roughly equal in wealth and resources, although one is at times more fortunate than the other.

One aspect of the egalitarian ethos was the sensitiveness to *superbia*, that is, behaviour indicating that someone considered himself to be of higher social rank than he actually was according to the neighbourhood or community consensus. Such manifestations of inappropriate superiority were criticised and ridiculed.<sup>83</sup> The strong disapproval of everything that could be interpreted as *superbia* reified the picture of an egalitarian peasantry in settings where the actual economic circumstances worked towards a differentiation among households in terms of assets.

### *Types of Reciprocities*

Marshall Sahlins' (1965) typology of three ideal types of reciprocities – generalized, balanced and negative – allows us to speak more abstractly about South Italian social relations. Sahlins' typology outlines the principal logical possibilities for dealing with the distribution of scarce assets.

In the South of Italy, generalized reciprocity characterized relations between kinsmen, especially between those of the nuclear family, and to some extent between pseudo-kin *compadres*. Ideally, all should share and help one another, but there was an expectation that, in the long run, giving and receiving should balance. This is expressed in the nuclear family by the expectation that children should reciprocate – 'pay back' – what they had received from their parents by caring for them when they became old and unfit.<sup>84</sup> Sharing could extend also to neighbours and other members of the community, and in this context the notion of equality is brought to the fore: people are equals since they all depend on one another. The ideological elaboration of generalized reciprocity is the Christian notion of equality between human beings before God, the concord that should characterize interpersonal relations, and the imperative of assisting those who are in need without regard to one's own well-being. Brought into practice situationally, this ideology meant that also persons not belonging to the community, such as itinerant beggars and travellers, were also incorporated into the sphere of sharing. In the case of the occasional visitor who is offered an overwhelming amount of the best of what the house can offer, the household is allowed to momentarily create an impression of itself that complies to the ideal of sharing and hospitality – an ideal that, if brought into

practice on a more regular basis with the community members as recipients, would soon exhaust its resources and assets.<sup>85</sup>

Balanced reciprocity means that each instance of giving or assisting is expected to be met by an equivalent return, either directly or at a delay. This type of reciprocity is characteristic of ordinary commercial transactions, but it may also apply to relations between more distant kin, neighbours, 'friends' and other persons of the community. The ideology accompanying balanced reciprocity in traditional Southern Italy was that of self-reliance. Each household is an independent unit that relates to other households rather informally in ways that are agreed upon in mutual respect for the other party. In practice, the distinction between delayed balanced reciprocity and generalized reciprocity may not be sharp; if the delay is long and if multiple actions flowing in the same direction are agreed upon without direct returns, the relationship begins to look like generalized reciprocity.

Negative reciprocity is, as Sahlins puts it (p. 148), the 'attempt to get something for nothing with impunity...', in which '...the participants confront each other as opposed interests, each looking to maximize utility at the other's expense'. This type of reciprocity is at the core of Banfield's notion of 'amoral familism'. Among its ideological corollaries are the 'mentality of mutual distrust' and the positive value assigned to *furberia*.

The three types of reciprocities can be assumed to have been basic to the conception, organisation and institutionalisation of social relations in South Italian communities. They are made manifest by different individuals favouring one over the other, or each expressed by the same individual in different contexts. Furthermore, notable variation has been documented in the character of social relations and in the discourse and ideology tied to them, between communities in different areas of Southern Italy and also over time in particular communities. Such variations can be seen as resulting from diverse constellations of a number of factors that influence social relations – such as demography, the availability of natural and other resources, the character of the local economy, the impact of market economy and the power of the state or of local political bodies to enforce various regulations. Differences in such constellations could, as has been shown with regard to Calabria,<sup>86</sup> generate significantly diverse socio-cultural patterns even between contemporary communities in the same region.<sup>87</sup>

To conclude, the features of South Italian social organisation of especial importance for the following discussions may be summa-

rised. The family household – whether nuclear or complex – stands out as the fundamental social unit. The family in a broader sense, including relatives living in different households, was also of great importance as a group inspiring a sense of belonging and solidarity in individuals. Religion was an ideological force that extended the notions of solidarity and sharing from the sphere of the family to the world outside of kinship; the patron saint was the symbol of the community, having the capacity to mobilize community members into otherwise rare common action. The type of reciprocity underlying the distribution of assets varied significantly in accordance with Sahlin's typological model of generalized, balanced and negative reciprocity. The factors accounting for this variation are complex, but distance in kinship and the prevailing economic conditions of a community emerge as highly significant.



## THREE

# BODY AND VITAL FORCE

### *Paradigms of Humoural Theory*

In the cultural traditions of Western Europe the most systematic, non-modern attempt to understand the human body and its functions is the humoural theory, fundamental to scholarly medicine from antiquity up to the 19th century. The humoural theory builds upon the thinking of the Greek natural philosopher Empedocles (5th century B.C.). In antiquity it was developed mainly in the Hippocratic writings – a body of texts written by or ascribed to the Greek physician Hippocrates (ca. 460-ca. 377 B.C.) and collected in Alexandria in the third century B.C. into the *Corpus Hippocraticum* – and by the Greek medical scholar Galen (130-ca. 200).<sup>1</sup> The theory combined four basic qualities – hot, dry, wet and cold – into four fundamental elements: air, fire, water and earth. The four elements further corresponded to four constituent humours of the body: blood, yellow bile, phlegm and black bile (see Figure 1). Thus yellow bile and fire were hot and dry, black bile and earth were dry and cold, and so on.

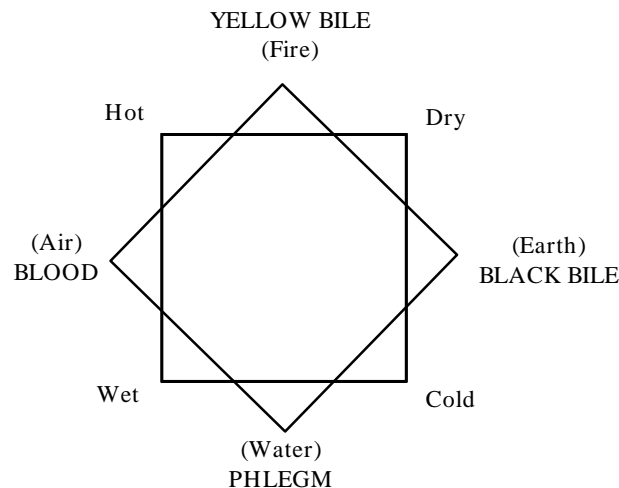


Figure 1. Qualities, elements and humours.

In the healthy organism the four humours were balanced; illness resulted from an upset of the equilibrium. Since the condition of bodily waste products such as urine, vomit and faeces were thought to reveal the humoral state of the organism, a diagnosis could be made by their examination. Therapy consisted of a manipulation of humours. Regimens of diet could restore humoral balance, since also foodstuffs were understood to consist of the four basic elements in varying proportions. For instance, 'hot' foods should be consumed to counteract 'cold' states. Drugs were prescribed, supposed to have effects on the humours of the body. Unwanted and dangerous fluids that had accumulated in the body could be evacuated by purging, vomiting, sweating, blood-letting and blistering.

The humoral theory was integrated, especially during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, with a unitary and associative view of the world and the cosmos. The human body and the universe was seen as consisting of the same fundamental qualities and elements. On the basis of identities in qualities and elements – as well as according to resemblance in form, colour and other outer appearances – far-reaching webs of associations were worked out by scholars of that time, in which minerals, gems, plants, animals, seasons of the year, the heavenly bodies, the houses of the zodiac, states of the human body, its internal organs and so on were all interconnected in the cosmos. Such associations provided the rationale for medical therapies as well as for the 'science' of alchemy.

Folk medicine in Southern Italy was, as in other South European countries,<sup>2</sup> a rather incoherent agglomerate of ideas and practices concerning health, illness and curing.<sup>3</sup> Although it included aetiologies, common sense recommendations, herbal decoctions and cures that according to modern medical science are accurate or efficacious, folk medicine at large was a body of knowledge in which aetiologies and cures based on associative principles of contagion and resemblance were mingled and amalgamated with elements of Hippocratic medicine. In this diversity, however, a simplified version of the old humoral pathology stands out as a coherent medical branch.

The Italian folk medical version of the humoral theory relied on the assumption that corrupted fluids tended to accumulate in the body, while it was less preoccupied with the elaboration of the system of the four humours.<sup>4</sup> It was thought that many ailments were caused by an abnormal condition of the blood: it could be 'bad', 'corrupted', 'too thick', 'too dark', 'too hot', it could 'contain pus' or it could have accumulated in too great amounts in a specific bodily part. These ideas found their main application in blood-letting, which

in older times was a widespread practice performed as a prophylactic measure or with the intention to cure ailments by drawing the corrupted or superfluous blood. Bleeding could be brought about by means of incision, by wet cupping, or by the application of leaches. One could perform the drawing of blood oneself, but it was most common to have it done by the barber. A natural evacuation of blood, such as a moderate nose-bleed, could also be seen as beneficial for the health.<sup>5</sup>

Prophylactic bleeding was recommended at least once a year. The specific times of the year when this was to be done could vary according to local traditions, but the most general practice was to draw the blood in March. According to other wide-spread recommendations a bleeding should be made at the beginning of every new season, that is, four times a year.<sup>6</sup> Hence the humoural cleaning and renewal of the body coincided with junctures in the calendar. March is a month suggestive of renewal of the vegetation and the year – the ancient Romans celebrated New Year in this month – and the beginning of a season is the start of a new phase of the year with distinctive characteristics of temperature, humidity and daylight. Just as the external world annually renew itself and at the beginning of a season assume a new constellation of fundamental qualities, so should the inner humoural world of the human organism also be periodically renewed and adjusted.

A therapeutic blood-letting was carried out with care. A timely bleeding could cure the patient, but an untimely one could kill him. The amount of blood to be drawn was strictly controlled; too much could cause harm, and it was better to take a little than too much, since one could always undergo an additional bleeding. Blood should be taken at an appropriate place and, in case of some ailments, this was the part of the body that was considered to suffer from an accumulation of blood. For example, haemorrhoids were treated by the application of leaches at the anus,<sup>7</sup> and headache, often thought to be caused by an excess of blood in the head, could be cured by a provoked nose-bleed.<sup>8</sup>

In the case of many other ailments, the exact spot of the bleeding was determined by ideas about the location of blood vessels. It was thought that the blood spread through the body only when there was a reason for it, such as a wound in the skin. The expression *jirisinni 'n sangu* ('the blood is circulating') was thus used in Sicily when a person was in danger of bleeding to death. We learn that two veins were widely known as suitable for bleeding. One was the *salvatella* (the 'saving vein'), which was located in the hand, and the other was

thought to lead from the heart to the fourth finger on the left hand.<sup>9</sup> On the basis of such notions, this also being the practice in Sicily, heart troubles were treated by a bleeding of the hand.<sup>10</sup> Yet other internal organs were thought to be connected through specific veins to the ends of limbs or to certain other points of the body. Nephritic colic was thus treated by blood-letting in the foot, and headache and pneumonia by incisions made at the shoulders.<sup>11</sup>

The idea that the body could contain corrupted humours was also expressed by the practice of blistering. From a Sicilian source we learn that blistering was performed mostly in older times and was less common than blood-letting.<sup>12</sup> It was employed especially in the case of a catarrh of the chest, but also in the case of swollen glands of the neck, scrofulous eruptions, eye ailments and against measles. The sign of a good treatment was that the vesicant in twelve hours produced a large blister filled with a yellowish liquid. This liquid was identified with the *mali umori* ('bad', or 'evil', liquids) that were thought to have caused the ailment. Blistering was usually made on the arms, and it was believed that if it was made at the nape of the neck, or behind the ears, this would make the patient blind.

Similar ideas concerned the emission of pus and lymphatic fluid from wounds. In Calabria, for example, skin diseases in general, such as eczema, furuncles and exanthemata, were thought to be outlets of bad blood that should not be arrested; if this was done, the 'bad' humours would cause the organism harm.<sup>13</sup> It was also believed that an intentionally procured wound in the leg, a *ruttorio* (or *lettorio*), which was constantly kept open and therefore emitted pus, protected from all diseases and could alleviate rheumatic pains of the legs. The *ruttorio* was made by tying tightly a small object, such as a chick-pea, against the skin. Some persons were said to have had a *ruttorio* for over forty years.<sup>14</sup> In Sicily it was held that carbuncles and boils were outlets for deteriorated blood, and that one should not attempt to heal old and persistently suppurating wounds on the lower limbs, because this might have a bad effect on the chest or the head.<sup>15</sup> The dregs from an inflamed ear were also seen as an emanation of corrupted blood, which should not be hindered as this would cause other ailments.<sup>16</sup> It was thought in Basilicata that suppurating boils were necessary since they purged the blood, and that this was especially necessary for persons living in chastity.<sup>17</sup>

This latter belief is one of several that speak of a notion that sexual activity provides a beneficial evacuation of humours from the body, the absence of which causes liquids to accumulate and cause harm. This idea, which was widely accepted in scholarly humoral medi-

cine from antiquity up to modern times,<sup>18</sup> presumably also inspired the belief held in Sicily that leucorrhœa (the whites) was thought to afflict foremost girls and women who lived in chastity, such as nuns and widows, and that the best cure was to marry (that is, to have intercourse).<sup>19</sup> Thus the whitish mucus emitted in leucorrhœa, which is strongly suggestive of decay and putrefaction, was identified with bodily humours that had become corrupted since they had not been let out of the organism in due time through sexual activity. It may be noted that an alternative cure for these women was to take baths,<sup>20</sup> that is, a measure implying purification of the body.

The view of sexual intercourse as a prophylaxis as well as a remedy is also expressed by the following Calabrian proverb on the subject of how often one should have intercourse, a saying which also states that it should not be enjoyed too frequently:<sup>21</sup>

*Ogni jornu,  
Eni scornu;  
Ogni settimana,  
Ti sana;  
Ogni quindicina,  
È medicina.*

(‘Every day,  
That is a disgrace/a mortification;  
Every week,  
It makes you healthy;  
Every fortnight,  
It is a medicine’).

Given the supposition that intercourse implies an outlet for bodily fluids, it may be assumed that the objection against excessive sexual activity connected with an idea that the organism was thereby drained not only of dangerous and superfluous humours, but also of substances of vital importance. In the ethnographic sources, only a few items speak of such a notion; there were some proverbs concerning the woes that afflict the man who too easily gives in to the sexual temptations of women,<sup>22</sup> and it was thought that a newly wed man can be ‘exhausted’ or ‘drained’ by his wife.<sup>23</sup> The scarcity of such documentation possibly reflects the circumstance that most early Italian ethnographers avoided subjects concerning sexuality out of a sense of decorum.<sup>24</sup> The idea that intercourse deprives the male of valuable semen, and hence strength and vital power, has been documented elsewhere in southern Europe,<sup>25</sup> and was a common theme in

scholarly humoral medicine.<sup>26</sup> There is therefore a reason to assume that South Italian folk medicine did not constitute an exception.

Still another expression of the assumption that sexual activity purified the body from unwanted humours is found in beliefs concerning eyesight. To understand these beliefs it must first be pointed out that the humid substance of the eyes was seen as connected with the fluids of the organism. This view is indicated by the already mentioned idea that blistering at the nape of the neck or behind the ears should make a patient blind. Other beliefs and practices also speak of such an assumption. In Calabria, for instance, ophthalmitis was called *'u sangu all'uocchi* ('blood in the eyes') and was thought to be caused by a 'bleeding vein'.<sup>27</sup> In Sicily, a prophylactic measure, as well as a cure against ophthalmitis and other ailments of the eyes, was to prick a small hole in the lobe of the ear. This should be done at the ear on the same side of the head as the afflicted eye. Some people kept the hole permanently open by means of an earring, in this way 'clearing' their eyesight.<sup>28</sup> In Lanciano (Abruzzo), one of many cures against conjunctivitis was to prick the inside of the eyelid with a blessed palm-leaf so that some drops of blood were drawn.<sup>29</sup>

Given this notion about the eyes, we can understand the idea, documented in Abruzzo and Sicily, that intercourse or onanism preserved good eyesight or even increased the sharpness of vision. Intercourse could thus be recommended when someone suffered an eye ailment.<sup>30</sup> Hence these beliefs, sometimes expressed with sincerity, sometimes more jokingly, were based upon an assumption that intercourse and onanism provided outlets for bodily fluids which otherwise accumulated in the organism and obscured the vision, apparently by muddying the clearness of the eyes; in the countryside surrounding Acireale (Sicily), intercourse was said quite seriously to 'draw the blood out of the eyes'.<sup>31</sup>

The assumption that bodily fluids whose excretion was hindered caused harm was expressed in a host of other beliefs and practices, for instance in connection with the weaning of a child<sup>32</sup> and in connection with perspiration.<sup>33</sup> To summarize, the body was thought to be under a constant threat of corruption. Only the most rigorous control, by prophylactic and therapeutic measures, could prevent humours from accumulating, corrupting and so causing harm. Without this control, the body would inevitably suffer a more rapid decay than necessary.

### *Vital Humidity*

Another train of thought in Western humoral theory concerns the relation between bodily fluids and vital force. In his study, *The Origins of European Thought* (1951, especially Ch. 6), Richard Onians presents ample evidence that a healthy body was understood in ancient Greece and Rome to be saturated with life-fluid, of which sweat, tears, sperm, blood and the cerebrospinal marrow were manifestations.<sup>34</sup> Certain ailments were explained to result from a deficiency in this fluid – the Latin word for illness, *siccus*, literary means ‘dry’ – and health was thought to be restored by increasing the amount of vital fluid by certain means, such as anointing with particular kinds of oils. As the body grew older, the vital fluid dried up; death occurred when it had decreased to a critically low level.

In Medieval medical tradition, the notion of a generic vital essence contained in the human body was elaborated as a theory of the *humidum radicale* (‘radical moisture’).<sup>35</sup> The theory’s principal ideas can be found as early as in the writings of Greek philosophers, in the Hippocratic writings, and in Galen’s works, but it was Arab natural philosophers, foremost the physician Avicenna (980-1037), who formulated the theory more consistently. On the basis of his writings, the theory was further developed until the middle of the sixteenth century, after which it began to decline.

The basic idea was that a human being was born with a finite amount of radical moisture – this derived from the sperm at conception – which was consumed during the span of life. The radical moisture could be replenished, but only to a certain extent and not indefinitely, since food, when it entered the human organism, was refined so as to form a sequence of four ‘secondary humours’ – often called ‘humidities’ or ‘moistures’ to distinguish them from the four constituent (‘primary’) humours – of which the fourth, and hence the most refined, was the radical moisture. The radical moisture was related to ‘innate heat’, which was identified with bodily heat and viewed as a principle of life, in the same way as a fuel is related to a flame; the metaphor of the process of life as being equivalent to a burning oil lamp was often used. The innate heat consumes the radical moisture, and the fleshy parts of the body thus dry up as life proceeds; hence, young age is ‘moist’ and ‘hot’, while old age is ‘dry’ and ‘cold’. When all radical moisture has been consumed in the production of innate heat, death will result, just as the flame of an oil lamp expires when all oil has been consumed.

This theory provided a basis for further speculation concerning the medical treatment of fevers, marasmus and senile diseases; it also provided guidelines for possibilities for prolonging life. In Piero Camporesi's (1988a, 1988b) investigations of medieval and early modern attitudes to the human body in Italy and Latin Europe, we find abundant evidence that the project of reinvigorating man and prolonging his life was of great importance; this quest could also be found in the works of scholars who did not explicitly rely on the theory of radical moisture. Medical practitioners of these times recommended many 'recipes' for vitalizing drugs, which contained human blood or other substances obtained from a living or dead human body – the medical scholars designed elaborate procedures for distilling from the body its essential vital fluid.

The theory of life as the continuous consumption of a vital fluid resulting in a progressive drying of the ageing organism is no doubt inspired by the observation of nature. Living organisms – plants and animals (including human beings) alike – have nearly always in their early age a soft and humid appearance. In Abruzzo, it might be noted, the newborn child was placed for a while by the hearth in order to harden the bones. Small irregularities in the shape of the face and the body were corrected by strokes of the fingers, as the child's flesh was thought to be as soft and formable as wax.<sup>36</sup> With increasing age, living organisms seem to become less humid, to become dryer, harder and wrinkled, and death implies an actual and radical loss of moisture, leaving behind dry material such as straw, shell or bone.

This process of nature has inspired the association between life and humidity, and between death and dryness, that is found in many cultural traditions the world over.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, the idea in humoral medicine that the body becomes corrupted has its foundation in the observation of actual states of natural decay of organic matter, where putrescence and mildew occur under conditions characterized by excessive humidity and stagnant liquids. Comparable ideas of bodily corruption are documented in numerous societies. Hence, the symbolism of corruption, humidity and dryness in relation to the human body and its vital force is found in many parts of the world; in this study, where it is a prominent theme, I will attempt to elucidate the particular form it had in traditional Southern Italy.

In traditional Southern Italy, there was no explicit 'theory' concerning humidity and vital force, like that of the *humidum radicale*. Nor do we in South Italian folk medicine find many reinvigorating procedures intended to supply the human organism with vital force, such as those described in Medieval and Renaissance medicine.



Rather, the vast majority of medical cures were employed in order to maintain the delicate balance of the bodily humours or to make various other kinds of adjustments and interventions in the assumed workings of the human organism.

However, we find, in the material from Southern Italy a strong association between life and humidity, a pervasive conception of death as a process of drying and also, although rather vaguely, the metaphor of life as a gradual consumption of vital moisture. These associations and notions are particularly evident in the ethnography which relates to death;<sup>38</sup> an individual's passing away brought to the fore the importance of vital force for the human organism. Indeed, the notion of death as a process of drying is key to an understanding of numerous beliefs and practices connected with death. In the following, we will discuss some linguistic metaphors for death, 'medical' uses of a 'dry' corpse, the notion of dryness as a desirable state of the dead, the idea of the dead as suffering from thirst and the symbolism of candles and oil lamps in death ceremonies.

#### **Linguistic metaphors**

The conception of death as a process of drying of the moist human organism is reflected in the Italian language: *restarci secco* ('find oneself dry'; 'to be dry') means to die a sudden death, *fare secco* ('make dry'), when said of a person, means to kill him and a common figurative meaning of the reflexive form of the verb *seccare* ('to dry') – *seccarsi* – means to suffer a loss of vitality and vigour. *La morte secca* ('the dry death') is the term for a representation of death in the form of a skeleton with a scythe or of a skull over two crossed bones. As in the English language, the word *ceneri* (ashes) is used for man's mortal remains, even if no cremation has taken place.

#### **'Medical' uses of a dead body**

A corpse could be used for 'medical' purposes, and some of these uses reveal the conception of death as a state of dryness. To understand these practices, however, we must first briefly consider a vast set of cures in folk medicine, namely those which aimed at drying enlarged internal organs, unwanted bodily abscesses and excrescences, and certain other states implying excessive humidity. Let us consider some examples of such cures, documented from various communities.

Nasal polyps could be treated by drying one marine polyp while another was consumed by the patient,<sup>39</sup> and slugs were dried by the fire to cure warts and corns onto which they had been rubbed.<sup>40</sup> A

child's excessive dribbling could be treated by touching its lips with a living frog, which then was hung up by the fireplace; the cure started to work first when the frog had died and turned completely dry.<sup>41</sup> A swollen spleen could be treated by drying an animal's spleen by the fireplace, since the patient's spleen was thereby also thought to be dried.<sup>42</sup> Another cure for swollen spleen or liver was to dry by the fire leafs and fleshy stems from certain plants, most often prickly pear and agave, which had been associated with the swollen organ (for instance, by attaching such a leaf for eight days onto the skin of the patient at the location of the spleen); this drying was thought to bring about an analogous drying of the afflicted organ.<sup>43</sup> These cures could also be employed against malaria, since the enlargement of the spleen and the liver often caused by malaria was seen among the uneducated more as a cause of this ailment than as one of its symptoms.<sup>44</sup> A swollen liver or spleen, and consequently also tertian fevers, could be treated by suspending a toad in the air, or otherwise restraining it, and leaving it to die and become completely dry.<sup>45</sup>

The logic of these cures is obvious. An object characterized by humidity, such as a dribbling toad, a slug or a fresh leaf, represents the swollen organ or another form of excessive humidity and, according to the principle of 'sympathetic' magic, the unwanted excessive humidity is dried up when its counterpart is dried. We also find therapies in which the object to be dried is soaked with the patient's urine, and thus constitutes a metonymic link to excessive humidity or swollen parts of his body. In Abruzzo, for instance, a therapy against swollen spleen and malaria was to fill a sock with bran, in which the patient was to urinate until it was soaking wet. Then the sock was hung by the fireplace in order to dry.<sup>46</sup>

There are, however, still other cures involving drying in which the implicit reasoning seems to be a bit different. For instance, the powder from a crab that had been hung up alive by the fireplace until it had died and become completely dry, was used in treatments of whitlow;<sup>47</sup> it was thought possible to stop nose-bleeds by means of a powder made from a frog that had been placed alive in an empty pot on the fire, burnt to death and then completely desiccated;<sup>48</sup> and chilblains were treated with the touch of a pig's penis which had been dried in the oven.<sup>49</sup> In these cures, no symbolic relation seems to have initially been established between the excessively humid organ and the object that brings about the cure. Instead it appears as though the dry object is understood to have a capacity to dry the excess fluids of the ailing part of the patient's body. The 'medicinal' object apparently works like a dry sponge that has the capacity to absorb liquids.

Let us now turn to some ‘medical’ cures involving corpses. In Palermo, it was thought that excessive sweating of the hands and malaria could be cured by touching the desiccated corpse of a certain Count Amari (in Sicilian dialect: *Conti Amaru*), resting in the underground cemetery of the Capuchin convent (on Capuchin burial customs, see Chapter 9). In the case of the former illness, the following spell was to be read when the corpse was touched:<sup>50</sup>

*Toccu lu Conti Amaru,  
E mi passa lu suduri di li manu.*

(‘I touch Count Amari,  
and the sweat will pass away from my hands.’)

A similar belief was reported in Lanciano (Abruzzo). It was held that excessive perspiration of the hands could be cured if they were rubbed against the soles of the feet of a dead child.<sup>51</sup>

These two cures can be understood as aiming at diminishing an excess of a bodily fluid (sweat) through contact with a symbolically ‘dry’ corpse. In one case, the corpse was actually desiccated, while in the other it was most likely a body waiting for burial. It is not surprising that malaria was also assumed possible to cure by touching Count Amari, since this illness, as noted, was thought to be caused by an excess of fluid in the spleen and the liver. Furthermore, the Italian word *amaro* means bitter. Substances with a bitter taste were commonly used against malaria, since their bitterness was considered to counteract the illness. Presumably this idea was inspired by the association between bitter taste and dryness – this taste gives an impression of dryness in the mouth. Hence the ‘dry’ bitterness will counteract the excessive humidity of the swollen liver or spleen, and the use of the desiccated corpse of ‘Count Bitter’ – ‘Amari’ is an actual Sicilian family name – against malaria is therefore presumably motivated by an association between death, dryness and bitterness.

Numerous other cures aimed at decreasing the size of swollen internal organs by means of direct or indirect contact with a corpse – this type of ailment was clearly the most common to be cured in that way. In Naples the touch of the hand of a dead child was believed to cure phalangitis, an ailment that causes swelling and pain of the fingers.<sup>52</sup> Swollen glands in the throat could be treated in Abruzzo by the touch of a deceased person’s hand;<sup>53</sup> in the area of Naples, the same cure was used against goitre.<sup>54</sup> In Montefalcone (Campania), goitre was instead supposed to be cured by inserting a needle with a

thread in the throat of a corpse. After a period of time the thread was removed and tied around the neck of the suffering person, and it was believed that the goitrous swelling dissolved as the forms of the dead body dissolved.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, a ribbon that had been tied around the neck of a corpse,<sup>56</sup> or a piece of thread that had been passed (by means of a needle) through the wrist of a corpse,<sup>57</sup> was thought to be a remedy for goitre when carried around the neck by the person who suffered from the condition. In Abruzzo, inflamed and swollen lymphatic glands in the neck and below the jaw were treated with analogous methods. The sufferer placed his comb or, in the case of a woman, her hair ribbon, under the head or neck of a dead human body.<sup>58</sup> In this region of Italy, *scrofula* (an illness that causes swelling of the lymphatic glands of the neck and throat) was treated by rubbing the hand of a dead priest on the tumours. It was held that the effect of the hand was at its strongest when his body was still warm. Thus, when a priest was deathly ill, those who had need of this cure made themselves ready to hasten to his deathbed as soon as he had expired.<sup>59</sup>

All these therapies can be seen as utilising the symbolically dry quality of a corpse or establishing a correspondence between a corpse that will be the subject of a drying process and the swollen bodily organ that is supposed to dry accordingly. However, some cures may also, as the comment to the cure used in Montefalcone suggests, be inspired by notions of dissolution, disappearance and expiration — just as the flesh of the corpse disintegrates, so should the swollen organ decrease in size. These notions were important in a number of cures against warts employed in *Somma Vesuviana* (Campania), which consisted of bringing objects, such as corns of grain and small pieces of meat or pigskin, into contact with the warts and then letting them rot. Among these cures we also find the idea that the hand of a corpse applied to the warts had the power to make them disappear; the earth over which a funeral coach had passed was also attributed this capacity.<sup>60</sup>

### **Dryness as a preferable state for the dead**

Numerous beliefs and practices speak of dryness as the preferable state for the deceased from the point of view of the living. First, however, the wider frame of meaning in which these practices are set must be briefly outlined. A theme recurring in the practices relating with the death of a family member is that death should imply a shift to another form of existence and that the dead is aided or incited to comply to this shift. The practices aim at controlling the initial phase

of a long process of death and thereby give this process a proper start and direction.

A metaphor for this move from one form of existence to another was that the dead must embark upon a passage to the other-world of the dead. For instance, at the moment of death, or immediately before or after, a window or door was opened, and sometimes remained so as long as the body was kept in the home. This custom was usually explained by the necessity of giving the soul of the departed free passage out of the house, so that it should not remain in its former home.<sup>61</sup> In one community, the door and the windows were closed as soon as the corpse had been carried out of the house; this was done to make it clear to the dead that he should not return to this world.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, the feet of the corpse were always directed towards the door of the room as long as it remained in the home, a position inspired by the common metaphor for death as an arduous walk to the other world;<sup>63</sup> with his feet pointed towards the door, the deceased was ready to leave and set out on this journey. A corollary of this metaphor is the idea that if the corpse was buried with its feet tied together, then the soul of the deceased would not reach heaven. Numerous other expressions of the thought that the dead must leave their former homes and the realm of the living can be found. Examples of this were to carry the dead body out through an opening in the roof so that the soul would not easily find its way back,<sup>64</sup> or to verbally urge the dead person to leave the home while his body was carried out.<sup>65</sup>

In summary, after death, the deceased should leave his former mundane home and move towards another realm. This move is a metaphor for a transformation of the dead. It will be argued that the dead gradually assumed another form of existence and, in that other, transcendent form, was present in this world. The living did not wish to relate to the deceased in his earlier form, associated with decay of flesh and death as a state of disintegration, but they did wish to relate to him when he had assumed another form. This new form of the dead will be discussed in Chapter 9, and it will be shown that the transformation of the dead implies a process of drying. The transient and humid flesh of the fresh corpse should be replaced by a 'new body', dry and permanent.

A first expression of dryness as a preferable state for the dead is found in connection with the washing of the corpse. This was done shortly after death, prior to the dressing of the deceased in the clothes he was to wear in the coffin. The washing of the corpse clearly connects with a notion of purifying the dead as preparation for their

encounter with the Divine, akin to such other preparatory measures as the Last Unction and the Viaticum.

Judging from the available ethnography, the dead body was most often washed with vinegar or alcohol, either pure or mixed with water.<sup>66</sup> In Abruzzo, wine could be used, either for the whole body or merely for the face, while the rest of the corpse was washed with pure or diluted vinegar. Pure water was only seldom used. In some communities, the corpse was not washed at all, or only occasionally, and in some places it was only the face, or the face and the hands, that were washed. In contemporary Naples, immediately after death, the corpse is:

‘... washed with surgical alcohol “which disinfects and cleans, without moistening it”. Humidity is inappropriate for a quick desiccation. The use of water is, therefore, considered inconsistent with anything concerning the corpse’.<sup>67</sup>

A rapid and complete desiccation of the buried corpse is an ideal in Naples, since a ‘dry’ corpse indicates that the departed has had a ‘good’ death and has come to rest. After a period of approximately two years in an earthen grave, the remains of the corpse, ideally consisting of the dry bones, are exhumed to be placed in a stone niche. The exhumed bones are washed with surgical alcohol, and it is said that alcohol – and not water – is used to ‘avoid wetting the remains’.<sup>68</sup> Humidity in the grave is furthermore understood to bother the dead.

The use of other liquids than pure water for washing the corpse, and the neglect of washing it at all, may be understood as expressing a notion, verbalised in Naples but implicit elsewhere in the South, that washing with water is detrimental to the process of drying that the dead should undergo. The application of water to the corpse meant that this process was disturbed, which further implied that the transition from the world of the living to the world of the dead had been disturbed – the dead do not ‘come to rest’. If this interference with the dryness of death was not altogether avoided by neglecting to wash the corpse, or minimised by washing only parts of it, it could be evaded by the use of liquids that had connotations of dryness. Vinegar, alcohol and wine clearly had such associations.<sup>69</sup>

We learn, however, that the dead sometimes were offered water for washing. According to reports from Sicily and Abruzzo,<sup>70</sup> a wash basin with water, sometimes together with a towel and a comb, could be prepared when death had occurred and placed in the room where the corpse was kept. It was said that the soul needed to wash itself before going to the other world. In Venosa (Basilicata), a wash basin

and a towel were placed in the room where the dead body had been kept; it was held that the soul of the deceased returned 24 hours after the corpse had been carried away for a wash after wandering among the shadows of the other world.<sup>71</sup> These ideas are connected with the notion that the dead should be cleansed before entering the other world. It is the immaterial soul that is believed to need the water for cleansing, and hence the conflict with the ideal drying of the dead is not as strong as when water is applied to the corpse. Nevertheless, a dilemma with respect to this ideal is suggested; to supply the dead not only with water for washing, but also with a towel so that they may dry themselves, can be seen as a way of resolving the problem.<sup>72</sup>

The corpse to be buried was usually placed in a coffin, and it was quite common to place certain objects there, to be buried together with the deceased. Some of these objects had been dear to him or were considered to be useful for him in his afterlife (for instance, a smoking pipe or a hat or, in the case of children, a favourite toy). The character of other objects, however, suggests that they were placed with the corpse because they were associated with dryness and final death. In some villages in Basilicata, it was customary to cover the bottom of the coffin with a layer of charcoal and to place dry maize leaves in it. In other villages in this region, the corpse was placed on a mattress filled with straw or its head was supported by a cushion stuffed with leaves of maize.<sup>73</sup> Similar customs have been recorded in Puglia: pieces of charcoal were placed under the cushion supporting the head of the corpse,<sup>74</sup> or the body (or just the head) was laid to rest on a mattress (or cushion) filled with straw.<sup>75</sup> In one town (Gallipoli), a bundle of straw was placed under the head of the deceased in order to ensure that his soul would reach God.<sup>76</sup> Dry leaves and straw are dead organic matter, and to place them in the coffin can be understood to express a thought that the dead should become equally dry and dead. Charcoal is dry, and it can glow and burn. It thereby suggests a drying of the corpse by means of heat and fire and alludes to the idea of the dead as burning in Purgatory.

#### **The thirst of the dead**

In Calabria, a receptacle with water was often placed in the vicinity of the deceased while he was kept in the home prior to burial.<sup>77</sup> This was done in the belief that his soul (or the souls of deceased relatives who came to visit him) were thirsty and needed to drink. Offerings of water to the dead could also be made after the corpse had been removed from the home and buried. From Campania, Basilicata, Calabria and Sicily it has been reported that, for some days after the

funeral, water, and most often also bread, were placed in the room where the corpse had been kept prior to burial. It was believed that, during the night, the soul of the dead returned to drink and eat.<sup>78</sup>

Furthermore, offerings of water could be made each year during the night of All Souls. On this night, the dead were believed to return to their former homes, and the water (and often also bread and other foodstuffs) was placed on a table in the house or on a window sill.<sup>79</sup> In Abruzzo, it was believed that the greatest suffering of the dead in their other-worldly existence was thirst. Thus water should never be missing on this night, while bread and other foods were optional offerings.<sup>80</sup> The idea of the dead as constantly suffering from thirst has also been documented in Naples where, more precisely, it was held that the souls tormented by the fire of Purgatory suffered in this way.<sup>81</sup>

Thus all the beliefs and customs described above express an idea that the dead suffered from thirst. To offer them water was an expression of concern for their well-being, similar to many other acts performed as care for them in their other-worldly existence (see Chapters 9 and 10). The notion of the thirst of the dead may be understood as being inspired by an idea of their subjective experience of the process of drying – since the vital humidity is drying up, they become thirsty.<sup>82</sup>

The idea that the dead were tormented by the dryness of death seems also to be present in a number of other death-related practices and beliefs. To console the souls of the dead in Purgatory, was often called to *rinfricare* ('refresh') the dead;<sup>83</sup> in the flames of Purgatory – an image of the drying affecting the dead to which we will return in Chapter 9 – they suffered heat and thirst. This 'refreshment' could, according to some reports, take the form of soaking the clothes that the dead had worn, as well as the sheets and the mattress he had used, with water immediately after the funeral,<sup>84</sup> or pouring water outside the door on the day of Assumption.<sup>85</sup>

In some villages in Calabria, it was the custom to empty all receptacles in the home containing water when a member of the family had died. It was believed that, if this was not done, the soul of the departed would not leave the house but instead stay in the water.<sup>86</sup> The custom has also been documented in Basilicata, where this water was called the *acqua morta* (the 'dead water'),<sup>87</sup> as well as in some areas of Abruzzo, where the emptying of water was rationalized as being a sign of crying.<sup>88</sup> It was the custom in Abruzzo to empty all receptacles of water in the house at still another time: immediately after the corpse had been carried away. This was done in the belief



that the soul of the dead, and the souls of departed relatives who had come to visit him, had been drinking from the water in the house or had washed themselves in it.<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, if someone who carried a receptacle with water happened to meet with a funeral procession, he or she had to pour out the water since it was believed that the dead had dipped his hands in it.<sup>90</sup> These customs and beliefs appear to express two assumptions: that the dead have an interest in water and that their death has contaminated the water so that it could not be used by the living.

Hence, out of concern for the well-being of the thirsty dead, water could be offered while, from the point of view of the living, the dead should be 'drying' since this implied their transition from the world of the living to the world of the dead. Evidently, these two conceptions co-existed without being consciously apprehended as contradictory.

#### **The *camera ardente***

The dead body was usually kept in the home of the family for a minimum of 24 hours (burial within 24 hours after death was not permitted) and, when this time had passed, the burial was performed before to the following evening. The body of the deceased was laid out on a bed or a table that had been placed in the middle of a room, and the rest of the furniture was lined up against the walls. If a coffin was to be used, the corpse was placed in it as soon it could be obtained. The room in which the dead body was kept was called the *camera ardente* ('the ardent room'). As this term suggests, candles and many times also oil lamps, were kept burning there.<sup>91</sup> The number of candles and lamps could be substantial; according to one ethnographer, all the visitors to the dead brought with them a candle or a lamp,<sup>92</sup> and these could be placed around the corpse or at its head or feet. If instead the corpse was kept in church, or was brought there for the funeral ceremony, it was also surrounded by burning candles and sometimes torches.

The use of candles and oil lamps in Roman Catholicism and in Italy has rich and complex significances;<sup>93</sup> in their use at the wake, two meanings emerge that connect directly with this particular occasion. First, darkness was associated with death and evil forces, while light was associated with God and benevolent forces. The light produced by candles and lamps thus has the capacity to ward off those evil and diabolic forces which threatened the soul of the dead and the living persons who were present.<sup>94</sup> A second meaning connects with the process of combustion rather than with the light produced by it.

The burning candle or lamp symbolically serves as a vehicle by means of which something can be transported from this world to the other world. To surround a corpse with burning candles and oil lamps can therefore be construed to express a concern that the dead should leave the world of the living and move towards a transcendental realm. This consideration was also expressed verbally. In Puglia, for instance, the relatives of a departed person said that the flame of the oil lamp kept burning besides the deceased had 'the pious mission of accompanying the soul of the dead to the kingdom of God'.<sup>95</sup>

The same two basic functions of candles and oil lamps – as offering protection and having the symbolic capacity to transfer – were also evoked during the agony of death, when they could be lit by the bed of the moribund person. In Sicily, candles blessed on Candlemas (or on some other feast day) were lit in order to secure for the death-bound a 'good agony' (that is, a swift and relatively painless death) and a 'good passage' to the other world;<sup>96</sup> in Abruzzo, the rationale for lighting such a candle, in the case of a long and painful death agony, was that it kept away evil spirits.<sup>97</sup> The parallel between the burning candle or lamp and the transition of the soul to the other world is especially apparent in the custom, documented in Abruzzo, of lighting an oil lamp beside the person in agony and to keep it burning until the burial had taken place, after which it was left to fade away by itself.<sup>98</sup>

This metaphor is also evident in a number of other customs observed shortly after the occurrence of death. According to ethnographic documents from Calabria, Basilicata and Sicily, an oil lamp was kept constantly burning in the room, in which a corpse had lain, for several days after the burial (3, 10, 30 or more days). Sometimes this lamp was placed in front of a photograph of the deceased, and sometimes it was placed instead on the floor at the place where the death bed had stood.<sup>99</sup> In some Calabrian communities, it was believed that, if the lamp went out, this caused the deceased pain and hindered him from reaching the celestial world.<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, candles, which ought to be left burning once they had been lit, could be lit in the former *camera ardente* for three days after the burial – one additional candle for each day.<sup>101</sup>

In this context, we may note that certain South Italian forms of sorcery drew upon the parallel between the consumption of wax by the flame of a candle and the waning of the vital forces of a human being. By spells and 'magical' procedures, one or several candles were placed in correspondence with the person who was to be hurt;

as the candles burned, so were the life-powers of the victim thought to be waning, resulting in illness and death.<sup>102</sup>

Hence the consumption of a finite amount of wax and oil by a flame, and the final expiration of the flame, were employed as metaphors for the ceasing of a human life – as a Neapolitan proverb, used when talking about a life that is coming to its end, says: *è fernuto l'uoglio a' lucerna* ('the lamp has no more oil').<sup>103</sup> By the force of this metaphor, the manipulation of flames was thought to influence the fate of the dead. More generally, there is a likening of life to the burning of a candle or a lamp. As mentioned earlier, this image was often used in the old theory of life as dependent upon the 'humidum radicale'. The combustion metaphor for organic life is rather appropriate in the light of modern physiological knowledge of the metabolism as crucial for sustaining life, and it might be understood to be inspired by the circumstance that a flame is similar to a living organism in several respects: both are self-regulatory, have the capacity to reproduce, have a limited duration when a finite amount of fuel is present, and in the case of warm-blooded animals, heat is produced.

### *Sources of Vital Force*

Thus far I have argued that the human body was seen as having a tendency to become corrupted and that organic life was associated with humidity, while death was associated with dryness; it has also been claimed that the consumption of fuel by a flame was employed as a metaphor for the waning of vital powers.

This latter metaphor relates to the assumption that vital force is a quality of the transient human body which could be lost as well as replenished. In a general sense, this assumption was explicit. The Italian word *vitalità* has, by and large, the same meaning as the English 'vitality'. South Italians would undoubtedly agree to the statement that the vitality of the human organism – understood as the power to live, as physical vigour and as endurance – is sustained principally by the consumption of food and that it is diminished by consumptive illness and old age.

However, what will concern us primarily are the beliefs and practices surrounding the gaining and losing of vitality, which do not correspond to actual physiological processes, although they may be inspired by such processes and symbolically incorporate features of them. In relation to these, we seldom find an explicit reference to the abstract concept of vitality. This is because the practices and beliefs are not theories of the possibilities of gaining and losing vital force;

instead, they are situational manipulations and thoughts about concrete entities (such as bodies, flesh, blood, mother's milk, food and water) that are intimately linked with life, that in a sense *are* life. It is in the analysis presented here that an abstract component of vitality is extracted, thereby making it possible to discern the more general and implicit notions on which the beliefs and practices rely. The subjects of the following five chapters will be such ideas and practices as relate to the loss and replenishing of vital force. Four principal direct sources of vital force can be identified in the ethnographic material.

First, vital force was understood to be something gained through the consumption of food. Physiologically, food is the true source of vital power, and the sensory experience of the metabolism of the human body allowed foodstuffs to be conceived of as bringing energy to the organism in a degree that roughly corresponds to their actual content of calories. Hence, meat and fat were viewed as more satiating than vegetables. There are, however, notable exceptions. Bread baked from wheat was thought to be very strength-bringing and therefore, in some areas, was consumed in the case of illness,<sup>104</sup> while rice, at least in Sicily, was considered to bring only little nutrition to the body.<sup>105</sup>

Second, vital force could be appropriated from animals and human beings. In Calabria, the fresh blood of a slaughtered pig or cow could be drunk in the conviction that it gave strength.<sup>106</sup> In this case, the blood is not primarily food, but a substance that contains a vital force that is incorporated by consumption. In European cultural traditions, blood is seen as containing the principle of life. This idea is no doubt a corollary of the observation that a radical loss of blood leads to death.

In the area of Nicotera (Calabria), the last remedy for seriously ill children, for whatever sickness had brought them near death, was to boil a puppy and give the broth to the child to drink;<sup>107</sup> the liver of a newborn puppy could be consumed as a remedy against asthma;<sup>108</sup> and, in Sicily, illness of the spleen and dropsy were treated by giving the patient meat from a new-born puppy.<sup>109</sup> In these ideas, referring to a puppy as containing a vitalizing and healing power, which human beings can appropriate through consumption, it is not the eating of dog's meat as food that is of importance. Rather, the puppy suggests vitality in a pristine, intense and unconsumed state, and the eating of the dog implies an incorporation of this vital force. However, yet another association is present. The consumption of dog meat was, as in the rest of Europe, normally viewed with disgust and horror. The principal reason for this is that the dog is in a certain sense part of

human society, although it occupies a low position in it; the dog is seen as a member of the family, as a faithful friend, and is typically attributed human sentiments and qualities.<sup>110</sup> Eating a dog is thus close to eating a human being, and it is precisely this suggestion of anthropophagy that seems to make puppies suitable for enhancing the vitality of human beings: they contain unspent and pristine vitality that is almost human. This quality of the dog's vitality is quite explicit in a Calabrian cure against children's rachitis, described by Norman Douglas (1955: 57):

'I have ... met persons who claim to have been cured of rachitic troubles in their youth by eating a puppy dog cooked in a saucepan. But only one kind of dog is good for this purpose, to be procured from those foundling hospitals whither hundreds of illegitimate infants are taken as soon as possible after birth. The mothers, to relieve the discomfort caused by this forcible separation from the new-born, buy a certain kind of puppy there, bring them home, and nourish them *in loco infantis*. These puppies cost a franc apiece, and are generally destroyed after performing their duties; it is they who are cooked for curing the scrofulous tendencies of other children.'

Thus, in this cure, the puppy to be consumed is particularly closely identified with a human being, since it has substituted for a human child.

A concrete way in which vital force can be transferred from one person to another is through mother's milk. If the mother consumes adequate amounts of food, she thereby gains strength and is able to lactate, while on a meagre diet her milk becomes scarce and may even dry up. By nursing, she conveys vital force to her baby, and the hunger for food, as well as the loss of vital force implied by nursing, were proverbial:

*La femmina che allatta  
Mangia come una vacca  
E fatica come una gatta*

('The woman who lactates  
eats as a cow  
and gets tired [as easily] as a cat')<sup>111</sup>

Mother's milk is therefore a vehicle through which vital force is transferred from mother to child. It is a bodily fluid which at the same time is food and, as will be seen, was the subject of numerous beliefs and practices relating to the transfer of vital force between human beings.

Third, the creative forces of nature could be appropriated by human beings so as to increase fertility and vital power. This will be

discussed in detail in Chapter Eight. Only one example will be given here: the therapeutic procedures, of which some were part of the calendrical celebrations during the summer, that involved water in nature. These consisted of baths in the sea, lakes or rivers, or involved ablutions or other uses of dew.

We learn that women in Calabria and Abruzzo took baths in the sea in the belief that this made them more fertile.<sup>112</sup> According to a report from Abruzzo, bathing in the sea, in a river, in a lake or in a mineral spring was more generally believed to have a positive effect on many ailments; those who sought relief from illness in this way were numerous.<sup>113</sup> In Calabria, people stayed long in the water when bathing in the sea as they considered this beneficial,<sup>114</sup> and one ethnographic source from this region informs that nearly all the folk medical 'medicines' and decoctions, regardless of what particular ailment they should be used against, were exposed to the dew of the night before use, in order to augment their curative powers.<sup>115</sup>

The beneficial properties of baths and dew were thought to be especially intense at certain times of the year, most commonly at Ascension (celebrated 40 days after Easter) and at San Giovanni (Midsummer Day). At least in Calabria and Sicily, it was common to take a bath in the sea or a river on the night preceding Ascension Day or on the morning of this day. This was held to be beneficial and to cure ailments of the skin and other illnesses.<sup>116</sup> In Sicily, domestic animals were led into the water to be healed from ailments or to be preserved from them, and some thought that the bath filled the udders of female animals with milk.<sup>117</sup> The dew that fell on the night preceding Ascension Day was commonly held to have beneficial properties — thus people could roll themselves over the humid vegetation of fields as a remedy against skin ailments.<sup>118</sup> It was common to expose water in a receptacle to the humid air of the night and use this 'blessed' water as a drink or for washing, since it was believed to help against various ailments or, more generally, to bring vigour and good health.<sup>119</sup>

From the ethnography we learn that the customs connected with baths and dew were quite similar on the day of San Giovanni. It was common to take a bath on the night preceding San Giovanni or on the morning of that day. This was often done with the intention of curing diseases of the skin, rheumatism or other ailments, or in order to avoid headaches or to purify body and soul.<sup>120</sup> It was held, at least in Sicily, that the salty water of the sea on this day turned sweet at midday;<sup>121</sup> a similar belief concerned seawater on Ascension, which was thought to turn sweet at midnight.<sup>122</sup> This idea can be understood as

expressing the vital connotations of water at these moments, since sweet water, in contrast to salt water, can quench the thirst of human beings, animals and plants and thus reinvigorate them. In Abruzzo, the dew that fell during this night was collected and used for therapeutic washings of the body, which were held to cure various ailments, protect from headaches and pains, and generally clean and strengthen the organism.<sup>123</sup> Applied to the face, the dew was also thought to make girls beautiful and, if applied to the hair, to make it grow long and nice.<sup>124</sup>

To summarize, these practices were supposed to have two major effects on the human organism. The first was a purifying effect; to bathe is to clean oneself, and the actual cleaning of the skin suggests a more thorough purification of the entire organism (it may be recalled that baths were considered to be a remedy against leucorrhoea). Ascension Day, and particularly San Giovanni, were days that suggested the beginning of a new season and, as we know, such times of the year were commonly held to be appropriate for purifying the humours of the organism. The most common ailments held possible to cure, or avoid, by means of water or dew on these days were those related to superfluity of corrupted humours in the body: cutaneous eruptions and other skin ailments, headache and rheumatism.

The second was a fertilizing and vitalizing effect – the fertility of women is increased, hair grows longer, the udders of female animals are filled with milk, health in general is augmented, the body is imbued with strength and new vigour. This effect can be seen as relating to water being a primordial element necessary for organic life, and hence intimately connected with life and vitality itself. The vitalizing effect is most marked on Ascension Day and San Giovanni. This is not the proper place for a detailed analysis of the significance and powers attributed to these two days of the year, but it is clear that they are closely connected with natural fertility. May and June are months characterized by an intense vegetal fertility and growth, and the celebrations of Ascension and San Giovanni connect with this fecundity in a number of ways. The use of water from nature on these days – to cure illness and to reinvigorate the body and purify it – can therefore be understood to be an attempt to appropriate pure, natural fertility and force of life for human purposes.

The fourth principal way in which it was thought possible for human beings to increase vital force was to receive it from divine sources. God, Christ and the Saints were unlimited in their power and capability and could in their grace bestow vitality to those who were in need and were worthy of receiving it. These divine powers could

heal from illness and infertility, give strength and vigour to the weak and remedy all negative states of the transient human body.

The generic term for receiving a favour from divine sources was to receive *grazia* (plural: *grazie*). Since *grazia* has meanings that are not commonly implied by the English word 'grace', the Italian term will be used when discussing *grazia* in Southern Italy. When speaking of a person, to have *grazia* denotes being attractive, delicate, beautiful, gentle and harmonious in a natural way. These characteristics are seen as having been given freely to the person, by nature, divine will or fate. In the religious context this aspect of *grazia* as something given is also present — *grazia* means essentially a free gift bestowed upon human beings by divine powers. Since this gift could consist of vitality, *grazia* might in many contexts be translated as vital force. For instance, the *grazia* bestowed upon a child at baptism by the application of holy water, salt and oil was by the laity 'believed to manifest itself physically, in greater health, strength and beauty'.<sup>125</sup> Hence, in terms of exchange, *grazia* means a free gift; as to its 'content', *grazia* is in many contexts synonymous with vital force.<sup>126</sup>



## FOUR

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# SHARING

I now turn to a discussion of beliefs and practices which speak of sharing of vital force among human beings or households. I will also consider beliefs concerning the loss of mother's milk as a result of the unequal sharing of food between two persons, which elaborates upon a contrast between the ideal of equal sharing and immoral appropriation.

### *'Donations' of Vital Nourishment*

In Basilicata, a child suffering from paleness, exhaustion and radical loss of weight could be treated by being smeared with hog's fat that had been collected from seven different households.<sup>1</sup> Another treatment against such infant sufferings was that the mother should collect some water in which pasta had been boiled and three pinches of salt from as many female friends as was the years of age of her child. The water and salt were used for bathing the sick child. In one version of the cure, wine was added to the bath, a prayer to God for assistance was read, and the child was massaged while being bathed.<sup>2</sup> In Calabria, it was believed possible to cure malaria if the patient ate food that had been begged for in nine homes on the eve of Christmas Day.<sup>3</sup> In San Giorgio Morgeto (Calabria), a practice employed to cure particularly grave cases of illness caused by the evil eye, which typically caused a depletion of vital force (see the next chapter), was to feed the sick person with bread which had been collected from seven girls all named Grazia.<sup>4</sup>

Similar collections of food and objects could also be parts of cures against agalactia (serious shortage or absence of mother's milk in a nursing woman), quite common among peasant women and often caused by malnutrition or general weakness due to illness. Since good milk substitutes were unavailable, agalactia posed a serious threat to the life of the nursing baby and was much dreaded. Therefore, we find a multitude of beliefs concerning the causes of agalactia and the means by which it was thought possible to cure the affliction.

In Nicotera (Calabria), it was thought that a nursing mother with insufficient milk could be helped if she collected seven small pieces of bread from seven women by the name of Grazia. The mother was to

boil these pieces, give a little of the pap to her child, and wrap the remainder in a piece of cloth to be placed on the child's chest. Another remedy suggested that the mother herself should eat a *pitta della carità* ('bun of charity'). She would bake this bun from ingredients that she collected from the households of nine of her female friends and with the help of utensils borrowed from them; one contributed flour, another fire-wood, yet another offered a receptacle, and so on.<sup>5</sup> Still another alternative, also practised in Calabria, was that the mother asked for food from seven women named Maria, one woman on each day of a week, and consumed this food.<sup>6</sup>

Similar procedures for increasing lactation have been documented for Abruzzo, Sicily, and Campania.<sup>7</sup> The agalactous mother gathered food from women of a certain number of households in the community. Sometimes she also borrowed utensils for cooking from these women, and at times the women should be named Grazia or Maria. In some cures, the mother prayed for assistance to the Virgin Mary, to the Madonna delle Grazie (Our Lady of the Graces), or to other saints thought to be particularly helpful in the case of agalactia. In one Sicilian community, the mothers are said to have assumed that the Madonna della Grazia, as a reward for the humility that they had shown when begging for food, conceded to them the milk.<sup>8</sup>

Another set of procedures employed to cure agalactia were those in which monks or nuns were asked to contribute leftovers of their meals. The following procedures have been documented in Abruzzo. In Atri and Ortona an agalactous mother could ask for, and then consume, leftovers from a meal partaken by monks or nuns. In Chieti, the unfortunate mother was advised to go to the Capuchin convent and ask for bread and parsley. The monks, understanding her predicament, conceded their help. The mother should then cook a soup based on the bread and season it with parsley. This dish was supposed to work miracles in increasing lactation. Also in Celano, a mother with insufficient milk could go to the Capuchin convent and there ask for a piece of bread that had been left over from the monks' meal. From this bread she made pap, which she herself ate.<sup>9</sup> In Orsogna, women suffering from agalactia asked for the leftovers from the monks' meal and most commonly were given pieces of bread. They brought this bread to the miraculous spring in Santa Eufemia, the water of which was thought to increase lactation, soaked the bread in its water, and applied water to their breasts.<sup>10</sup> Outside Abruzzo similar procedures seem to have been documented only in Calabria; nursing mothers with scarce milk should ask for food from monks for a period of seven days.<sup>11</sup>

These practices, which we may call 'donations' of vital nourishment, connect with two separate notions: the sharing between equals and receiving favours from divine sources. In the case of 'donations' asked for within the community, the notion of sharing is central.

As we know, there was a pervasive ideology that those who have plenty should be willing to share with those among their fellows who have little. The mother suffering from agalactia is troubled by not having enough food for her baby, which is a state possibly caused by an insufficient diet, and her baby suffers directly from the life-threatening lack of milk. A person who is ill needs vital force and food is a direct source of strength and vital force; hence he or she is given food. In one case, however, hog's fat was collected and smeared onto an emaciated child. Hence, the fat which the child had lost through its illness was symbolically replaced.

The donated items cannot actually bring about the effects for which the recipient hopes. They are nutritionally insignificant tokens of food or implements that are used for preparing a meal. In some cases, the food is not even consumed but applied to the body. It is an imaginary activity in which tokens stand for a plenty of nourishment and vital force, received from external sources.<sup>12</sup>

In many procedures involving 'donations' asked for from neighbours, there is an invocation of divine *grazia*. The Virgin Mary and other saints were prayed to, and women named Grazia or Maria were specifically sought out as donors of food. The name Maria suggests the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the name of Grazia evokes the concept of divine *grazia*. The Virgin Mary was seen as a source of abundant *grazia* – for instance, in the 'Hail Mary', one of the most common of prayers, she is said to be *piena di grazia* ('full of grace'). Virgin Mary listens to prayers, feels compassion for those who suffer, and extends to them the assistance they need. Since a constituent part of the Christian conception of divine *grazia* is that it is given freely without concern for returns, the Virgin Mary extends help to human beings asking for no direct compensation; the same is expected of those who 'donate' vital nourishment.

Hence, in these practices, there is often an amalgamation of a notion of receiving mother's milk and vital force from neighbours and an idea of receiving divine *grazia* from the Virgin Mary or other saints. On the one hand, the person who suffers from a lack of vital force, or food in the form of mother's milk, may ask for food in the neighbourhood (in person or by proxy). By consuming the food, or applying it onto the body, that which is in short supply is supposed to be gained. On the other hand, a mother may pray to a saint, ask for

alms from persons with names suggestive of divine *grazia*, and think that the Virgin Mary will reward her for showing humility in this way by bestowing her with milk. The two sets of notions converge since generalised reciprocity is embedded in notions of Christian altruism and concern for fellow human beings.

When 'donations' of milk were asked for from monks and nuns, the prospect of receiving favours from divine sources was central, and notions of sharing among equals absent. Monks and nuns (and also priests and other members of the clergy) are persons who are ideally supposed to distribute divine *grazia* to deserving human beings. They occupy mediating positions between God and mortal human beings. Hence, to ask for a donation of food from monks or nuns is to ask for divine *grazia* — which in the mundane world may be manifested in the form of nourishing food and an abundance of mother's milk.

It should be noted that the kind of food asked for from members of the community was different from that requested from monks and nuns. The 'donations' in the community consisted of food kept in stock, groceries, and kitchen utensils with the help of which a mother could prepare her food. These donations speak of a basic equality between giver and receiver. The one who receives belongs to an independent household capable of transforming raw food into cooked food, but that at the moment suffers a shortage of one type of food — mother's milk — which is produced by the mother when she eats food cooked in the household. The 'donations' asked for from monks and nuns are leftovers from meals. To ask for such food suggests a subordinate and dependent position, like that of the itinerant beggar who has no household and must rely on cooked food from the kitchens of foreign households. This dependent position reflects the subordination of human beings in relation to the saints and to God and is associated with the theme of showing humility before the Divine.

As mentioned earlier, mothers in Abruzzo who had asked for 'donations' from monks could take the bread that they had been given and soak it in a miraculous spring, the water of which was supposed to increase lactation. An alternative, also documented in Abruzzo, was to drink the *acqua di San Francesco* ('water of Saint Francis') from a spring located under a Capuchin convent.<sup>13</sup> In some more elaborate forms of asking for 'donations' among neighbours, the mother was also supposed to drink water from a spring or well that had a reputation for curing agalactia or use the water for preparing pasta with flour that she had collected.<sup>14</sup> More generally, there was a

quite common belief that the water of certain wells or springs, when drunk or applied to the breasts, had the power to cure agalactia.<sup>15</sup> Hence, still another notion of how to gain mother's milk is present in some of the 'donations' – the abundance of the water of a spring will bring about an abundance of milk. Therefore, in some practices for the curing of agalactia, all four principal imageries of gaining vital force mentioned in the previous chapter merge: food is consumed, life-giving nourishment is received from other persons through the sharing of food, milk is bestowed by divinities, and, finally, an abundance of milk is secured through drinking water from a spring or using it for ablutions.

### *Mother's Milk and the Unequal Sharing of Food*

In Basilicata, it was held as unwise that nursing mothers ate together, since one of them might lose her milk to the other.<sup>16</sup> According to a more detailed report from Abruzzo,<sup>17</sup> nursing mothers should neither eat from the same plate nor drink from the same glass, since the woman who ate the last mouthful of the shared food or who drank the last sip of drink would 'attract to herself' the milk of the other (among the peasants it was quite common to share plates and glasses when eating, not only when the family ate, but also when guests were invited for a meal). A similar belief was held in the area of Irpinia (Campania): if a woman (or a man) ate from the same plate as a nursing mother, the milk from the mother's bosom would 'flow' over into the breasts of the other person. However, the milk could be restored if the two persons again ate from a shared plate and the nursing mother was then allowed to have the last mouthfuls.<sup>18</sup>

It was a common belief in parts of Southern Italy that an animal, usually a cat or a dog – especially if the animal was lactating – 'stole' the milk from a nursing mother by consuming the leftovers from her meal. Often it was held that the deprived woman could 'steal' the milk back again if she, in turn, ate leftovers from the animal's food. For instance, it was believed in Basilicata that if a lactating cat or dog ate from the plate of a nursing mother, her milk would dry up. To get it back, she should prepare a plate of baby's cereal, give a little of this to the animal and then eat the rest herself while saying: 'Give me my milk that you have stolen'.<sup>19</sup> In Abruzzo, it was said that even the flies gathering on the leftovers from a nursing mother's meal could steal her milk.<sup>20</sup> In this region, it was also believed that a mother suffering from agalactia could herself steal milk from any innocent animal which was lactating by consuming leftovers from its food. She

could, for instance, throw a piece of bread to a lactating she-goat and then herself eat the bread that remained or that fell from the mouth of the animal while it ate. Through this procedure the animal lost its milk, which passed instead to the breasts of the woman.<sup>21</sup>

These suppositions seem to explain some otherwise enigmatic ways to increase insufficient lactation. In Abruzzo and Puglia, the excrement of mice, usually powdered and mixed with water or bouillon, was believed to be an efficient remedy against agalactia,<sup>22</sup> and a report from Molise informs us that the mother who wished for milk in abundance should eat pasta with a sauce made from the meat of mice.<sup>23</sup> We also learn that in Nicosia (Sicily) a cure against agalactia consisted of hanging a ribbon along the ceiling in the room of the unfortunate mother, taking it down again when stained by the excrement of flies, and then boiling it in wine. This wine was to be drunk by the woman (who was told nothing about its disgusting ingredient), and she was thereby supposed to regain her milk.<sup>24</sup> These cures make sense if we assume that they connect with notions of mice and flies 'stealing' milk from the agalactous woman through their consumption of parts of the leftovers of her meals, and of her own possibility to take the milk back — not by eating leftovers from these animals' food, but instead by consuming their flesh or excrement, the latter being another kind of 'leftover' from their food.

Thus the beliefs described above account for agalactia as being caused by other persons or animals appropriating a mother's milk. This takes place under two conditions. First, the one who appropriates the milk consumes the *last* piece of food of a meal shared with the mother; second, an animal 'thief' consumes leftovers from the mother's meal.

Considering the first condition, it is clear that commensality, to share a meal, has a profound significance of unification; it is a primordial expression of togetherness. Momentarily, the sharing of a meal creates a minute, but nevertheless distinct, social unit. In that situation, the division of the finite asset of food between the two persons apparently becomes both a sensitive and evocative matter. The concern with whom consumes the last portion of the food can be seen as relating to an idea that a meal, ideally, should be shared equally, an idea commonly evoked when equals ate together. If there is one portion left, then this should ideally be divided in two equal parts so that the two eaters could share it.

The eating of the last portion of a meal without dividing and sharing it can therefore be assumed to evoke notions of greed and appropriation of what rightfully belongs to others. Such conceptions

are projected upon another asset, mother's milk, and inspire the idea that the one who appropriates the last portion of the food also appropriates the milk. Just as in the 'donations' of mother's milk, the dividing of food is a model for the distribution of mother's milk but, while the 'donations' build upon notions of egalitarian sharing, the unequal sharing of a meal suggests an unjust appropriation of milk.<sup>25</sup>

To fully understand the meanings relating to the second condition, we must more generally consider the implications of the leftovers of food and water. These could be used for sorcery; in 'magical' procedures, remainders of food could be buried in the earth, pierced with sharp objects, or fed to a toad which was then buried or tortured with sharp sticks. This was assumed to cause the person who had eaten the meal to suffer ailments and calamities.<sup>26</sup> There was a belief in Abruzzo and Campania that, if one person drank the remaining water from a glass that someone else had used, that person would be able to read the thoughts of the other.<sup>27</sup> In folk medicine, we find numerous cures and aetiologies that involve food from which animals have eaten or water from which they have drunk. These uses and beliefs cannot be discussed in detail here, since that would require lengthy arguments concerning the assumed nature of these ailments.<sup>28</sup>

However, it is clear that a fundamental notion in all these beliefs and practices is that food or water from which someone has earlier been eating or drinking constitute occult links between beings. In a certain sense the meal is still one entity, and the treatment of one part of it affects the other part. Such a connection could attach to the leftovers qualities which made them useful for curing certain ailments, or it could be exploited in order to influence the person who had left them behind. In the case of sorcery, the maltreatment of the leftovers corresponds, according to the principle of *pars pro toto* on which much of the South Italian sorcery is based, to a maltreatment of the man or woman who left them. The food of the meal is contained in the body of the person who ate it, it is assimilated by him and made part of his organism, and the leftovers are thus not only a part of the food that he ate but also a part of himself.

Accordingly, if an animal eats the leftovers of a person's meal, this suggests a consumption of the person who left the food. When a nursing woman dries up, she has lost fluid contained in her body and the idea is brought to the fore that an animal has appropriated her milk by consuming some leftovers of her food. In such a situation, as well as when she was believed to suffer from agalactia for different reasons, she may symbolically incorporate milk from lactating animals by eating what they have left.

It is therefore possible that the practice of increasing lactation by consuming the leftovers of monks' and nuns' meals can be seen, at least to some extent, as a similar appropriation. The monks and nuns certainly have no milk, but they are instead regarded as having, or being able to distribute, divine *grazia*, which is what agalactous mothers pray for. There is no 'theft' involved, however, since the leftovers are given freely, just as *grazie* are supposed to be offered by divine beings to humans as free gifts.

Finally, we may consider a procedure whereby a person was considered able to assist an agalactous mother through sharing food with her: one should eat, as it was said in Scanno (Abruzzo), a little from a trout and give the remainder to the mother.<sup>29</sup> In this procedure, the unequal sharing of food, in which the mother eats the second and largest portion, combines with the notion of flowing water as being beneficial for the flow of milk. The person who eats the first portion of the trout is not understood as being in possession of an abundance of milk. Instead, it is the trout that associates with a plenty of continuously flowing liquid, because it has been caught in one of the local streams. Another expression of the association between streams and an abundance of milk was the common idea that lactation increased if the placenta was submerged in a river or a stream. The milk of the child's mother was assumed to flow as plentifully as the water surrounding the placenta.<sup>30</sup>

### *The Funeral Meal*

As long as the body of the deceased remained in the home, one or two days, all members of the bereaved family observed a strict fast.<sup>31</sup> On Sicily, there was even a ban on drinking during this time.<sup>32</sup> The fast was broken after the burial but, for the three or more days after, when there was still great mourning, no food was cooked in the home. During this time, cooked food was brought to the family by their relatives, friends, and neighbours, a practice called *consuolo*. This term derives from the verb *consolare*, signifying 'to console' or 'to comfort', thus referring to assumed consolatory intentions of the donors. The first meal eaten after the funeral was most often on a comparatively grand scale, assuming the form of a banquet at which the bereaved family ate together with relatives and friends. This funeral meal usually consisted of an abundance of all kinds of foods,<sup>33</sup> but, as will be pointed out later, some particular foodstuffs could be banned. In some communities, the atmosphere of the funeral meal



appears to have been rather festive,<sup>34</sup> while it in others was expected to be very subdued.<sup>35</sup>

To discuss the practice of *consuolo*, one result of the discussion of mourning practices, which appears in Chapter 9, must be anticipated. The ethnography suggests that in the days following the death of an adult, all family members were symbolically in a state of death. Virtually all ordinary activities were suspended, and the deepest grief was expected to be felt by the bereaved; one expression of the family's state of death was the fast and the abstention from preparing food. After this time of intense grief, there followed a period of more ordinary mourning, suggestive of a family in which a sense of death was present, but not as overwhelmingly as in the earlier phase.

This shift from a group in a state of death into a functioning household only touched by the presence of death took place in the period when food cooked by others was brought to the mourners. The funeral meal may be seen as a symbolic re-creation of the family into a functioning household, a first step in coming to terms with its state of disintegration and death. As was mentioned earlier, eating together is a fundamental expression of belonging among human beings, and bringing relatives, friends, and acquaintances together for a meal is a way to repair the rupture in the social fabric caused by death. Those who partake in the meal reconfirm kinship and other social ties in a situation in which the fragility of human flesh threatens to disrupt them.

Food sustains life. Through the act of offering food, the bereaved family is symbolically supplied with life-force and its state of death is thereby terminated. The family's household starts to function normally again, although it is shadowed by the presence of death, and the mourners can then again cook their own food. The notion of food as a source of vital force is hinted at in a saying that the gifts of food were made so that the family of the deceased 'should not lose their powers'.<sup>36</sup> We may also note that the funeral meal might be celebrated as a rather festive event, a circumstance that suggests that the bereaved household thereby takes a significant step away from its intense involvement with death.

The leftovers from *consuolo* food should not be re-claimed by the donors. From some sources we learn that this should not be done, or that it was avoided, because it was considered a 'bad omen'.<sup>37</sup> According to other sources, the re-claiming of leftover food was avoided since it was thought to 'bring the mourning outside [of the home]',<sup>38</sup> or it was feared that to re-claim it would cause a death in the family.<sup>39</sup> Still other sources (describing customs in Abruzzo) inform us

that taking food back was avoided because it would lead to yet another death in the bereaved household.<sup>40</sup> Hence, to remove the leftovers of the *consuolo* from the bereaved home was believed to have two specific sinister consequences: (1) it would cause a further death in the bereaved family or (2) it would cause death in another family.

The first consequence may be understood as a result of the symbolic sharing of vital force being nullified. By taking back the leftovers, the donor destroys the image of him as generously bestowing the bereaved family with vital force. He avariciously takes from the family the food they need in their precarious position between death and life. Instead of being strengthened and brought back to life, the members of the household are weakened, and struck by another death.

The second consequence concerns a notion of the reclaimed food as bringing death. The funeral meal, although it symbolically brings life to the bereaved family, is permeated by the presence of death. The leftovers are still in a sense the funeral meal and, when consumed, they carry death with them. Or phrased more in terms of the logic of symbolic action, when the reclaiming family eats a 'funeral meal' in their own home there ought to be a dead family member, and one of them therefore dies.<sup>41</sup>

The idea that a death will occur in another family can also be understood – but this is a more speculative interpretation – to connect with the levelling function of sharing. When *consuolo* food is brought to the bereaved family, this means that it gains vital force while others supply it. The families of the neighbourhood or community thereby become more equal with respect to vitality. When donors take food back they appear to be stingy, and the sharing is suggestive of inefficacy. In such a case, the levelling of assets between families may take on a negative and sinister character. Members of other families die and, through this, they become in a sense equal to the already bereaved family.

Such a symbolic balancing of lives between families may shed light on the ideas that the death of a priest brought with it the death of two more persons in ordinary families, the death of a family head in the vicinity, or the death of seven or nine family heads.<sup>42</sup> In some communities of Abruzzo, it was also said that not only the death of a priest caused the death of seven family heads, but likewise the death of a man with a doctoral degree.<sup>43</sup>

The education for the priesthood was the most common investment in formal learning made among peasant and artisan families. It

was a costly undertaking, which nonetheless was an attractive economic option in a long-term perspective. Such a son, once ordained into priesthood, was expected to make an important and reliable contribution to the family's economy and to exercise until his death his influence and prestige to obtain favours for the members of his family.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, in terms of family resources, the priest represented a substantial long-term investment, which however was lost should he die – lost to a greater extent in the case of premature death and to a somewhat lesser degree if death occurred at an advanced age. Hence it could be argued that the death of a priest or a doctor struck the family and household with extraordinary force, causing greater loss of social assets than the death of an uneducated relative. Such grave ill fortune for the family could not be fully compensated for through an input of *consuolo* food nor by other means, and therefore a levelling with respect to vitality and human resources between households is created by deaths in other families. Since the loss in social assets is so great, it is not equal to only one other death, as when leftovers from the *consuolo* food were reclaimed in the case of an ordinary death, but to the death of a family head or several deaths.

Whether or not these arguments are relevant, the donations of *consuolo* food can be seen as inspired by a notion of input of vital force into a household struck by death through food brought by relatives, friends, and neighbours. In some other parts of Europe, however, the symbolism of the funeral meal quite expressly suggests an identification between the food and the deceased.<sup>45</sup> Such an identification can be seen as another solution to the problem of the family's loss of human life, that is, to recover the dead's life-force through a symbolic consumption of him.<sup>46</sup>

The ethnographic evidence in Southern Italy for such a mortuary symbolism is scant. The only more substantial indication of an association between the *consuolo* food and the deceased seems to be that the funeral meal in Abruzzo was often eaten at the table on which the corpse had been resting during the wake,<sup>47</sup> or at a table that was oriented in the room in same way as the coffin had been placed, that is, with one of its ends towards the door.<sup>48</sup>

Instead it is clear that in the period after death certain foods were identified with the dead, but were for that reason *not* consumed. The most obvious evidence of this is that meat was often banned from the meals for the members of the bereaved family. In Bagnara (Calabria), this ban was explained by the statement: '*abbiamo perso la carne e non possiamo mangiarla*' ('we have lost the flesh/meat and must not eat it'; in Italian, the word *carne* signifies both 'flesh' and 'meat').<sup>49</sup> Absten-

tion from meat for like reasons has been documented in several other regions: in Puglia, where it was said that eating meat would cause the buried corpse to be eaten by worms at an early stage;<sup>50</sup> in the Abruzzo-Molise highlands, where the bereaved thought that meat would remind them of the flesh of the deceased;<sup>51</sup> and in contemporary Naples, where it is said that '... it's human flesh that one eats: one has just buried one's flesh... Meat must not be eaten now.'<sup>52</sup> Thus meat on the table was identified with the rotting flesh in the grave; to eat meat would suggest a consumption of the corpse. The horror of such implied necrophagy is given a somewhat macabre expression by the saying from Puglia mentioned above: those who would eat meat on an occasion of death are like the worms that feed on the decaying corpse. It can therefore be concluded that a notion of necrophagy was brought to the fore when a death occurred in the family, but that it evoked horror and repugnance rather than a possibility for recovering lost force of life.

## FIVE

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# UNINTENTIONAL APPROPRIATION

This chapter is concerned with beliefs used to explain losses of vital force and of bodily substances closely associated with vitality. The core of the beliefs is the assumption that someone has appropriated what has been lost. We have already discussed some instances of such appropriation, the 'thefts' of mother's milk that occurred when food was shared unequally. Thus, it seems apposite to begin this chapter by surveying other beliefs of *furti di latte* ('thefts of milk') – this term was commonly used by those who believed in, or discussed, the phenomenon – before turning to losses of vital force in a more general sense.

### *'Thefts' of Mother's Milk*

In Grottole (Basilicata), a mother with an unweaned child who visited another nursing mother was not allowed to leave the house with her child at the breast, since leaving in this way was believed to take the milk away from the woman visited. If this rule was ignored, the mother risking the loss of her milk called the visitor back, calmly and firmly saying to her: – 'Please, give me back the milk that you have taken away'. The visiting woman was then to enter the house, again with her own child at her breast, in this way bringing the milk back.<sup>1</sup>

In Colobrarò (another community in Basilicata) it was believed that an unintentional 'theft' of mother's milk committed by a woman who visited a mother could take place when the visitor had been allowed to hold the child in her arms and, when returning it, happened to touch one of the mother's breasts. Even the slightest touch was believed to dry the breasts from milk. Nor was a visiting woman allowed to dry the mouth of the baby with a handkerchief after it had been fed. Should the visiting woman inadvertently put her foot into milk which the baby had vomited on the floor, this was also considered a potential theft of milk.<sup>2</sup> Yet another belief was documented in Basilicata: a visiting woman with her unweaned child must not give the breast to the infant with her back turned against the hostess mother as, again, she would be suspected of unintentionally 'stealing' her milk. If milk had been stolen in this way, it could be returned if the two women shared a meal. It was also considered dangerous for a woman to nurse a baby that was not her own and, although the

ethnographer does not explicitly say so, it can be understood from the context of this information that the danger was loss of milk.<sup>3</sup>

Similar ideas of 'thefts' of mother's milk have been documented in other parts of Southern Italy. In Calabria, it was believed that if a nursing woman conceded to do another mother the favour of nursing her child, she ought to give the child back to its mother with her left hand had it been drinking from the right breast and vice versa. Was this not observed, the child 'took the milk away' and the milk of the woman would dry up, at least in the breast from which the child had been drinking.<sup>4</sup> In Abruzzo, if a mother with an unweaned child allowed another nursing woman to taste her milk, it was held that she would suffer from agalactia.<sup>5</sup> There are no indications in any of the ethnographic sources that the 'thief' was morally condemned; rather, the appropriation seems to have been regarded as a kind of natural phenomenon for which the 'thief' could not be held responsible. Furthermore, in both Calabria and Abruzzo, it was believed that a cat or a dog could 'steal' the milk from a mother by licking up some of it which had been spilt on the ground or by otherwise tasting it. This risk was especially great if the animal was lactating.<sup>6</sup>

It was also thought that the turgid breasts of a nursing woman could be drained of their milk just by the envious gaze of a nursing mother who herself had an insufficient supply. This was considered to be a form of the evil eye.<sup>7</sup> In one story, told by a female informant from Savoia (Basilicata) and recorded by the Italian ethnographer Ernesto De Martino in the 1950s, the idea of a 'theft' of milk provoked by a desiring glance merges with a theme of male erotic desires. De Martino retells the story in the following words:<sup>8</sup>

'Once at the end of the harvest season [thirty years ago] a farm worker returned from Puglia and walked on foot the way back to his hometown Potenza, making stops here and there on the way. One evening he passed through the village of Vaglio. There a young mother sat by the door of her house, feeding her little baby from her breast. She was so absorbed in this that she did not notice the man who passed by. But he did take notice of her, and especially of her white, full breasts, and he could not keep back a feeling of envy [*invidiare*] for that splendour. He continued his walk and arrived in Potenza, but there he suddenly felt a strain in the chest and, touching it, he felt that his own breast was filled with milk. He immediately set out to return to the woman what had been stolen from her and, in fact, he found her in tears, having lost her milk. With no further explanation, the harvester made himself ready to perform one of the rites prescribed by tradition for returning stolen milk. He started to recite the formula:

*I have your milk  
give me a slice of bread*

*now I take a bite of it  
and you snatch it from me, saying  
'Give me my bread'*

During the recitation, the corresponding acts were performed. The woman gave the harvester a piece of bread without saying anything, he took a bite from it and she snatched it from his mouth, repeating the words: 'Give me my bread'. When the ceremony had been performed, the two separated without exchanging further words, and the harvester returned to Potenza. His breast had been emptied of milk, while the breasts of the young woman had once again become filled and turgid.'

The procedure supposed to restore the milk is a further variation of the beliefs that relate loss of milk to unequal sharing of food. In this procedure, unequal sharing takes on the form of a blatant theft of food, the woman tearing the bread from the man's mouth while he eats. This act corresponds to her intention to regain her milk which the man unwillingly has taken away from her.

Desire is central in this story. The harvester is seized by erotic desire, which, since it is inspired by the sight of the mother's turgid breasts, has a resemblance to the desire for the abundant milk of fortunate mothers experienced by less fortunate ones. The story playfully combines notions relating to these two forms of desire by letting the harvester involuntarily appropriate her milk; the effect of his erotic desire, experienced in an inappropriate context of motherly love rather than sexuality, is an undesired and ridiculous feminisation. Desire is also of crucial importance in another story, told as a self-experienced event, recorded in Basilicata in the 1950s by the American social scientist Edward Banfield (1958: 56). In this case, however, it is not a look of desire, but the pronunciation of certain words of praise, implying a wish for having plenty of milk, which brings about the drying up of mother's milk:

*'... a mother told a group of ladies that when she was nursing her second child she had so much milk that she had to wear a rubber guard to avoid soiling her clothes. One day when she was visiting a friend the milk began flowing and continued until there was a puddle on the floor. Her friend remarked, "How lucky you are. And here am I, who cannot produce a drop". On her return home the woman found that her breasts were dry. They remained dry, and she was unable to nurse her next babies.'*

Thus all the beliefs on record – related in the previous pages – are based on the assumption that one cause of agalactia is someone appropriating the milk. Typically this happens when a mother with plenty of milk is confronted with a person (or animal) who can be suspected to covet the milk: a nursing mother (who always wish for plenty of milk); a mother who by words of praise implies her desire

for the abundance of milk; or a suckling child (who displays an uninhibited desire for milk). Another typical feature is that the notion of appropriation is brought to the fore by acts suggestive of removal and seizure: a woman leaves a house with her child at the breast, thereby inspiring a thought that she leaves with the milk; a touch of the hand, a gesture associated with the taking of something; wiping up milk with a handkerchief, an act of removal through absorption; a woman gives milk to her own child, with her back turned towards the mother – a position with connotations of concealed and illicit activities; another woman tastes the milk or animals lick it up, an actual consumption of milk.

Hence, the essential nature of the appropriation of milk is – as the Italian term suggests – a theft. The ‘thief’, however, is not indicative of having any malicious intent to deprive another person. She expresses only the innocent wish for the milk she needs or happens to act in a way suggestive of taking.<sup>9</sup> She is not morally condemned. In fact, the appropriation has a certain legitimacy. According to the ideology of sharing scarce assets, those who have little have a justified claim on anyone who has more, although it is not warranted to demand all.

An argument that might be raised against the interpretation of ‘thefts’ of milk as an appropriation by one person from another is the fact that, in many instances, the ‘thief’ is not supposed to gain, as logically she would. For example, in the story related by Banfield, the envious mother is not described as able to nurse after the ‘theft’. This weakness in logical consequence, something which we will also find in other beliefs that concern unintentional appropriation of vital force, may be understood if the contexts of the beliefs is considered. The beliefs of ‘thefts’ of milk were evidently used as an explanation for agalactia, an ailment that often appeared to peasant women as inexplicable. It is thus actual or feared *loss* of milk which evokes a notion of appropriation. The idea seems suggestive enough to allow discrepancies in actual circumstances – the ‘thief’ does not actually gain any milk. In the mythical world the basic principle is occasionally given full expression, such as in the case of the harvester who is said to have received the milk of the young mother in his own chest.

### *The Evil Eye*

Beliefs in the evil eye can be found among many peoples, and folklorists, psychologists, sociologists and anthropologists have paid much attention to the subject.<sup>10</sup> The evil eye has been seen as being



based upon gaze behaviour which humans share with many animal species,<sup>11</sup> as a representation of patron-client relationships,<sup>12</sup> as a means of social control of deviant persons in the name of community values,<sup>13</sup> and as an expression of envious feelings.<sup>14</sup> George Foster sees the evil eye as an expression of a cognitive orientation of 'limited good' among peasants,<sup>15</sup> and Allan Dundes has combined this view with symbolic and psychoanalytical interpretations.<sup>16</sup> The view proposed here bears similarities to that presented by Foster, since evil eye beliefs are related to egalitarian ideology, and is similar also to that of Dundes, who argues that an equilibrium between wetness (associating with life) and dryness (associating with loss of life) is an essential component in these beliefs. However, I have neither adopted Foster's view of an 'Image of Limited Good' nor the psychoanalytical perspective of Dundes. What is more, I make no claims for the relevance of this interpretation for similar beliefs in other societies, since the notion of occult ocular influence can evidently be incorporated into rather diverse frames of social significances.<sup>17</sup>

The belief in *malocchio* or *iettatura*, the evil eye, has been and still is wide-spread and enduring in Southern Italy. The notion was typically brought to the fore as a way of explaining why someone or something – a human being, an animal or an inanimate object – had suffered harm. Even if a physical cause for this could be recognised – for instance, that a horse had broken its leg stepping into a hole – the question still remained as to why this had happened: why did the horse step there? In the search for a deeper cause it was thought that someone, intentionally or unintentionally, had cast the evil eye.<sup>18</sup> Typically this happened when the suspect had looked at, or praised, what was harmed. The term *malocchio* could be used in a restricted sense to mean only the wilfully activated evil eye, while the involuntary variant was called *iettatura*.<sup>19</sup> This distinction is maintained throughout the following text in order to distinguish between these two variants. There is little information in the ethnography about local 'theories' concerning the more precise way in which the harm is inflicted. It seems that the evil eye was accepted by many as a real phenomenon beyond doubt, even if no elaborate explanation of its nature could be offered.<sup>20</sup>

The English term 'evil eye' is an appropriate translation only for *malocchio*, *male* means 'evil' or 'bad' and *occhio* means 'eye'. However, it is less suitable to render the more common *iettatura*. The *iettatore* was not thought to wish evil, even though the effects of his eye were seen as disastrous. An Italian ethnographer speaks of the *occhio bono* (the 'good eye') in discussing cases when the evil eye has been acti-

vated by strong feelings of positive appraisal.<sup>21</sup> The Italian term *iettatura* derives from the Latin verb *ieictare* (to throw, to cast) which has no moral connotations. The term 'evil eye' is used here nevertheless, since it is the standard English translation for both *iettatura* and *malocchio*.<sup>22</sup>

Let us consider in some detail the harms thought to be inflicted by the evil eye. These belong to two categories. (1) It ruins the health and life of human beings, animals and plants and harms biological processes involving growth and fertility. (2) It causes misfortunes that bring disaster to objects, persons and projects. The following examples are representative of the first type of harm:

– A person who was the victim of the evil eye suffered from anaemia, general weakness, paleness, dizziness, fainting, loss of weight, lameness, sleepiness, a sudden withering away, poor appetite, vomiting, convulsions, exhaustion, an unexplainable feeling of fatigue in the arms and legs, spontaneous abortion, sterility, deep melancholy, fever, headache or colic. If the evil eye was strong, the afflicted person could die.<sup>23</sup>

– The health of animals is affected in much the same way as that of human beings: they waste away, horses lose weight, pigs do not become fat, whatever they are fed.<sup>24</sup>

– As we know from the previous section, nursing mothers may lose their milk, and lactating animals may also go dry.<sup>25</sup>

– The crops may be harmed by persons gazing at the fields or watching the work of harvesting;<sup>26</sup> trees and plants may be impeded from setting fruit, or dry up so that they wither and die;<sup>27</sup> and, in baking bread, the evil eye might prevent the dough from rising.<sup>28</sup>

The common denominator in these injuries is that the evil eye causes a loss of vital force. A living organism that has formerly possessed an abundance, or at least an adequate amount, of vital force loses vitality. Since humidity is intimately linked with life, the harms of the evil eye often take the form of a drying process;<sup>29</sup> we may note that the evil eye could be attributed the capacity to dry up a well.<sup>30</sup> The 'drying' effect of the evil eye was expressed verbally – in Basilicata, chronic sufferings of the evil eye were called *ucchiatura secca* ('dry evil eye');<sup>31</sup> a Campanian term for the evil eye was *uocchi sicchi*, ('dry eyes');<sup>32</sup> and in Naples '... people who are envious or evil-minded are ... called [*uocchie sicche*], because envy and evil-mindedness are believed to "dry up" one's energy and the resources and good-fortune of others'.<sup>33</sup>

Examples of the second type of harms – which in Naples could be said to be caused by a specific type of the evil eye, the *iettatura sospen-*

*siva* ('suspensive evil eye'), a term which will be used below with reference to this type of influence – are the following unlucky events: a person has bad luck in card games, someone loses money in financial transactions or suffers an unsuccessful outcome of a legal process, a horse rears so that its carriage is turned over, a person loses his voice when speaking in front of an audience, a love affair takes an unhappy ending, a person misses the train he is hurrying for, domestic mishaps occur (such as the breaking of objects) and mechanical gadgets break or cease to function.<sup>34</sup>

To understand why misfortunes were thought to be caused by the evil eye, we must first consider an important implication of the notions of fortune and misfortune in traditional Southern Italy. The essence of *buona fortuna* ('good fortune') lies in its reference to what is *extra*, something that is additional to what is expected and normal. This conception of the extra is found over and over again when the notion of good fortune is evoked.

Among the circumstances leading to the arrival of good fortune, there were especially two that occupied the minds of South Italians and stimulated their imagination: to win a *terno* on the game of *lotto* (the top prize in a very popular kind of lottery) and to find a treasure of gold buried in the earth. Legends telling of enchanted treasures and attempts made to take possession of them circulated in virtually all villages and towns; the assumption that the winning lotto numbers could be foretold inspired numerous methods of prediction as well as an elaborate 'science' of how to interpret events in dreams and real life in terms of numbers, the knowledge of which was published in thick manuals. Common to both circumstances is the idea that an immense amount of wealth will suddenly be bestowed upon a fortunate person. Such an event would be extraordinary and entirely separated from everyday economic activities involving transactions of property, goods and labour. An appropriate term for the wealth gained would be *extra-economic*.

A two-tailed lizard was commonly used as *portafortuna* ('luck-bringer'). It was held to bring richness and happiness to the person who owned it, and it was also considered a good omen to see one.<sup>35</sup> Such a lizard could be used as protection against the influence of the evil eye at games of cards and generally to increase chances of luck during the game.<sup>36</sup> It was also believed that, through certain procedures, a two-tailed lizard could reveal the winning numbers of a game of lotto. For instance, it could be made to crawl on a surface sprinkled with bran in which it was supposed to trace the numbers.<sup>37</sup> While the lizard is a symbolically potent reptile, suggestive of regen-

eration of life from death, this potency becomes extraordinary in the case of a lizard with two tails because it is so rare and has something *extra*. Consequently, in Sicily, a lizard with no tail was thought to bring misfortune.<sup>38</sup> Such a lizard has not even what is ordinary and normal; something is missing. Another example of a *portafortuna* associated with something extra, additional and multiplied is the four-leafed clover. As in many other European countries, it was considered to bring good luck to the one who found it.<sup>39</sup> Clover is a herb which grows in great luxuriance (it has been employed as an emblem for vital force), and hence a clover with an *extra* leaf suggests extraordinary abundance.<sup>40</sup>

There was a belief, at least in Abruzzo, that all things safeguarding against the evil eye and against misfortune in general ought to be stolen, or at least received as gifts. An example of this from more recent times is the idea that a car owner might avoid road accidents by stealing the radiator filler cap from another car to use it on his own vehicle.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, the idea was widespread that a horseshoe brought luck and protected against misfortunes, although only when it had been found accidentally, received as a gift or stolen.<sup>42</sup> In Calabria, it was thought that to have a chance of winning in the *giuoco delle nocciuole* ('the game of fruitstones'), the fruitstones with which one played the game had to have been received as a gift.<sup>43</sup> In these ideas, we again find the extra in the sense of extra-economic. If a person buys a horse-shoe, for instance, he participates in an economic transaction in which objects of value are exchanged. In stealing something or receiving it as a gift, a person gains without losing. The value so stolen or received is separate from, and additional and extra to, the transactional exchanges of ordinary economy. The incidentally found, stolen or gratuitously received object embodies the notion of the extra and is therefore believed to promote it in the form of good fortune.

Persons having certain physical characteristics were thought to be especially lucky. A rich growth of hair on the body and the face was, in the case of a man, seen as a sign of virility, health, vital force and good fortune, while little hair implied stupidity and lack of energy and initiative.<sup>44</sup> Another idea was that a child who had been born with the caul would be fortunate,<sup>45</sup> and that those who were so born could protect themselves against misfortunes and ailments by carrying a dried piece of the caul as a charm.<sup>46</sup> In both these cases, the occurrence of something extra on a person — also suggestive of vital force (the hair, the organic substance of the foetal membrane enveloping the head) — is taken as an indication of extraordinarily good fortune.

The notion of fortune as something unexpected and extra seems also to have inspired the sayings, in communities in Sicily and Abruzzo, that it is good luck to be hit on the head by a bird's dropping outdoors,<sup>47</sup> that it is a good omen to find an ant crawling on one's body,<sup>48</sup> and that it is a sign of coming abundance if a cricket leaps upon someone.<sup>49</sup> There is also a Calabrian term designating an unusually lucky person: *lu sputatu* ('the one who has been spit upon').<sup>50</sup> In these sayings, however, what constitutes something extra has no obvious connotations of wealth or vitality, excepting the saliva.<sup>51</sup>

To sum up: good fortune in traditional Southern Italy implies that a person acquires something extra and is raised *above par*, in comparison with what is expected and normal. Misfortune, then, implies that he falls *under par*: he has suffered a loss and experiences a deficit in relation to his expectations. Hence the *iettatura sospensiva* essentially brings about a sudden loss of assets.

It can therefore be proposed that the notion of the evil eye was employed to explain the loss of two classes of assets, one more specific and one more general. When the evil eye causes bodily weakness, illness or death, the victim has lost vital force and falls below par with respect to life energy. In the case of the *iettatura sospensiva*, the victim is suddenly deprived of a normal amount of wealth, property or other things seen as crucial to his well-being. The loss of these things, which would be possible to distinguish as a number of separate kinds of assets, is generally conceived as misfortune.

Misfortune, or a loss of vital force, could be explained as a result of some unknown person's casting of the evil eye at some unknown point in time. However, the evil eye was commonly thought to strike the victim in a particular situation and to be activated by a particular individual. What is hurt by the evil eye is typically an entity suggesting prosperity and abundance, such as a fat pig, the turgid udder of a cow, a chubby baby, a healthy adult, a brand new olive press and the like. As has been mentioned, the entity suffers harm when a person praises or gazes at it. In many contexts, the verbal expression of praise suggests that the one who expresses admiration would himself like to possess or otherwise enjoy what he is praising. Similarly, it is through vision that the abundance of others is perceived, and a prolonged gaze at the desirable object or state indicates a wish for it – in the Italian language, the expression *mangiare con gli occhi* ('to eat with the eyes') is used to describe such an intense gaze, filled with desire.

Hence envy is of great importance in the evil eye beliefs. Defined as the desire to possess the advantages enjoyed by others, it is the

essence of the *iettatura*; defined as the *malicious* such desire, it is crucial for the *malocchio*. Envy triggers the evil eye, and so the evil eye could also be called *invidia* ('envy').<sup>52</sup> It may be noted that the word *invidia* itself was formed with reference to a notion of harmful ocular influence since it is derived from the Latin verb *invidere* ('to look upon').

Therefore, the *iettatura* could be activated involuntarily by anyone through an innocent word of praise, by astonishment when confronted with abundance and beauty pertaining to others or simply by an admiring look. A person and his valuable belongings could even be struck by the evil eye involuntarily cast by his dearest friends and relatives. Most often it was thought to be activated by persons in the community who were, roughly speaking, the equals of the victim with respect to wealth and social position. It was believed, however, that unusually thin, lanky and emaciated persons were especially prone to cast the evil eye.<sup>53</sup>

In summary, the activation of the evil eye was typically thought to occur in situations in which a person was confronted with something valuable belonging to someone else and displayed behaviour suggestive of desire; the emaciated individual personifies a notion of shortage, implying a permanent desire. We may note that the expression *sanguisugo a diguno* ('fasting medicinal leech') is used in Italy to denote an emaciated person, hence connecting this state with an inclination to appropriate the vital fluid of human beings. With respect to the coveted object, the *iettatore* has less of the same compared with the victim and the notion of the former's harmful influence is essentially, it is argued here, that he appropriates what he desires — he 'eats' with his eyes.<sup>54</sup>

The evil eye therefore bears similarities with 'thefts' of milk and, as with these, the *iettatore* was typically supposed to have had no harmful intention, but only a desire to own or enjoy that possessed by others, and would not be reprimanded or subjected to sanctions.<sup>55</sup> Rather, we find examples of how he or she — like the 'thieves' of milk — was kindly asked to participate in procedures aiming at the removal of the influence of the *iettatura*.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, since *iettatore* and victim typically belong to a group of persons who ideally should share scarce assets, the appropriation has a certain legitimacy; the *iettatore* has a justified claim on the victim for a share.

In the case of the consciously inflicted *malocchio*, the person who throws the evil eye is thought to have both evil and immoral intentions and is therefore morally condemned. He may be envious, greedy and have a wish to enrich himself beyond limits at the

expense of others. He may have a wicked desire, not so much for appropriating from others, but for causing harm and suffering. Some individuals were considered to have a greedy, wicked, resentful and envious character which caused them to cast the evil eye continuously. The idea of the voluntarily activated evil eye tended to merge with beliefs in other supernatural and evil forces causing harm and some people regarded it as a kind of sorcery. In Basilicata, for instance, certain forms of suffering were said to be the result of *fascinationatura* ('fascination'), which could be caused not only by the evil eye but also by sorcery and possession by spirits.<sup>57</sup>

As was the case regarding most 'thefts' of milk, the logical consequence of the appropriation is not elaborated. The person who casts the evil eye is not understood as gaining an amount of vital force in correspondence to what the victim loses, nor to benefit from what is lost through bad fortune caused by *iettatura sospensioa*. Like the notions of 'thefts' of milk, the notion of the evil eye was used as an explanation for losses suffered, not to account for someone else's gain of vital force or good fortune. Since the loss is an actual event that could seldom be juxtaposed in time with an actual gain by a person suggestive of desiring what was lost, the corollary is left without elaboration. Furthermore, the *malocchio* was seen as an evil desire to harm others and, hence, the stress was laid on loss rather than on a possible gain.

Let us now turn to a discussion of counter-measures against the evil eye. As a prevention, a possible victim or desirable object could be concealed. Abundance and prosperity that nobody can see cannot excite desire and so is safe from the evil eye. For instance, attractive foodstuffs could be carried home hidden under one's clothes, or the turgid udder of a she-goat could be covered by a sack.<sup>58</sup> It may also be argued that such behaviour was a way to avoid claims from others for a share and their criticism should they receive nothing, which in social rhetoric was spoken of as a counter-measure against the evil eye.<sup>59</sup> Such a precaution would however be closely related to the notion of the evil eye, since both concern the distribution of scarce assets within an ideally egalitarian community.

If objects could not be hidden from the gaze of others, there was the alternative to depreciate their value. A source referring to Basilicata describes the case of a woman who received compliments for her sow, but interrupted these by enumerating more or less actual defects of the animal in order to avoid the evil eye.<sup>60</sup> N. T. Colclough (1971: 226) describes a case of a rather well-to-do man whose...

'...only surviving child was invariably dressed in rags. As his wife explained to me, she had already lost a baby daughter as the result of the envious glances of her neighbours and had no intention of exposing her son to the same danger.'

There was a strong reluctance not only to speak in positive terms about one's belongings but also to talk about one's own health. When asked about the state of well-being, it was common to answer *meno male* ('less bad') if one felt fine, and when asked how things were going, a person who prospered could easily respond: 'I am still alive'.<sup>61</sup>

A variation of the protective measure of depreciation has been documented in Cetraro (Calabria). A newborn baby was seldom shown to anyone outside the family, since it was feared that the evil eye would strike it. If someone was nevertheless allowed to have a look at it, that person had to repeat, together with the mother: *è bruttu, è malfattu, prestu more* ('he is ugly, he is malformed, he will soon die') and so on while the child was being shown.<sup>62</sup> This procedure forces the viewer to signal no desire for the child by pronouncing words indicating sentiments of dislike. More common was the practice of adding words such as *Dio ti benedica* ('God bless you') when a child had been complemented so as to suggest that the person who praised had nothing but good intentions.<sup>63</sup>

Another protective tactic was to share what one had with the one who coveted it. For instance, if someone happened to come while one was eating, it was customary to invite the visitor to share, and the invitation could then be made with an explicit reference that, if not accepted, this would cause the host to be struck by the evil eye of the unexpected guest.<sup>64</sup>

Hence, concealment, depreciation and sharing were practices employed as means of protection against the evil eye. The belief in its power therefore tended to reify the image of a community of egalitarian peasants, where no one possessed more than his neighbour. Individual behaviour was regulated so that displays of assets in amounts exceeding the average were suppressed. If ostentation should occur, the value of the items displayed was depreciated, and other community members could be invited to share.<sup>65</sup> Anthropological studies have shown that in some societies accusations of 'witchcraft' are a powerful means of social control, in that those who deviate from the norms for proper behaviour are likely to be singled out as possessing a malevolent, destructive force.<sup>66</sup> Concerning the South Italian ethnography, it is clear that this was not an aspect of the belief in the involuntarily activated *iettatura*, since *anyone* could be believed



to cast the evil eye. Instead, social control concerns potential victims, who conceal, depreciate or share wealth. As to the intentionally activated evil eye, however, it is likely that socially deviant persons were accused, although this is not explicitly said in the sources. This is so because the belief in *malocchio* tended to merge with images of evil witches and malevolent sorcery. These images included anti-social behaviour and moral corruption, and it is clear that persons on the margins of society could easily be associated with diabolic and evil forces. The wider social framework of the evil eye beliefs, of which the old ethnographic sources tell us little, is a gradually modernising society in which ideals relating to a disappearing egalitarian peasantry are confronted with increasing social and economic inequality.

Finally, let us discuss charms employed as protection against the evil eye. A wide variety of such objects was used, and it is beyond the scope of the present study to offer a comprehensive description and analysis of these. In an article discussing beliefs in the evil eye in the Mediterranean area – and particularly on the Italian island of Pantelleria – Anthony Galt (1982: 670) concludes that the prophylactic measures have three major common 'emic subcomponents': '(1) diversion of gaze, (2) appeal to stronger powers, and (3) injury and blockage of the offending eye.' Galt's conclusion applies well to many, but not all, South Italian protective measures taken against the evil eye. Here the discussion will focus on charms connected with the notion of the evil eye as an appropriation of vital force and fortune from the victim, in that they all counteract the influence of the evil eye by symbolically bestowing the bearer with extraordinary fortune and strong vital force. It may be recalled that one specific type of charms bestowing the bearer with extra-ordinary fortune has already been mentioned: the *portafortune*, which were used not only to bring luck, but also to protect against the evil eye.

If a seriously ill person was considered to be moribund, all the charms that he wore as a protection against the evil eye and other malevolent forces could be removed in the belief that they would only prolong his suffering.<sup>67</sup> It can hardly be assumed that the relatives would allow the person to fall prey to evil forces. Instead, the act of removing the charms can be construed as a devitalization of the dying person through the withdrawal of objects symbolically conferring vital force, allowing him to expire peacefully. This idea may be compared with the Calabrian belief that, should a person have brought a piece of firewood to his house with some mistletoe growing on it, he would suffer a prolonged, agonizing death.<sup>68</sup> In Southern Italy, mistletoe was a symbol of fertility and immortality: to bring

'immortality' to the home resulted in an inability to die.<sup>69</sup> Both the amulets and the mistletoe have the effect of prolonging the death agony as they objectify life and vitality.

Probably the most common protective charm against the evil eye was, and still is, horns. Authentic horns from ox, ram, goat, stag and other animals were used, as were charms depicting horns (made from red coral, mother of pearl, lava-stone, silver or gold) and other small objects resembling horns (such as a red pepper or a tooth from a wild boar or from a pig).<sup>70</sup> The protective power of horns could also be evoked by making the 'horn' gesture against immediate threats from the evil eye – the index and little fingers were extended while the other fingers were bent down towards the palm of the hand. Charms depicting a hand making the 'horn' gesture were also common.

The horn, in the area of the Mediterranean as well as in numerous other cultures, is a symbol of abundance, virile strength, fertility and vitality, hence the image of the *cornucopia* ('horn of plenty', a representation of a horn overflowing with fruit, flowers and grain). Horns suggest physical force, since animals employ them as weapons of defence and attack and horns display a rather independent power of growth (which in the case of castrated male animals is markedly depleted). Horns grow out of an animal's head and were associated in antiquity with the spirit of the beast. Furthermore, horns were thought to be moistened by the cerebrospinal fluid, which was identified with sperm and with a generic life fluid; thus the horn was viewed as a congealed concentration and outcrop of the animal's life force.<sup>71</sup>

The horn is the defensive charm *par excellence*. It symbolically bestows its bearer with an abundance of strength and virile power; it suggests that the bearer will be above par in this respect, as long as the horn is carried or displayed. Moreover, the evil eye is confronted with a congealed and solid form of the vital humours of the organism, which implies that the person in danger will withstand attacks that threaten to dry up vital juices. The horn is pointed, it is a weapon of defence, making it a member of the class of amulets which, owing to their sharpness and pungency, suggest injury to the evil eye (some examples of such amulets are: a dagger, a pin, a nail, a scythe and a pair of scissors).

From a Freudian perspective, the horn might be understood as a phallic symbol. A set of charms and apotropaic gestures are those which depict or indicate the male genitals more explicitly. Phallic amulets were considered by the Romans to be a most effective charm against the evil eye, and the use of them in Southern Italy was docu-

mented in the nineteenth century.<sup>72</sup> In the case of immediate threats from the evil eye, a phallic gesture could be made with the hand, by holding the middle-finger straight up while the other fingers were bent down towards the palm of the hand. Against such threats it was also common to make the *fica* gesture, which in the vocabulary of Italian hand signs signify intercourse (the position of the fingers suggests the penis in the vagina; in Italian, the word *fica* is a vulgar term for vagina). Protective charms in the form of a miniature hand making one of these gestures were used, and especially the *manofica* seems to have been common. An explicit reference to the genitals is found also in the common male gesture for warding off the evil eye: to touch the testicles.<sup>73</sup> The erect penis indicates an extraordinarily intense state of vitality, in which a man enjoys his virile force at the peak of its strength. The phallic charms and their corresponding gestures may be understood as symbolically bestowing abundant virile energy, which counteracts the power of the evil eye to draw away life force.<sup>74</sup>

The erect penis also associates with the regeneration of life through sexual procreation. A theme of regeneration is suggested by numerous charms that associate with periodic rejuvenation and/or rebirth from death: the moon,<sup>75</sup> the toad and the frog,<sup>76</sup> the crab,<sup>77</sup> the crayfish,<sup>78</sup> the snake,<sup>79</sup> the lizard<sup>80</sup> and the egg.<sup>81</sup> The connection between regeneration and these entities is commonly found in European cultures and is extensively documented in the literature.<sup>82</sup> The association draws on natural features of the objects – the waning and waxing of the moon; the ability of the toad and frog to hibernate during periods of dryness and cold, which appears as a death followed by a rebirth; the changing of skin by the snake or the lizard or a shell by the crab and the crayfish, which give them an appearance of ‘dying’ and being born again; and the capacity of the egg to contain and perpetuate life. These animals and entities objectify a particular ability to rejuvenate life and thereby escape the irrevocable destiny of ordinary biological withering away and dying. An extraordinary form of recreative vitality is suggested, protecting against the influence of the evil eye.

The colour red was widely used against the evil eye, and many of the protective charms, regardless of their material or depiction (horns, *manofica*), were red or incorporated some red element. Red in Italy, as well as among numerous other peoples, associates with blood, strength, virility and life itself.<sup>83</sup> To paint something red, or otherwise associate it with this colour, is therefore to confer to it a quality of strength and vitality and to do this with a degree of permanence that

suggests that vital force will not easily decrease. Silver and gold were commonly used for charms depicting objects in miniature such as crescent moons, toads, horns etcetera. These metals are valuable, and so they objectify the wealth, abundance and fortune of those who wear them.<sup>84</sup> The precious red coral (*Corallium rubrum*) was also used extensively for the manufacture of charms, and it can be assumed that this use was inspired not only by its colour and costliness. In South European societies we find examples of how red coral has been associated with the productive forces of the sea, and also with blood.<sup>85</sup> It represents an abundance of humidity and life in a solid and permanent form.

### *Menstruation*

The ethnographic literature gives abundant evidence that, in all regions of Southern Italy, a menstruating woman was thought to bring harm. In Sicily, it was believed that she made plants dry up simply by touching them, that she could stop a horse carriage solely by entering it and that she would break the back of a donkey should she mount it (unless a little salt had been spread on its back).<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, if she let her water by the root of a tree, the tree would wither and dry, and if she mounted a pregnant mare, the animal would abort.<sup>87</sup> If she kissed a child under one year of age, it would be harmed. More specifically, it was believed that the kiss would cause the child to be afflicted by milk thrush or milky scabs.<sup>88</sup>

In Calabria, it was believed that a menstruating woman could harm a tree, so that it withered and died, by touching it or climbing it; that she made a horse or donkey collapse if she mounted it; that no blood would flow from a pig or a cow if she were present at the slaughter or blood-letting of it; that pork sausage made by her would soon become spoiled; that she caused wine to turn to vinegar and preserved tomatoes to become sour; more generally, it was held that she should not touch any kind of preserved foods, cheese or fat meat, since these foodstuffs would then become rancid.<sup>89</sup>

In Abruzzo, it was held that a well would dry up if menstrual blood, even only a single drop, fell into it and that, if a new well was to be dug, the workers would certainly have to dig deep if there was a menstruating woman among them. Therefore, if female workers were to be employed in the digging of a well, girls and old women were preferred. It was thought that the tree that had been climbed by a menstruating woman would soon turn dry and die, and that the flowers in a vase, if touched by her, would lose freshness and become dry. If she mounted a horse or travelled by horse and wagon, the

animals would soon become tired or crippled. Furthermore, many domestic undertakings went wrong when a menstruating woman performed them: preserved foods turned sour, must was spoiled and pork sausages became rancid or rotted. It was held that a woman who had her period was particularly dangerous if menstruation had set on while she sat close to the domestic fire.<sup>90</sup>

Beliefs similar to these were current all over Southern Italy,<sup>91</sup> and nearly all of the harms caused by a menstruating woman were of two kinds. First, she has a corrupting influence. This is most evident when she causes foodstuffs to become sour, spoiled, rancid or rotten, but it may also be discerned in the idea that her kiss causes children to become afflicted with milky scabs or milk thrush, since these ailments were seen as symptoms of the presence of corrupt fluids in the infantile organism.<sup>92</sup> Second, her presence or touch causes a drain of liquid and vitality – plants and trees dry up, wells go dry, animals tire or are injured or are changed into a 'dry' state so that no blood will flow from their bodies when slaughtered or blood-let. These two categories of harm can be seen as relating to two different aspects of menstruation: to the nature of the blood that was lost and to the loss of blood in itself.

The idea of the first category of harm no doubt expresses an association between menstruation and corruption. The opinion that menstruation is beneficial to the health of women, since it is an evacuation of corrupted humours, was held by medical scholars from antiquity up to modern times.<sup>93</sup> This opinion has been documented among most Mediterranean peoples, together with the idea that the blood in itself is polluting because it carries with it the filth that accumulates in the organism between the menses.<sup>94</sup> In a Sicilian riddle, menstruation is said to keep a woman healthy,<sup>95</sup> but there are otherwise few explicit references in South Italian ethnography to menstruation as a bringer of health. It is clear, however, that an absence of menstruation was seen as a dangerous state causing illness; sometimes this was specified as ailments typically thought of as caused by corrupted bodily humours, such as rheumatism and swellings.<sup>96</sup> This view indicates that, in Southern Italy as well, menstruation was seen as a beneficial elimination of corrupted fluids.<sup>97</sup> Thus, on the basis of historical evidence and ethnographic indications it seems reasonable to assume that menstrual blood has long been associated with corrupted bodily fluids and that this is the reason for the idea that menstruating women have a corrupting influence on organic matter.

The second category of harm, characterized by a drain of liquid and depletion of vitality, can be understood as relating to the fact that

the menstruating woman loses blood. Blood is the vital humour *par excellence*, and there is evidence that menstrual blood was associated not only with corrupt fluids but also with vital force. In Vasto (Abruzzo), for instance, young girls washed their hair in water mixed with their first menstrual blood because they thought that this would make their hair grow rich and beautiful.<sup>98</sup> In San Giorgio Morgeto (Calabria), women dripped some of their menstrual blood on the earth of the potted plants in the home in the belief that this would make the plants grow luxuriant.<sup>99</sup>

Just as agalactia could be explained by the notion of a 'theft' of mother's milk performed by a desiring person, and just as a loss of vital force and of good fortune was explained by the evil eye of a person suggesting a desire for the vitality and fortune of others, the loss of blood by the menstruating woman evokes an idea that her loss of vital humour will be compensated by an appropriation from other living organisms.<sup>100</sup> In terms of vital humours, the menstruating woman is 'dry' and therefore even more dangerous should her bleeding have started near fire; the heat intensifies her 'dryness'.<sup>101</sup> We also find this drying influence of fire on bodily humours in some beliefs concerning mother's milk: reports from Calabria and Abruzzo say it was common belief that if some milk accidentally fell into the domestic fire, the breasts would go dry.<sup>102</sup>

Unlike the 'thief' of milk and the *iettatore*, the menstruating woman never causes harm to other human beings through her drying influence. Furthermore, when bringing about such effects she has neither been indicative of taking what has been lost nor of desiring it – the only thing she does is to bleed. Ideas concerning intentions and morals are absent from the beliefs in her harmful influence, which is perceived rather as a purely natural phenomenon brought about by physical contact or proximity between her and objects in her environment. Her corrupting influence is contagious, while her drying up influence works as though she were a dry sponge that absorbs liquid. It may be recalled that this homeostatic principle was also present in the folk medical cures discussed in Chapter 3, in which a dry object was used to dry up unwanted bodily humours or excrescences. Indeed, a menstruating woman could be asked to participate in such a cure: her touch was thought to make warts disappear.<sup>103</sup>

Hence, menstruation was associated with bodily corruption and loss of vital humour. It was very commonly given a negative expression in the many ideas that menstruating women brought harm. However, menstruation and menstrual blood were, as has been noted, also attributed positive values; menstrual blood, like blood in

general, had connotations of vitality, and menstruation was most probably assigned a positive value in liberating the female organism from corrupted fluids. Furthermore, menstrual blood was widely used by women as an ingredient in love potions.<sup>104</sup> This use could be of great importance in a girl's aspirations to attract a partner of her liking, in a society where marriages were often pre-arranged by the parents. Such potions could also be used in a wife's efforts to maintain the fidelity of her husband.

If menstruation and menstrual blood had ambiguous connotations, why were danger and impurity stressed, while the positive aspects were comparatively unelaborated and recognised mostly by women themselves? Just as in many other societies in which menstruation is given a negative value, in the South Italian worldview there is a dichotomy between an inferior, biological and transient realm and a superior, supra-biological and transcendent realm. Women are associated with the former realm and men with the latter. As a biological phenomenon affecting only women, menstruation thus assumes a negative value.<sup>105</sup> In Italy, this dichotomy, elaborated as a distinction between the carnal and the spiritual, is essential to Roman Catholic cosmology, and it will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Let us now look briefly at some beliefs regarding infliction of harm that are similar to those concerning menstruating women. In some Sicilian communities, it was held that if a man or a woman who suffered from nasal or haemorrhoidal haemorrhage snatched a few leaves or twigs from a plant, it was doomed to die; if he or she sowed seeds, the plants from these would die young; if the person made a tomato paste, it would never thicken; if from a pile of olives he or she picked up a few pieces of fruit, the whole pile would rot.<sup>106</sup>

Thus, by and large, the bleeding person has a 'draining' and a 'corrupting' influence, and this idea can be seen as inspired, as in the case of menstruation, by the dual connotations of haemorrhage. Haemorrhage is a loss of blood from the organism that also associates with corruption, since a haemorrhage was commonly seen as a way for the organism to rid itself of putrid liquids. The idea that tomato paste will not become thick if made by a person suffering from haemorrhage, seems, however, to be inspired by yet another association pertaining to the flow of blood. Owing to its red colour, tomato paste associates with blood and, just as the bleeding will not stop quickly by the coagulation of the blood, the tomato paste will not 'coagulate' and thicken.

In Molise, it was believed that the touch of a pregnant woman arrested the growth of plants and made them dry up, that wounds that she tended did not heal until she had given birth and, should she herself fall ill during the pregnancy, she would not get well until after she had given birth.<sup>107</sup> It was also thought that a pregnant woman was able to cure a certain swelling of the wrist (caused by overstrain while working with the harvest) by biting the swollen part.<sup>108</sup>

If it is assumed that the vital force of the pregnant woman was conceived as being constantly sapped from her by the foetus – a physiologically correct observation which was elaborated into ideas connecting with the pregnant woman's intense cravings for certain foods, which could be understood to be desired not by her but by the foetus<sup>109</sup> – then we may understand her capacity for impeding the growth of plants and making them dry up as an appropriation of their vital sap. The pregnant woman suffers a constant want of vital force, which disposes her to draw up vital humour from plants. She can 'dry up' a bodily swelling by biting at it, an act that implicates consumption. Ideas that wounds tended by a pregnant woman would not heal and that she herself would not recover from sickness until after giving birth also reflect her state of low vitality. It can be noted that, in some communities of Abruzzo, it was thought that if a pregnant woman acted as a healer and read spells against ailments, she would abort and, if a lactating woman did so, she would lose her milk.<sup>110</sup> These beliefs indicate that the practice of healing, at least in some contexts, was construed as a transfer of vital force to the patient. The healer is imagined to lose vital force, and this loss is identified with physiological events further suggestive of loss of life and vital powers: abortion and agalactia.

### *Cravings of Infants*

It was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter that it was believed dangerous for a mother to nurse a child that was not her own, since this could cause her to suffer from agalactia. This belief indicates that suckling children, who have an obvious desire for milk, were supposed to have the capability to 'steal' milk from lactating women.

The desire of infants for other children's milk also forms the subject of beliefs reported from Abruzzo. A mother sometimes breastfed two of her children, one older and one younger. If the older child was thought to have had drunken not only its own ration of milk but also that which was for its younger sibling, it was believed that he would acquire the terrible power of throwing the evil eye continuously and



with such a strength that no spells or remedies could aid the victims.<sup>111</sup> It was also believed that it was 'natural' and 'certain' that a person, who as a nursing child had drunk the milk from seven different women, had the power of casting the evil eye.<sup>112</sup>

These children consume more than their own share of mother's milk, they appropriate the milk meant for a younger sibling or other children. They acted in this way at an early age at which innate inclinations first show up and habits are formed. Their behaviour inspires the idea that as adults they will continue to have a desire for the vital humours of other persons — a desire which causes them to appropriate vital force by casting the evil eye, and a very malicious form of it.

In Sicily, no children under the age of one were allowed to kiss one another, since this was thought to cause harm.<sup>113</sup> According to a more detailed report from Nicosia (Sicily), it was believed that, if two children of the opposite sex under one year of age kissed each other, then the smaller child would die. Small children of the same sex could, however, kiss without risk.<sup>114</sup> In Calabria as well, kisses between children were to be avoided, since these children would run the risk of becoming mute or mentally retarded.<sup>115</sup> In Atri (Abruzzo), it was feared that children who could not yet talk would become mute or stammerers if they touched one another.<sup>116</sup> In another town in this region (Chieti), as well as in Sicily, it was said that, in a twin birth, one of the children would soon die if they were of the same sex; if not, they would both survive.<sup>117</sup> Still another source from this region mentions that, in twin birth, the second child was regarded as the first born, since it was believed that it had lain in position of being born first in the womb but that its sibling had pushed it out of the way during labour.<sup>118</sup>

Hence, twins compete for being born first and, when they have been born, one must die so that the other can live. By means of a touch or a kiss, a child can appropriate vital force from another child, thereby causing harm, or entirely deplete it of such force and cause its death. The condition of being a stutterer, mute or mentally retarded can be understood as a consequence of the child's loss of vital force, which severely hampers its development so that it cannot acquire normal verbal and intellectual abilities. That the kiss was seen as a particularly dangerous form of contact presumably relates to the fact that a nursing child feeds by means of sucking. The kiss is strongly suggestive of sucking and therefore brings forth the image that the child who kisses another child feeds on it. There is an uncertainty about which of the children that will be harmed. In some beliefs both children run a risk, in others the older and stronger child will harm a

younger and weaker one, and in still others the dangers implied by kissing and close contact seems to fuse with notions of antagonism and competition between the sexes.

To conclude, these beliefs express notions of infants involved in harsh competition for life and prone to appropriate other children's milk and vital force. Despite the ruthlessness implied by this potential appropriation, there are no indications that children suspected of causing death and illness were viewed as immoral or evil. Instead, young children were understood as 'pre-moral': like an animal, the tender child follows its natural impulses for plenty of nourishment in order to stay alive; this takes place in a world where food tends to be scarce and infant mortality high. The child has no intention to harm — this is beyond its powers of comprehension — and has no idea of the consequences that may follow its selfish satisfaction. The age of one year is presumably of importance in these beliefs for two reasons. First, infant death, for which the beliefs probably provided an explanation in otherwise inexplicable cases, was significantly higher during the first year of life than during later years of infancy.<sup>119</sup> Second, at about one year of age, the child's appearance is more like that of a human being. The child leaves its pre-moral animalistic state when it starts to walk and talk and when its social skills become more advanced.

### *Death-Bringing Dead*

There was a widespread belief that, if the eyes of a person should remain open after his death, this was a forecast and even a cause of the death of someone who had been present by the corpse, such as a member of the family or a person who had made a visit of condolence. For this reason, the deceased's eyes were closed immediately after death.<sup>120</sup>

This harmful influence does not seem to have been understood as the working of the evil eye. Nevertheless, the belief can be construed as a notion of the deceased as inclined to appropriate, just as a *iettatore*, the vital force of the living which would allow him to stay alive, thereby causing their death. The open eyes of the corpse suggest both that it has some consciousness and that it can see and, as in the belief in the evil eye, the gaze is taken as an indication of desire for what is looked at, that is, persons who have precious vital force. The idea can be compared with the belief that a restless spirit created by a 'bad' death could possess the body of a living person (see Chapter 9). In such a case, the original body of the spirit has disintegrated

and it is in need of a new one. The recently deceased still has an intact body, but it has lost its vital force and he appropriates not the body of a living person but the vitality of someone he 'sees'. The similarity between a recently deceased person and a *iettatore* is also indicated by the fact that counter-measures typically employed against the evil eye could also be used when a funeral procession passed by or when a corpse was near. The most common of these means of protection was the gesture of men touching their genitals. Others were to touch iron, make the *fica*-gesture, or touch a charm in the form of a horn.<sup>121</sup>

Priests and monks – especially unknown itinerant begging monks with an ugly appearance – were everywhere suspected to possess the evil eye and to cast it with an extraordinary intensity. More generally, they were believed to bring bad luck and death.<sup>122</sup> I will argue that these ideas rely on the association of monks with the sphere of death.<sup>123</sup>

Monks and nuns, and to some extent also priests, have renounced normal mundane life. The initiation of a monk or a nun is a procedure in which the new brother or sister is explicitly declared as *mundo huic mortuus* ('dead to this world'). The following two examples of the initiation of nuns are illustrative.

In the Benedictine nunnery San Gregorio Armeno in Naples in the mid-nineteenth century, the novice took the four vows: chastity, poverty, obedience and eternal solitude. Thereafter she laid herself prostrated on the floor in front of the altar, four burning torches surrounding her. She was covered by a shroud, with a crocheted image of a skeleton. The church bells were tolled as if it were a funeral service and from the congregation deep sighs could be heard. The officiating cardinal addressed the novice and three times pronounced the words: *Surgae quae dormis et exsurge a mortuis et illuminabit te Christus* ('You who are sleeping, rise from the dead and Christ will illuminate you'). At these words, the shroud was removed and the new nun rose to her feet. Finally, she covered her head with the Benedictine hood and received communion.<sup>124</sup>

The American writer Ann Cornelisen, who witnessed an initiation of nuns in a convent in Basilicata in the 1950s, describes the atmosphere immediately before the initiation as one of deep grief (1971: 252-5). The novices, assembled in front of the altar, as well as those relatives who were present in the church, wailed and groaned:

'The dying and the living grieved together, for themselves, not for each other. The novices were no longer willing to give up life; the relatives had suddenly recognized their own fate in death. Mourning so clouded the air that the vows went unheard' (p. 255).

The novices prostrated themselves in front of the altar and were all covered by a single black cloth with an enormous cross embroidered in white silk. The churchbells tolled as if it were a funeral. The officiating bishop intoned the words 'Ashes to ashes', as for a burial. At that moment:

'... mothers shrieked in a final letting of agony. They raced toward the altar and when they found themselves blocked they turned mindlessly and rushed to the back tearing their hair in frenzy. And the bells tolled on, playing on the strings of human endurance until mind and body twanged with anguish. Then silence too abrupt to be real. The cloth had been lifted and one by one the girls were drawn to their feet by the Mother General and taken to kneel before the Bishop. This was their resurrection, the miraculous dowry of new life which Christ gives to those willing to sacrifice their lives for Him. Each girl, reborn a different person, repeated her vows and heard her new name for the first time' (p. 254f).

Thereafter the new nuns were taken behind the altar, where their hair was shaved off and they were dressed in their habits. Their veils were decorated with garlands of white orange blossoms and they wore capes of white wool. Thus dressed:

'... they came as brides slowly down the aisle. There had, indeed, been a rebirth in the image of grace. Those raw-boned girls with faces still blotchy from crying were wrapped in a luminous ecstasy that made them oblivious to all save the passion of their celestial lover' (p. 255).

The new nuns then assembled in front of the Bishop and received his blessings.

Hence, the initiation accomplishes the symbolic death of the novices and their rebirth as nuns, that is as persons concerned with spiritual rather than carnal life. A symbolic death of the flesh is followed by a rebirth of an essentially spiritual person to whom is given a new name. The old name is used no more; it pertains to the person who 'died' in the initiation. In the initiation described by Cornelisen, the spiritual rebirth is fused with the image of the nuns as brides of Christ.

When initiated, a monk or nun must withdraw from mundane matters, especially from those involving carnal pleasures. The monk's status as a 'dead' person in this world was expressed in various ways. For instance, the monasteries of the mendicant orders in Italy were usually surrounded by planted cypresses, a tree that otherwise was emblematic of cemeteries, and the beds of Capuchin novices and monks were designed to resemble coffins.

Furthermore, in traditional Southern Italy, priests, monks and nuns were believed by many to have the ability to fly in the air and to

transform themselves into clouds. In this shape, and for sheer evil, they destroyed crops by means of terrible storms, torrential rains or devastating hail showers.<sup>125</sup> In Abruzzo, similar capabilities were attributed also to the restless spirits of the dead who remained wandering on earth,<sup>126</sup> and it was generally believed in Southern Italy that such spirits appeared as storms and whirlwinds or that a violent death (which created such a spirit) provoked a sudden burst of wind.<sup>127</sup> These atmospheric phenomena are thus caused by agents who are, symbolically speaking, equivalent: spirits of dead human beings who have not been able to leave the mundane world, and priests, monks and nuns who are carnally dead to this world and live an essentially spiritual life on earth.

While monks, nuns and priests thus were symbolically dead to this world, it was nevertheless a commonly held opinion among the laity that they had an inappropriate interest in mundane and carnal matters. The priest's involvement in practical business was stressed in a widespread anti-clerical discourse making the claim that priests were all greedy hypocrites who used their position for their own personal benefit. Moreover, priests did often not adhere to the rule of clerical celibacy and the presence in the local community of their illegitimate children was a remainder of what was viewed as their improper sexual licence. Similar opinions concerning monks were circulated; the itinerant monk was regarded as a libidinous seducer of women and the supposed avarice of monks was proverbial.<sup>128</sup> Thus, one image of monks and priests was that they were in a sense dead and detached from this world, but that they did not accept this state and had a strong desire for the mundane and carnal. Like the evil spirits of the dead they do not accept death but wish to return to life and are therefore dangerous to the living. This makes them bringers of death, misfortune and the evil eye.

But priests and monks had ambiguous connotations. Priests were not only greedy and self-interested but could heal ailments and distribute divine grace, and so could many monks. It may be recalled from the previous chapter that monks and nuns could be asked to contribute 'donations', which were thought to positively affect the lactation of nursing mothers. In determining what connotations are brought to the fore, the context, in which a monk or priest is encountered, is crucial. The aspect of grace-giving is stressed when monks and nuns are within the domain of their monasteries and churches. These were conceived of as sacred domains of divinity and spirituality where people could approach God and other divine figures, present as relics and icons, and receive their *grazia*. Up to the second half

of the 19th century, convents and churches were the customary burial places for the dead. There they could rest in peace. Hence, in the convent or church, the symbolically dead monk and nun, as well as the priest, are in company with ordinary dead people and with the grace-giving relics of martyrs and saints who, like them, beyond carnal death do good deeds towards the faithful. The other aspect of monks and priests, the one related to death and the evil eye, was especially brought to the fore by the image of the single, ugly and unknown priest or monk collecting alms. As a beggar, he expresses an obvious interest in acquiring something from other people. Outside the realm of his monastery or church, such a monk or priest was, in a sense, a frightening revenant who had left the realm of the dead, where he properly belongs, with the intention to acquire valuable assets from the living.

There is a moral dimension of these notions of the dead appropriating the vital force of others. In their carnal aspect, the dead do not belong among the living, but in the other-world. When death has occurred, there shall be no way back to mundane life. The thought of the re-animation of a corpse was one of horror and is said to have inspired in Sicily the killings of persons, recovering from periods of unconsciousness that had mistakenly been taken for death, in the belief that they were dangerous revenants.<sup>129</sup> It is essentially wrong for the spirits of the dead to 'steal' the bodies of the living. Moral condemnation was part of the image of the dangerous monk or nun; they are evil, greedy and hypocrites. However, the recently deceased person, who by the gaze of his still open eyes would bring about the death of those who mourn him by his deathbed, was not viewed as morally corrupt or acting from an intention to harm others. Perhaps the idea of this unintentional appropriation of vital force can be understood to derive from a conception of the dead as strongly wishing to live again but having no intent to hurt others.

### *Forces of Attraction*

To summarize, most of the beliefs discussed in this chapter explained losses of vitality, vital body humours or fortune. A more or less implicit notion is that these losses are caused by appropriation by someone else. This notion can be construed as relying on a presumption of two forces of 'attraction' that are governed by the same general principle: if one entity has little of a certain matter and another has it in comparative abundance, the first tends to attract that matter from the second. One force of attraction is at work in the social

sphere, where it is manifested by the sentiment of desire and by acts of seizure, and the other in the realm of physics, where it is made manifest through the power of absorption of liquid by what is comparatively dry from what is humid.

In the social domain, there was a common concern with the even distribution of wealth among those who were of roughly equal social standing. By the force of moral imperative, those in relative poverty 'attract' assets from those who are more fortunate. If sharing was not practised or possible, those who had little might have a desire for what others owned in plenty or they may try to seize it. Such desire – real or assumed – brings to the fore an idea of appropriation. If something that is worth coveting is hurt or damaged, then this event is juxtaposed with the general or specific desire of others and a causal connection established. Somehow, the one who desired must have been able to take what he coveted.

In the domain of physics, there are states of humidity and dryness. If a dry entity touches a humid entity, the dry one appears to have the power of attracting humidity from the wet one. A person who is short of vital humours, such as blood, is in a sense 'dry' and so will draw up the vital humours of other living organisms; if he is short of vitality, he is also in a sense 'dry', since vitality is intimately linked with humidity. In that case, both the sentiments and intentions of the person become irrelevant. Harm is supposed to be caused merely by physical contact or proximity. No particular acts suggestive of seizure or desire are of importance in determining the agent; what matters is his or her 'dry' state. An expression of these notions is the belief in the harmful influence of menstruating or pregnant women.

In other beliefs and practices, notions relating to these forces of attraction operating in two domains tend to merge. The concepts of life, vitality, fertility, bodily humours, humidity, abundance and richness are associated and contrasted with death, illness, sterility, a drying up of the organism, the state of dryness, scarcity and poverty. The merging of these two domains and forces of attraction provides a basis for metaphors – for instance, the belief in the *iettatura*, which is essentially based on a notion of desire on behalf of the *iettatore*, included an explicit notion of 'dry' eyes. Another example is that the word 'secco' ('dry') in the Italian language can, as mentioned, be used when speaking of death; however, it can also be used to denote poverty – the expression *rimanere al secco* translates 'to be left penniless'.

## SIX

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# WITCHES AND CHRISTIAN DUALISM

### *Blood-Sucking Witches*

The anthropological literature on witches and witchcraft has generally been concerned with the social functions of accusation of witchcraft. In Mary Douglas' typology of such functions,<sup>1</sup> accusations directed at outsiders of the community reaffirm group boundaries and solidarity, while accusations within the community concern the definition of community factions, and the hierarchy between these, or the control of deviant social behaviour 'in the name of community values'. Although the available ethnographic material does not reveal the details of the social context of accusations of witchcraft in Southern Italy, Douglas' typology does seem to apply. The often antagonistic relation between communities motivated beliefs that there were many witches in neighbouring towns and few in one's own.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, neighbours were also accused, which presumably reflected tensions and hostilities within the community.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, women who lived without a family and deviated in various ways from the ideal image of the South Italian woman, were more liable than others to be targets of accusation.<sup>4</sup> In the following, however, the focus will be on the image of witches, rather than on the use of this image in social interaction.<sup>5</sup>

The main features of the image of the South Italian witch are similar, almost identical, to the stereotype of the European witch of the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>6</sup> The *strega* ('witch', plural *streghe*) was an evil human being who had acquired supernatural abilities and was typically a woman.<sup>7</sup> The word *strega* is derived from Latin *strix*, a nocturnal bird regarded as a vampire or harpy. The *strega* had entered a pact of collaboration with the Devil and it was from him that her supernatural powers ultimately derived. The *streghe* assembled to orgiastic conventions where they revelled in all sorts of perversions and, once a year on Saint John's day (Midsummer), all witches of Italy gathered by a certain walnut tree in Benevento (Campania).<sup>8</sup> A witch was understood to have the ability to fly in the air, to enter homes through the keyhole or a fissure in the wall



and also to change appearance, assuming the guise of animals such as cats, bats or dogs. To fly, she had to prepare herself by undressing, undoing her hair and applying to her body an ointment made from powerful and horrifying ingredients.

Witches were especially active on Fridays and made nightly attacks on domestic animals and human beings, causing illness and death. They sucked blood from their victims, tormented persons by 'tying' them so that they were unable to move and talk, and inflicted upon their victims strange-looking and dreadful ailments and deformations. By means of 'black magic', a *strega* could harm or kill people at a distance and also induce strong feelings of love or hatred. Her work was for her own wicked pleasure or on assignment for passionate or evil persons. The effect of her sorcery in the field of passion was the destruction of socially approved relations between the sexes (engagements and marriages) and the creation of promiscuous relations based exclusively on carnal desire. It was believed that the *streghe* destroyed crops, typically by piloting hail storms to the fields, an act from which they themselves gained nothing apart from the perverted pleasure of harming others. In sum, witches were profoundly evil and entirely morally decadent. They destroyed, molested and killed in order to satisfy wicked private lusts and needs.

As mentioned, it was commonly believed that witches sucked the blood of animals and human beings at night. In particular, they sought out sleeping babies who, as a result of repeated attacks, lost weight, faded away and ultimately died.<sup>9</sup> Hence, this belief in their blood-sucking clearly expresses a notion of intentional and utterly evil appropriation of vital force.

The theme of appropriation of vital fluid is also found in other beliefs. In the Sicilian town of Siculiana, it was thought that the touch of a witch made a tree wither<sup>10</sup> and, in a community in central Sicily, witches were considered prone to dry up the milk of nursing mothers.<sup>11</sup> It was also believed in Siculiana that the kiss of a witch would kill a baby,<sup>12</sup> and, in Trapani, another town in western Sicily, the kisses of the *animulari*, a local type of witches, were said to be lethal.<sup>13</sup> Probably, the alleged habit of witches to suck the blood out of children evoked these ideas that the touch of her mouth in a kiss, an act suggestive of sucking, would kill. As will be recalled from the last chapter, kisses between nursing infants — human beings who actually feed by sucking nourishment from other persons — were also believed to be harmful.

Another belief documented in Trapani was that a child should not be kissed during the first 40 days of its life, except by women of the

'same blood': it was feared that the child should die as a result of the kiss. Even when the child was kissed by consanguineous women, the cheeks were avoided, since it was thought that the kiss could cause them to lose their healthy colour. Instead, the child was kissed on its forehead or feet.<sup>14</sup> These precautions make sense given the idea that the child could run the risk of being kissed by a harmful witch, who would suck the child's vital humours. The idea that the kisses of consanguineous women were less harmful, occasionally only removing a little blood from the cheeks, could perhaps be construed as expressing notions of kinship solidarity and 'shared blood' between consanguines. Ideally, kinsmen should not harm one another and to feed on blood that, in a sense, is one's 'own' blood, implies a self-consumption which does not tally well with the image of the evil witch who appropriates vital force from others.

A few sources relate that witches were attributed the habit of anthropophagy and necrophagy. In a legend recorded in Abruzzo,<sup>15</sup> a witch is said to devour the roasted flesh of a child and, in Palena (also in Abruzzo), they were believed to enter graves in the cemetery to feed on corpses.<sup>16</sup> A protective measure against witches was to bury (sometimes alive), by the entrance or beneath the floor of a room, a puppy.<sup>17</sup> It will be recalled from Chapter 3 that puppies could be used in medical cures because they connote intense un-spent vitality akin to human life force, drawing on the metonymic link between dog and man. A puppy buried in the house would presumably attract the interest of a witch entering the house in search of a human victim, typically a baby, diverting her attention to the 'baby' dog instead. Burying the animal alive may be seen as a negation of its death – it is still in a symbolic sense 'alive' and therefore exercises a stronger power of attraction on witches with a preference for living prey.<sup>18</sup>

The ideas of the physical appearance of witches can be summarised as follows: *'vecchie quanto il mondo e giovani come il mattino, il volto scabro di rughe o rorido di freschezza'* ('old as the world and young as the morning, the face furrowed by wrinkles or fresh as dew').<sup>19</sup> These two seemingly contradictory images are encountered again and again in the ethnography.

The age of an old witch is typically abnormally advanced ('old as the world'). This idea may be seen to spring from a conception that witches, like East European vampires, prolong their lives more than is allowed by nature by appropriating life force from external sources, human beings and animals. The old witch was imagined to be dried up, wrinkled and emaciated, and we may also note that, just as in the case of the evil eye, persons who were strikingly thin were often

assumed to be witches.<sup>20</sup> So the image of the old witch also connects with the idea that a person in want of vital force is prone to have a desire for it, craving it from others.

The other characteristic image, the blooming youth bristling with vitality, connects with an idea of witches as being extraordinary energetic. They have an intense sexual drive that compels them to engage in frequent and prolonged erotic encounters, in which they exhaust human partners. A great many of the witches other activities were hectic, such as the wild dancing at their conventions, frenzied rides through the night on borrowed horses – found exhausted in their stables the next morning – and nocturnal flights through the air at great speed and over long distances.

Both images of the witch connect to notions of extraordinary vital force and are not as contradictory as they might first appear. Witches appropriate the vitality of human beings and animals and are so able to attain extremely advanced age (the old witch); they also attain the energy for frantic activity (the young witch). Furthermore, the very same witch could presumably be imagined to appear as sometimes young and sometimes old. In Europe, it was a common idea that witches were essentially old ugly hags, but that they could easily take on the guise of a lovely young woman.

The element of frenzy in the image of witches is linked with the association between witches and fire, which is present in numerous beliefs. In the Abruzzo-Molise highlands, witches were thought to appear in flames in the fields.<sup>21</sup> In Campania, it was said that they danced at their depraved conventions while holding glowing embers in their hands; ashes and filth marked where the gathering had taken place.<sup>22</sup> Witches were also associated with the domestic fire. For instance, they were said to enter the house through the chimney,<sup>23</sup> and to torture children by lacing them through the rings of the fireplace chain.<sup>24</sup> It could be dangerous to talk about witches close to the hearth.<sup>25</sup> Witches were also said to capture infants and torment them with fire at night. They could, for instance, light a fire on a bridge over a stream and throw or kick a child between themselves like a toy. The child who was hurled over the fire three times was destined for certain death. The fire of the witches left no marks on the skin, but the child who had been scorched by it would mysteriously lose weight and vitality.<sup>26</sup>

Fire suggests intensity – the Italian language has numerous expressions that use the intensity of fire as a metaphor for intense human activity or sentiment: *ardente* means animate, passionate, lively. Witches were ardent, burning with intense desires and

engaged in fervent activities. The intensely burning fire consuming its fuel in flames leaves behind dry cinders. It is similar to the hectic activities of witches, sustained by their consumption of the vital force of human beings and animals, that are thereby drained and exhausted.

The behaviour of the witch was thought not only to be frantic, but also to have a compulsory character; she had no true freedom of choice. This is made clear in a set of protective devices, used almost exclusively against witches. Brushes and brooms were among the most common objects used to protect a home from their attacks. Since witches were associated with filth and uncleanness, the apotropaic use of such domestic tools was, presumably, inspired to some extent by their function to remove dirt from the house. It was often said, however, that a witch who was about to enter a home was compelled to count all the straws of a broom found by the entrance.<sup>27</sup> A fringed napkin could also be used as protection,<sup>28</sup> as could the tail of a badger,<sup>29</sup> a bag filled with sand or grains of millet,<sup>30</sup> a cob of maize,<sup>31</sup> a net,<sup>32</sup> or a piece of rope with knots.<sup>33</sup> All these objects impeded the approach of the witch, since she would be compelled to count all the threads of the fringe of the napkin, the hairs of the badger's tail, the grains of sand, millet or corn, or to undo all the knots of the net or the rope. Hence, the witch was imagined to have incomplete control over her own activities. Her behaviour was guided by primitive impulses and resembled that of animals.

### *The Witch in Christian Cosmology*

The image of the witch cannot be understood properly unless it is situated in the dualistic cosmology of Roman Catholicism. It is this dualism which historically shaped this image and which later sustained its form. The great European witch-hunt in the later Middle Ages and early modern times was based on the conviction that there existed organised sects of witches, allies of the Devil. It was of great importance to the formation of this idea that popular beliefs in sorcery, harmful witchcraft, spiritual nocturnal journeys and in non-Christian supernatural beings were all understood to refer to real events.<sup>34</sup> Earlier, the Church had regarded such beliefs as popular superstitions or mere illusions created by demons. Situated in the duality of God and the Devil, these 'real' phenomena were unambiguously linked with the demonic and thereby lost much of their former heterogeneity and moral ambivalence.

Elements from a diversity of popular beliefs were re-assembled so as to create an image of the abominable human allies to the personification of utter evilness, the Devil. Numerous non-Christian supernatural beings in old European popular beliefs were female and had an ambivalent character, being able to be both beneficial and destructive. Their negative traits were stressed by the Church, and the positive aspects re-interpreted as devilish features. Examples of such ambiguous beings who were turned diabolic are fairies. The popular beliefs in their existence were largely erased, and only some of these figures survived close to their original form as protagonists in folk tales (such as fairies guarding enchanted treasures) and in nursery tales (such as Befana, who bring the children gifts on Epiphany, see Ch. 10). The Sicilian belief in the capricious and ambiguous *donne di fuori*, who were fairies that in their negative aspect resembled witches, have been seen as a continuity into the 19th century of older beliefs.<sup>35</sup>

To shed light upon some of the main characteristics of witches, certain elements in the dualistic world view of Roman Catholicism must be discussed in more detail. In particular, we will be concerned with the distinctions between perishable flesh and the immortal soul, and between greed and grace. This discussion is also necessary in order to proceed, in Chapter 7, to an examination of the grace-giving saints, the antitheses of witches and personifications of moral perfection and goodness. The dualities that will be discussed should not be seen as part of some binary 'deep structure' of culture that might be revealed by structural analysis. Rather, they are quite explicit in the doctrines and practices of the Church and in the extensions of dualistic thinking which formed among the laity.<sup>36</sup>

### *The Carnal and the Spiritual*

The fundamental distinction in Roman Catholic thought, inherited from antique philosophy, is that between what is material and what is spiritual: these are the two basic qualities of the universe. Man is understood to have a dual essence: the carnal and the spiritual, while animals consist of matter only. God and the angels are, and have always been, essentially spiritual. The material component of man is flesh, which by nature is destined for decay, death and disintegration. The material body is the source of irrational impulses of concupiscence. If these are not controlled, they bring suffering to mankind because they incite hatred and strife, theft and murder, wickedness and egotism, and illicit sexual encounters that destroy the family.

Man's soul, on the other hand, is immortal and transcends his mundane existence. It provides him with the faculty of reason and free will. Man can choose a mode of conduct which is, according to the Church, the way of God. It is a rational way that brings happiness to mankind – one should be loving and considerate, generous and unselfish, good and forgiving. Man is the only thinking animal in the universe. He is the crown of God's creation, because by placing *logos* in the body of an animal, God created him in his own image.

At the beginning of time, God gave man the gifts of eternal carnal life and immunity against lustful impulses. By committing the first sin, Adam and Eve rebelled against God and as a punishment they were deprived of these sanctifying gifts. According to the doctrine of original sin,<sup>37</sup> the sin of Adam is transmitted to all his descendants and alienates man from God. The original sin is manifested by human mortality and man's tendency to sin and depravity. God, however, had not abandoned man. He sent to earth his son Christ, who through his sacrificial death on the Cross took upon him the sins of mankind and redeemed them. Christ's resurrection in the flesh from death, and his ascension to Heaven, showed man that trust in God and love for one's fellow human beings will triumph over hatred and death.

Thus every individual has the freedom to choose to be governed by the irrational lustful impulses of carnality, and thereby commit sins bringing harm and suffering to others, or whether he shall let *logos* rule, control concupiscence, abstain from sin, trust in God and be good. If he chooses the former, he voluntarily withdraws from God and from his love. Should he choose the latter, he receives as a free gift assistance from God and the Church, without which he cannot attain salvation; he receives divine grace.

After corporeal death, which implies the separation of man's spiritual and material components, God judges every human being and decides the destiny of the soul. Those who have trusted in God and been good will be welcomed in Heaven, where they will enjoy a blissful and eternal spiritual life. Before that, however, they must be cleansed from their sins in Purgatory. God promises that on Judgment Day, all those who have trusted in Him will be resurrected in the flesh and happily live on a 'new earth', again enjoying his gracious gift of eternal carnal life.

Those who voluntarily and unrepentantly alienate themselves from God, allowing themselves to be ruled by lustful carnal impulses, will not be welcomed by Him in Heaven, but instead will have to suffer eternally in Hell. The Church's traditional idea and iconography of Hell depicts a place where the damned suffer torture and are

trapped in an eternal death agony. The sinner is tormented by fire, gnawed by worms, dismembered by demons, immersed in huge cauldrons filled with boiling oil and so on. In recent times, Hell tends to be construed as an eternal death. The soul remains alienated from God and forever lost in a void and darkness where there is no life.

The finer details of the Roman Catholic Church's elaborate views on man's dual nature, concupiscence, sin and redemption were certainly less known to the average South Italian layman, and probably also to many priests. It is evident, however, that the basic message was clear to all – that man is dual and that his carnal nature is a source of social disharmony, suffering, decay and death, while his spiritual nature implies a promise of fellowship, joy and eternal life.

The Church's essentially negative view of man's carnal dimension is particularly emphasised in matters concerning human sexuality. Although marriage is a sacrament that legitimises sexuality – because children must be born, and when ordinary persons are overwhelmed by carnal desire, then 'it is better to marry than to burn' (1 Cor. 7: 9) – restraint of sexual lust is recommended and celibacy praised as the ideal for the one who wishes to devote his or her life to God and to spiritual development. Chastity is seen as a virtue because the spirit by free will thereby firmly manifests its domination over the carnal body. The practice of clerical celibacy builds explicitly on the idea of the preservation of 'purity' among these men.<sup>38</sup>

A rejection of sexuality permeates the practices of churching and baptism. In the Roman Catholic Church, women who have recently become mothers can be blessed in a certain ceremony (churching). According to the Church, this ceremony expresses joy and thanksgiving for the birth of the child, but its ritual form speaks of symbolic cleansing from pollution. In Southern Italy, the woman often had to wait at the threshold of the church until the priest came to meet her, and there she was sprayed with lustral water and blessed. She was then escorted by him into the church and to the altar, its most sacred area, where prayers were read and she was expected to express thanks to the divine powers for the child. The ceremony was usually performed 40 days after the delivery.<sup>39</sup>

Among the laity, churching was understood as a purification.<sup>40</sup> In many communities, the mother was not allowed to go outside her home until the ceremony had been performed, and her visit to the church for the blessing was the first time after the delivery when she showed herself in public.<sup>41</sup> In Ari (Abruzzo), the mother was not even allowed to go to the church for the ceremony, and instead the priest was called so that the blessing could be made in her home.<sup>42</sup> The

seclusion of the woman after having given birth was, according to some reports, explicitly said to be a consequence of her state of 'impurity'; in Lanciano (Abruzzo), the woman was considered 'impure' for 30 days if she had delivered a son and for 60 days if she had given birth to a girl.<sup>43</sup> The ceremony could be called *purificazione* (purification)<sup>44</sup> by the laity or by names which implied a termination of a temporary mundane state: *ribenedire* ('re-blessing') or *rientrare in santo* ('re-entry into blessedness').<sup>45</sup> The term *ingresso in chiesa* ('entry into the church') has also been recorded,<sup>46</sup> relating to an idea that, although the Church had no such regulation, the woman was not allowed to enter the church unless the ceremony had been performed. The contrast between, on the one hand, a mundane and negative condition following birth and, on the other hand, a state of blessedness brought about by churching is also expressed by the idea, held by devout women in Montorio nei Frentani (Molise), that the ceremony should be made so as to *far la pace con il Signore* ('make peace with the Lord').<sup>47</sup>

Until it was baptised, a child was not understood to belong to the Christian community. Among the laity it could be referred to as a 'heathen', a 'Turk' or an 'animal';<sup>48</sup> the recommendation, widespread in older times, that the child should not be kissed, was commonly understood to be based on the circumstance that it was a 'heathen' and therefore not worthy of this sign of affection.<sup>49</sup> In the case of death, the unbaptized child, according to the regulations of the Church, could not be given a Christian burial and the corpse was many times disposed off as if it were the carcass of an animal (see Ch. 9).

The ceremony of baptism terminates the child's previous 'heathen' existence and constitutes its rebirth as a Christian. According to the dogma, baptism 'cleans' the child from the original sin inherited from Adam: baptism is the 'tomb of sin'. The ceremony unites the child with Christ in a double sense: it is united with the death of Christ, which destroys sin, and it is united with the resurrection of Christ, which brings to it a new life.<sup>50</sup> These two senses correspond to a short immersion in water, which in the liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church is represented by pouring water onto the head of the child: '...the immersion of the rite symbolises the death and the burial; the emersion symbolises the resurrection and the new life'.<sup>51</sup> Although original sin is redeemed through Christ, baptism does not imply a future immunity against concupiscence. When the innocence of childhood has passed, each person must battle against the lustful carnal impulses that tempt him or her to commit sin.



When the ceremony of baptism was to take place, the godparents, who according to the regulations of the Church must not be close blood relatives, brought the child to church. Through baptism, they became the child's spiritual parents. The presence in church of the biological parents (or solely of the father) was, in some communities, considered inappropriate or was thought to cause the child harm: for instance, it might abbreviate its life.<sup>52</sup> The godparents waited at the threshold of the entrance, where they were met by the priest. He blew on the child so as to exorcise evil and impure spirits (*immundes*) and put some salt into its mouth. Thereafter the child was taken into the church where the priest anointed its ears and nostrils (the orifices through which the spirits had left it) with his saliva. As he touched the child's right ear, he pronounced a Hebrew word, signifying *Do thou open*, the word Christ is supposed to have used when curing a man who was born deaf and dumb. In the name of the child, the godparents renounced Satan, and the infant was anointed with blessed catacumenical oil. It was then baptized while the priest three times poured water over its forehead while pronouncing the formula of the baptismal sacrament — 'N. N., I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit'. Thereafter the child's head was anointed with Holy Chrism, and it was dressed in white and assigned a lit candle.

Hence, two images of birth are contrasted. The biological birth takes place at home and was typically attended only by women. It had few ritual elaborations and it produced a child that was not fully human, a 'heathen', associated with impurity and evil spirits. This birth puts the mother in a correspondingly unclean state. The second birth takes place in church; it is ritually elaborate and is performed by a male priest. The child is given a name and new parents, who are related to it not through blood but through spirit. It emerges out of the water of baptism as a Christian human being, cleansed from sin and evil, unclean spirits. By 'opening' the ears and mouth of the child, the priest symbolically gives it the faculty of speaking and understanding language, that is, one of the crucial differences between human beings and animals. Significantly, a deficiency often believed to afflict a child improperly baptized, because the priest or the godparents had made some mistake when pronouncing the formula, was stuttering, and sometimes also mental retardment. Hence, the unsuccessful humanising of the child, not succeeding to make a Christian out of an '*animale*', inspired an idea that its verbal faculty would not develop normally.<sup>53</sup>

Through the contrast between these 'births', sexual procreation is devalued and connected with pollution and evilness, while the Church portrays itself as giving birth to the child in a pure and superior manner.<sup>54</sup> The concept of original sin appears as a theological elaboration of the Church's depreciation of biological procreation. Original sin is through carnal intercourse transmitted from parents to children, and many, including some theologians, have suggested that Adam's first sin was in fact intercourse with Eve. It shall be noted that this view of sexuality causing defilement conflicts with the beliefs described in Chapter 3. In folk medicine, which incorporated many ideas and practices of pre-Christian humoral pathology, sexuality functioned to purify the human organism by providing an outlet for fluids that otherwise would corrupt and cause harm.

When a child's nails were to be cut for the first time, this should not be done by the parents but by a friend of the family who thereby became the child's 'godmother of nail' (*comare d'unghia*), or in the case of a man, 'godfather of nail'.<sup>55</sup> The cutting of nails, as it is clear from other contexts, inspired a notion that something valuable was lost and that this loss had undesirable effects. The nails of a baby should not be cut during its first year (or first six months), since this would cause the child to become a thief.<sup>56</sup> Adults were advised not to cut their nails on a Friday (which was generally seen as an unlucky day) or in the evening or at night, as this caused blindness or implied dangers.<sup>57</sup> According to one source, the person had to collect all the cut off nails on Judgement Day.<sup>58</sup> In these beliefs the cutting of nails is either connected with diffuse dangers threatening the person, or induces a disposition to use the hands to collect or appropriate. In one belief, it is the lost nails that are repossessed on Judgement Day; as to the belief and practices relating to infants one may argue that that the idea of their future inclination to thievery is inspired by a thinking that, since they have suffered a loss from their hands at an early age, they compensate for this later in life by taking in their hands things that belong to others. It may be noted that money could be placed in the child's hand when its nails were cut for the first time or when it was younger than one year of age;<sup>59</sup> one source relates that this was done as a 'precaution', while another source says that this was done so that it would become rich. This custom can be seen as a way to compensate for the loss implied by the cutting of nails by immediately supplying the child with something valuable.

Hence the first cutting of the child's nails is, just as baptism, an act that removes from the carnal aspect of the child something associating with vitality — in baptism, the child symbolically loses its life,

and, in cutting its nails, parts of the body that continually grow are for the first time violated. This similarity inspires the conception that the cutting should involve, just as baptism, the appointment of godparents. There is also a notion that something should come in place of that which is lost. In baptism, the child is reborn to a new life; when its nails are cut, it should be given money in its hands.

In a comparative perspective, the removal of a part of the body of a child or youth, suggesting a depletion of natural vitality, is common in rituals that mark a decisive step in the creation of it as a social being. In the Orthodox Church, a portion of the child's hair is cut off at baptism. Male or female circumcision, or both, are performed in numerous societies as an essential element in *rites de passage* of children or youths. In circumcision, a part of the genital organ is removed, and this practice could hence be understood as a removal *pars pro toto* of the part of the child or youth which is most closely associated with biological reproduction and carnal pleasures. This removal, it might be argued, is performed in order to negate the physical, carnal person and, in subsequent phases of the *rite de passage*, create a social person, and this fundamental social function explains its widespread occurrence in human societies.<sup>60</sup> The symbolic similarity between baptism and circumcision is pointed out in the Bible, when Paul speaks of baptism as a circumcision of the flesh 'performed without hands', in which the baptized dies as well as resurrects with Christ.<sup>61</sup>

Now, if we look at the image of the witch in the perspective of the duality between the carnal and the spiritual, we find that she personifies the human being who mindlessly follows all her carnal lustful impulses. She clings to carnal existence by prolonging her life through the consumption of other persons' flesh and blood. She indulges in the pleasures of the flesh by engaging in orgiastic sexual encounters. Her tendency to act out of compulsion suggests a resemblance between witches and animals, which follow their instincts without being able to reason and make free choices. The witch also annihilates the free will of human beings by 'tying' them and, through sorcery, she compels them to follow carnal impulses, such as the desire for extra-marital sexual pleasures.

Witches have the capacity to transform themselves into animals, beings who are understood as entirely carnal, and some of their bodily parts were also believed to resemble those of animals. A tuft of hair growing at the nape of the neck or a much pronounced coccyx could be called a 'tail' and interpreted as a sign indicating that a person was a witch;<sup>62</sup> during the times of the witch hunt, witches were

commonly thought to have animals' tails as well as horses' hoofs or cats' paws.<sup>63</sup> In the case of the Devil, these animal features are more pronounced: he appears, in popular iconography, as a cross-breed between man and goat, with a goat's face, horns, tail, a hoof and rich hair over the body. The image of the Devil as having features of a goat, while Christ is compared to a lamb, expresses a duality in Mediterranean symbolism adopted by Christianity: the evil goat versus the good sheep.<sup>64</sup>

Hence witches had a pronounced animalistic character, but they were not animals. Essentially they were ordinary dual human beings with body and spirit that were dominated by their carnal aspect. In the Christian cosmos, the carnal has a negative value only when it conflicts with the spiritual in a being that is both carnal and spiritual. Animals, which are entirely carnal, are essentially viewed as morally neutral and part of God's wonderful creation. To express the negative character of the carnal for human beings, the witch is therefore imagined as a human being with *logos*, who has once chosen to let herself be dominated by animalistic lustful impulses and uses her powers of reasoning only in order to refine her evil deeds and to maximise her own pleasure.

### *God and the Devil; Grace and Greed*

In the Christian cosmos, God is the personification of ultimate spiritual perfection, while the Devil is his opposite. Witches are human beings who are close to the Devil, while the saints are humans close to God. Thus the witch can be said to be the antithesis of the saint. While priests are men who mediate between humans and the divinity, sorcerers are men who occupy an equivalent position between humans and evil forces, drawing power from the occult and demonic domain by means of magic. Figure 2 depicts these relations.<sup>65</sup>

The Church represents God on earth; it mediates by means of the Holy Sacraments and holy rituals between the mundane world and the Divine. The 'Sabbath' of the witches is a perverted version of the Holy Mass. The rite of the Eucharist is replaced by the consumption of children, saying of prayers are exchanged for sexual orgies, the adoration and kissing of Crucifixes and Holy Relics are turned into kissing the Devil's behind, and so on. As Norman Cohn (1975: 102) observed, the witches' Sabbath is an inversion of the Holy Mass that could be achieved only by former Christians. The ritual frame is that of the Mass, but it is filled with inverted and defiled Christian practices that serve to worship, not God, but his adversary, the Devil.

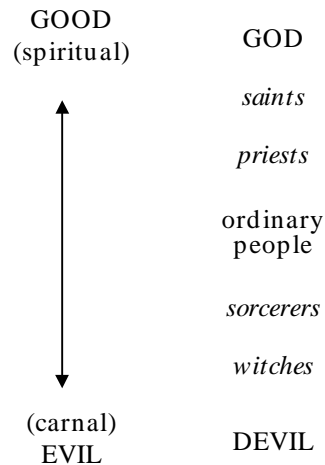


Figure 2. A span of positions between God and the Devil.

While God, Christ and the saints represent principles of goodness – the just, the honest, the altruistic, the generous, the gracious, the loving, the forgiving – the Devil and witches represent the extreme opposite: corruption, evilness, dishonesty, selfishness, greed and hatred. God and saints unite people in harmony and peace; the Devil and witches incite men to discord and strife.

Of particular interest here is the relation between grace and greed. Although grace, and corresponding notions such as the Moroccan *baraka*, are fundamental to Mediterranean religion, it has only recently, by way of the volume edited by J. G. Peristiany and Julian Pitt-Rivers, *Honour and Grace in Anthropology* (1992), attracted the well-deserved attention of anthropological scholars. The essay by Pitt-Rivers – where he concludes that the essential character of grace is to give freely, gratuitously and generously, to offer out of good will without any consideration of a return – is the first general anthropological examination of the notion of grace.<sup>66</sup> Grace, it is pointed out, is a supplement and an excess to that which is obligatory and predictable. Therefore grace is essentially non-reciprocal; it does not belong to systems of exchange of goods and services. Pitt-Rivers construes grace and 'reciprocity' as two 'parallel modes of conduct' (p. 221), where the former is associated with the sacred and the latter with the profane world (p. 242).<sup>67</sup> Hence this view of grace is similar to, but broader than, the theological definition of grace in the Roman Catholic Church, which is: '... a free gift, supernaturally conferred by God

to the human soul regarding eternal life'.<sup>68</sup> To Pitt-River's two basic 'modes of conduct' we may add a third, which also does not involve exchange but which is the inversion of grace: appropriation without giving a return, to take from others for reasons of greed or evilness. Thus a model of three modes of conduct might be proposed (Figure 3), in which I substitute Pitt-Rivers' term 'reciprocity' with 'exchange', so as not to bring confusion when presently discussing Sahlin's typology of reciprocities:

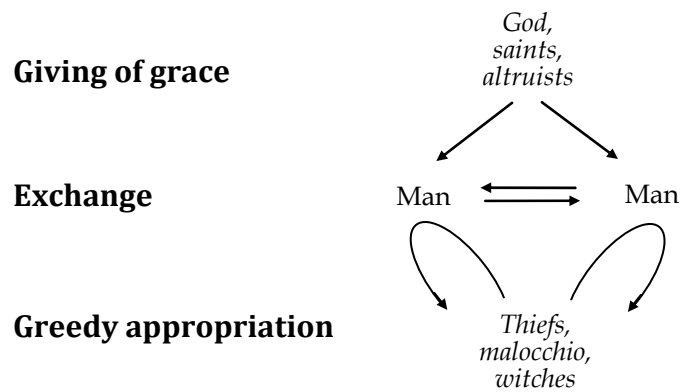


Figure 3. Grace, exchange and greed.

This model corresponds to the three types of reciprocities – generalised, balanced and negative – outlined in Chapter 2. The conduct characteristic of each type of reciprocity (giving, bartering and taking), is assigned a moral value (positive, neutral and negative), and thereby the three types of reciprocities are incorporated into the scheme of Christian dualism.

Generalised reciprocity in Southern Italy is permeated by notions of Christian charity and obligations to help those who are in need. The act of giving to those who have less, ideally without consideration of a return, has an intrinsic positive value in Christian thought; the associated sentiment is love. Among human beings such giving is called altruism. The true altruist is ready to give away *all* of his assets to the one who is in need. Therefore altruistic giving, in a world of finite resources, cannot be sustained over time because the altruists inevitably will run out of assets. Ideally, altruism requires inexhaustible resources. Such unlimited abundance is present in the imagery of the divine realm of God and the saints.

According to the Scripture, the human race enjoyed existence in a world of plenty until the Fall. In the garden of Eden, God provided Adam and Eve with everything they needed, without demanding anything from them except that they should not eat the fruit from the tree of knowledge. When Adam and Eve violated this prohibition, God punished them by cursing the earth so that it brought forth 'thorns and thistles'. From this moment, all their descendants dwell in a world of scarcity where they can subsist on what the earth yields only with hardship, and must eat their bread in the 'sweat of the face'.<sup>69</sup> The Church promises that a paradisiac existence will be re-established on a 'new earth' after Judgement Day when Christ has returned; war, suffering and death will not exist.<sup>70</sup> At present, however, the mundane world is characterized by shortages, while the divine is imagined as a realm of abundance. Divine grace is unlimited and often understood as excess of love, food, vitality, goods and other assets beyond the quantities in which these are ordinarily enjoyed. The hyperbolic imagination is characteristic for Roman Catholicism as well as many other religions.<sup>71</sup> God and the saints graciously give of divine abundance to those human beings who deserve it, a giving without demand for return that can be sustained over time. The *grazia* of God and the saints is an idealistic vision of the entirely free gift. We will discuss *grazia* further in the next chapter, where we will also consider the notion that human beings and saints can engage in reciprocal exchanges.

The conduct characteristic of negative reciprocity, that is theft, has a strongly negative value in Christian thought; the eighth commandment is 'thou shall not steal'. Sentiments associated with theft are greed and envy, which are condemned in the tenth commandment.<sup>72</sup> The evil and asocial witches steal vital force from human beings by drinking their blood and consuming their flesh; they are an extreme image of the malignity of the one who takes from others without giving in return. Since witches occupy a cosmological position as the antitheses of saints, their evil appropriation of blood from human beings emerges as an inversion of the grace given by the benevolent saints. The intentional appropriation of vital force and other assets by the *malocchio*, which was thought to be activated by greed and ill will, is also condemned according to this morality.

Negative reciprocity, justified by the argument that since all men cheat and steal from others, one must take part in this game, is essentially incompatible with Christian morals. Certain forms of theft, however, might be justified as forced sharing. A poor man who steals from the rich can see his theft as righteous, since the rich should

ideally have shared with him; his fellow poor could agree to this. In that case, however, it is not a theft in the proper sense of the word, but rather a taxation that brings about a forced sharing.

Finally, the 'exchange' mode of conduct corresponds foremost to reciprocity of the balanced type. This mode is morally neutral in Christian thought. In a world with unevenly distributed finite assets and resources, individuals or groups of individuals agree to barter one type of goods for another.

I earlier argued that fortune and misfortune could also be seen as modes of receiving and losing, contrasted with exchange. Good fortune is essentially an addition to what a person could expect normally to be the outcome of work and reciprocal transactions. Misfortune (*sfortuna*) is to fall below par, to be deprived of valuable assets and to end up with less than one could expect; this could be brought about by the *iettatura sospensiva*. Hence the relations between exchange, fortune and misfortune can be depicted as:

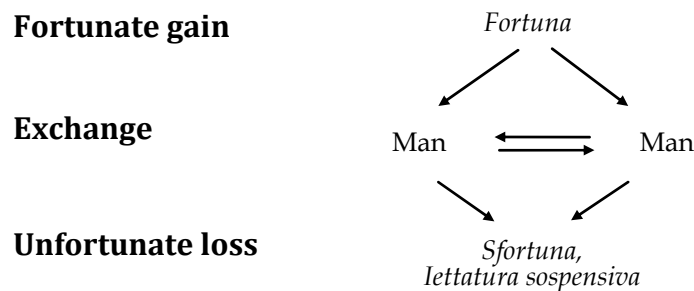


Figure 4. Fortune, exchange and misfortune.

The two sets of relations outlined in Figure 3 and 4 have a similar structure. However, while the former set is dense with notions of morality, the second set has little to do with good and evil. All men, good and bad alike, can sometimes be struck by misfortune and sometimes enjoy good fortune. The sources of good and bad fortune were not commonly represented by human-like beings with a moral character — as God and the Devil represent grace and evilness — *fortuna* and the *sfortuna* just suddenly arrived to a person. Only in the mythological old hag, *Fortuna*,<sup>73</sup> and in the ambiguous fairies do we find personifications of fortune. Nevertheless, in an important sense, the idea of good fortune and the idea of receiving divine grace are similar. Both ideas draw upon a vision of another mode of obtaining assets than that of exchange: assets are freely received from an essen-



tially unlimited source. While *grazia* is a sacred version of this vision, *fortuna* is secular. It might be noted that the Italian word *disgrazia* not only denotes the loss of divine *grazia*, in its most common usage the word means 'misfortune'. Hence, *grazia* is a divine gift, while its opposite, *disgrazia*, is a mundane loss.

### *Order and Disorder*

The realm of God is ordered, while the opposing forces of the Devil bring about disorder. Stability and moderation are two aspects of order negated by witches. Their ability to change appearance suggests morphological instability, and their behaviour in general is characterized by a lack of orderly habits and gross excesses. Excess, however, as has been pointed out above, is also a condition characteristic of the heavenly domain. Both the Divine and the devilish are conceived of as unlimited in contrast to the everyday world but, while the heavenly promises an abundance of that which is positive and good, the devilish threatens with an excess of suffering and evilness.

Perfection is an aspect of order – it is a condition in which no discrepancies make an entity depart from its ideal form – and witches were typically imagined as imperfect. They have physical deformities, such as an ugly hunch on the back, and their minds are characterized by defects and shortcomings. Witches also found a wicked pleasure in harming human beings by inflicting upon them strange and horrible deformations, thereby spreading the quality of imperfection to others. This can be compared to the hesitation of the Roman Catholic Church to accept for priesthood men with noticeable body defects. The Church has been particularly sensitive about the hands, as they must be used to perform the Sacrament of the Mass, and requires that these should not be deformed.<sup>74</sup>

### *Purity and Impurity*

In the worldview of Roman Catholicism spiritual purity is contrasted with the impurity inherent in man's carnal existence. The flesh is seen as perishable and doomed to decay. During the Middle Ages and early modern times, the macabre image of man as being imprisoned in a rotting body and of corporeal death as a state of extremely repugnant bodily corruption and putrefaction was greatly elaborated.<sup>75</sup> The Roman Catholic tendency to associate carnality with impurity might be understood to build upon the ancient supposition

that the human body tends to corrupt, to which a moral dimension has been added. While humoral pathology was an essentially amoral science that aimed to control the processes of bodily corruption, Christian thinking is pessimistic about the body and emphasises its perishableness as opposed to the pure and immortal soul.

Witches were closely associated with impurity and putrefaction. In older accounts, food consumed at the witches' Sabbath is said to have been rotten and repugnant. As mentioned above, in Abruzzo, witches were thought to feed on corpses and, in Campania, it was believed that they left behind, in the place where they had celebrated their Sabbath, ashes and filth.<sup>76</sup>

In Southern Italy, it was commonly held that witches abhorred salt and ate only food without it.<sup>77</sup> Salt was therefore commonly used as protection against them.<sup>78</sup> Salt is used in various rituals of the Roman Catholic Church – as mentioned, some salt is put into the mouth of the child at baptism – and it signifies, according to the Church, 'the battle against the putrescence of sin', the infusion of wisdom and the integrity of moral life.<sup>79</sup> One reason for this use and significance of salt is that salt preserves food, especially meat, from corruption. In the kitchen, salt preserves meat from rotting; in its sacred use in the Roman Catholic Church, it preserves human beings from the 'putrescence of sin'. The idea that witches detest salt therefore relates to their opposition to the values of Christian religion and, more specifically, their desire to revel in impurities.<sup>80</sup>

### *Male and Female*

From the history of ideas and doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church, it is clear that the carnal component of human beings has been seen as more dominant in women than in men. Hence men are closer to God and the spiritual domain, while women are more liable to fall victims to temptations of the flesh.<sup>81</sup> The archetypal myth reflecting this notion is that of the Fall: Eve succumbs to the temptation of the Devil (the snake), eats from the fruit of the tree of knowledge, gives from it to her husband, thereby bringing an end to the paradisiac era of plenty and immortality. It is a woman who brings suffering, scarcity and death into the world. It may also be recalled that the Roman Catholic Church allows only men to become priests, and that there was a debate in the Church during the Middle Ages as to whether women had a soul, or whether they were more like animals. Therefore, in Roman Catholic cosmology, female is to male as flesh is to spirit.

The idea that women are more carnal derives from the fact that women are more vividly involved in biological reproduction than are men. They menstruate, bear children in their wombs, give birth and feed their infants by their breasts. Furthermore, in Southern Europe, as well as in many other societies, women are chiefly responsible for the domestic sphere and the home, which provides a space where the organic needs of feeding, rest and sleep get their everyday satisfaction. At the same time, her participation in institutions concerned with the government of communities and society or the transmission of advanced knowledge is restricted or prohibited. These institutions are instead dominated by men. Women are thus associated with biological reproduction, while men are associated with social reproduction.<sup>82</sup>

Therefore the image of the witch as female connects to the conception of women as being more carnal than the male. It may be noted that the typical image of the male *stregone* (sorcerer) in Southern Italy was that of the learned scholar, a man who through the long study of rare and obscure manuscripts acquired ancient and occult knowledge.<sup>83</sup> While it is true that his powers derive from non-Christian sources of wisdom and sometimes from the sphere of devils and demons, and that he cannot resist using them to satisfy his private ambitions and lusts, he himself does not appear as fundamentally evil. Instead, he has in his search for knowledge come upon dangerous forces beyond his control; he himself is a victim of these forces. The image of the male sorcerer reflects a discourse on the ethical problems of searching for and using advanced knowledge, while the activities of the female witch stand for the very antithesis of social life.

There are additional dualities of significance in Christian cosmology, such as those of light/darkness, right/left and heaven/earth, which have contributed to the image of the witch, but to discuss these in detail would not benefit the arguments of the present essay. Instead, we now turn to a consideration of the antitheses of the blood-sucking witches, namely saints full of *grazie*.

## SEVEN

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# SAINTS FULL OF GRAZIE

The cult of saints in Roman Catholic societies is important in many areas of social life and of crucial significance to the formation of the individual's religious sentiments. The theological and social history of the cult is extensively documented,<sup>1</sup> and popular cults of saints are undoubtedly the aspect of Roman Catholic religion that has attracted the greatest attention of social anthropologists. In this and the following chapter, we will focus on the idea that saints bestow *grazie*.

### *Saints and Images*

According to Roman Catholic doctrine, a saint is a deceased human being whose soul enjoys a privileged position in Heaven close to God. During their lives the saints were pinnacles of virtue, piety and altruism. They lived according to the highest moral standards, abstained from sinful acts and adhered sternly to the doctrines of the Church. Many saints renounced the flesh by long and frequent fasts, food asceticism, abstention from worldly pleasures and the practice of severe self-mortification. Because of their devotion to the Christian faith and their exemplary and virtuous lives, their souls were spared from the pains of Purgatory and accepted directly into Heaven. From their own experience the saints understand the difficulties of mundane existence. In Heaven, they listen with compassion to the prayers of the living, forward them to God and speak to Him in favour of those who pray. This is why one can hope for miracles when one prays to a saint. The saints shall only, however, be prayed to as intermediaries between man and God. Worship (*latria*) is reserved for God and Christ, while veneration (*dulia*) is the appropriate form of religious devotion towards the saints. The position of the Blessed Virgin Mary as the holiest among saints makes *hyperdulia* the form of devotion proper to her.

This, in short, is the Roman Catholic doctrine on saints. The religious practices of the South Italian laity, however, speak of two important modifications of this view. First, although most persons certainly knew that saints should be approached as intermediaries to God, it is clear that saints were often seen as independent providers of *grazie* and that the attitude of believers was one of worship rather than veneration.<sup>2</sup>

Second, a corollary of this notion of the saint as an independent source of *grazia* is that the divine hierarchy, with God as the superior and the saints as ranked lower, was of little relevance to the local cult of saints. An ethnographer thus describes the opinion of the Sicilians:

'Christ is counted higher than the Eternal Father and the Holy Spirit, who is lesser than all. Mary is regarded as superior to her Son and, between one Mary and another, adored in different churches and villages, and under different titles, there are differences, and one is counted as superior to the other, all according to the faithful who are under the direct patronage of one or the other of them. Saint Joseph, the universal father, is regarded as higher than the Eternal Father, Christ and the Madonna together; but then, immensely superior to each and all of the saints of Paradise is for a village the saint who is its patron. ... [A]ll legends, all traditions, all past and present facts and acts show clearly as daylight that the Patron Saint has no superiors, that he can do everything and that he has absolute rule over everything and everyone.<sup>3</sup>

The superior position of the village patron in relation to other divine beings derives from his position as protector of the community. The patron saint belongs to the community; he is one of its members. The relics or image of the patron are kept in the community's principal church, and can be easily visited and addressed directly. Many persons had a very intimate relation with the patron saint. For instance, they could engage in small talk with him as were he a close and trusted friend. Local mythology often tells of miracles worked by the patron in the community, for example healing the sick, sending rain in times of draught and stopping volcanic eruptions.<sup>4</sup> The patron saint is often thought to have been present in the community in the distant past, and to then have chosen to protect it and its inhabitants. Mia Di Tota (1981: 325) cites an informant from a Sicilian community in the 1970s, who was asked why people regarded the saint's feast as more important than the Easter celebrations of Christ:

'The feast for Sant' Angelo is more important because he has been here in this village. He has walked the same streets as we do, he has lived here with our forefathers who knew him. He was killed by one of ours. His earthly remains lie here in the church of Sant' Angelo. Our forefathers have experienced miracles that Sant' Angelo performed, and he is our patron saint. Jesus Christ on the contrary lived in a country far away. We never had any personal contact with him.'

The strong attachment to a village patron who only rarely was Jesus Christ — Christ was the patron of about one percent of the communities in continental Southern Italy<sup>5</sup> — does not imply, however, that the figure of Christ was of little significance in local Catholicism.<sup>6</sup> As will be described later, he was the focal figure of the Christmas and Easter celebrations.

San Giuseppe was, as the text cited above tells us, popular as a patron saint in Sicily. In other parts of Southern Italy, other saints could be the object of particularly strong devotion. In Abruzzo, for example, Sant'Antonio Abate was highly venerated.<sup>7</sup> In Southern Italy as a whole, the Blessed Virgin Mary was the most popular community patron.<sup>8</sup> She occupied a special position among the saints; in popular devotion, she tended to be perceived as an autonomous goddess related to the fertility of the natural realm. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

Apart from the official village or town patron saint, other saints could also be of great importance for the members of the local community. As mentioned in Chapter 2, it was common in larger cities for different parts of the town to have their own patron saints. A village or a town as a whole could also hold in particularly high esteem a saint other than the official patron. This saint could thereby assume a position of unofficial co-patron. The saints of some shrines were famous for their great powers and were worshipped over large geographic areas, and pilgrims arrived in great numbers to the shrines on feast days. Furthermore, saints were not only regarded as patrons of communities; professions, certain groups of persons (such as students and travellers) and those with special needs (such as prisoners, expectant mothers and sufferers of various ailments) had their patron saints.

Although individuals could invoke a saint in prayer, without the presence of any image, or contemplate a saint's virtuous life in order to gain spiritual inspiration, the popular cults focused on images, in the form of paintings or statues, or on relics.<sup>9</sup> The more important relics consist of a saint's body or parts thereof, but relics may also be objects that had been in contact with a saint, such as a piece of clothing or instruments used in the torture and execution of a martyr. The body parts could be of all kinds: a skull, a heart, a knee cap, a finger bone, a shin bone or some blood. The important relics were as a rule enclosed in costly reliquaries of silver or gold and decorated with precious stones. Some reliquaries depicted the saint or the body part that it contained, and were hence a combination of relic and image.

People acted towards a publicly venerated image or relic as though it were the saint *himself*, not merely a representation. The image was treated as though it could see, hear and possessed the sense of touch. Prayers for assistance were read in front of the image or relic, and it could be spoken to as though it was able to hear. Images and relics were understood to be founts of *grazie* and were approached as such. They were kissed, caressed, touched and

embraced, and they could be applied physically to the sick as a cure. Animals could be brought in the vicinity of an image to put them under the saint's protection and make them healthy and fecund. Grain for sowing could be treated in the same way because it was thought that such contact improved its fertility. The images or relics could also be carried in a procession to the fields, in order to imbue the crops with fertility.

A corollary of the identification of saint with image is that the replacement of an image of a saint for another one of the same saint was problematic. We learn, for instance, that, in Lanciano (Abruzzo) in 1876, the archbishop replaced the old statue of San Pietro with a new one. Some time after, a terrible hailstorm caused much damage to the city and the surrounding countryside. In the evening of that day, several hundred infuriated peasants gathered in the town and called for the death of the archbishop, who they blamed for causing the catastrophe by having desecrated the old statue. The archbishop was close to being stoned to death in the turmoil.<sup>10</sup> In this case, the old statue was the patron saint, and the new statue of San Pietro something, or someone, else. The patron saint had been mistreated and therefore withdrawn his protection from the community or, alternatively, punished the community (we are not informed of the precise ideas about why the hailstorm had struck).

The close connection between image and saint was also expressed by the belief that the personality of one saint, venerated in one community or church, was distinct from that of the same saint venerated elsewhere. This was most common in the case of the Virgin Mary, the most popular saint. Each 'image/saint' was believed to have its own personal characteristics and peculiarities which were considered when the saint was approached to be asked for favours. The individuality of the saints was reflected in local legends relating the history of the images and the miracles they had performed. Although these legends individuate the local saint, they have conventional elements that can be found in many legends, and they also typically contain parts of the official hagiography of the saint.<sup>11</sup>

Hence the Madonna of one town was not the 'same' divine being as the Madonna of another town; in the view of the laity, there existed not only one Madonna but many. Every collectively venerated image of the Blessed Virgin had its distinct name, formed by adding to *Maria* or *Madonna* the name of a local place or of some natural feature connected with an apparition of her, or a word referring to some particular quality of her or to some remarkable event related in local legends.<sup>12</sup> The multitude of Madonnas could be accounted for by

ideas about kinship ties: one Madonna was a sister, a cousin, an aunt or a niece of another.<sup>13</sup>

Images of saints in the forms of statuettes and pictures were kept in virtually every home for protection and as objects of devotion. They were part of the 'family shrine' (see Chapter 9), and the daily prayers to the saints were read in front of them. These images could have been given their appearance out of the imagination of the artist, but most often were copies of images that were the focus of collective veneration — thus of the 'actual' saints in the popular cults.

### *Grazia and Body*

The following song of devotion was sung in Lanciano (Abruzzo) at the feast of the Madonna del Ponte when asking for *grazie*.<sup>14</sup> It enumerates the various parts of the body of the Madonna, one after the other, describing them as 'full of *grazie*'.

*E lu pede de la Madonna  
è piene di grazie e di bontà  
e si nu' le sapeme prigà  
la Madonna li grazie je fa.  
La gamba di la Madonna  
è piena di grazie e di bontà  
e si nu' li sapeme prigà  
la Madonna li grazie je fa.  
Li jenocchie de la Madonna  
è piena di grazie... (etcetera).*

(And the foot of the Madonna  
is full of *grazie* and goodness  
and if we know how to pray to it  
the Madonna will grant us the *grazie*.  
The leg of the Madonna  
is full of *grazie* and goodness  
and if we know how to pray to it  
the Madonna will grant us the *grazie*.  
The knee of the Madonna  
is full of *grazie*... etcetera.)

In the Hail Mary, the Virgin Mary is said to be 'full of grace'. The devotional song above takes this statement quite literally; it conveys a notion that the blessings and *grazie* of the Madonna are contained in her body and that they will be granted to the devotee if she is prayed



to in an appropriate way. There are numerous symbolic expressions that elaborate on such a notion, in that they associate the saint's blessings and *grazie* with fluids that are miraculously released from his or her body, a relic or an image.

The theme of a holy person exuding miraculous fluids, substances and odours, either while alive or when dead, was common in the Medieval religious imagination.<sup>15</sup> For instance, we find descriptions of female saints dripping holy fluid from their breasts or fingertips. Stigmatisation, the mystical appearance of bleeding wounds on the same parts of the body as where Jesus was wounded during his Passion (on the forehead, the palms of the hands, the feet and the chest over the heart), is a similar phenomenon since it amounts to the excretion of a substance from the body of a person renowned for holiness. The first saint to have shown stigmata was Saint Francis of Assisi; since then about 60 other stigmatics have been sanctified. In all, over 300 saints and mystics of the Roman Catholic world are known to have been stigmatised.<sup>16</sup>

In modern times, Padre Pio is the best known stigmatic in Southern Italy.<sup>17</sup> He was born in 1887 in Pietrelcina (Campania) and died in 1968 in the Capuchin convent of San Giovanni Rotondo (Puglia), where he spent most of his life. He was regarded by many as a saint even before his death; at the present, he is a subject of an official process of beatification and canonisation. His stigmatic wounds, which he claimed to cause him constant and tremendous suffering, became permanent in 1918 and are said to have drained his body of at least one cup of blood every day. The wonderful fragrance that, according to believers, emanated from Padre Pio's person was said to come from the blood that never ceased to flow from his wounds. Many pilgrims arrived to the monastery in Puglia to see Padre Pio, to hear him preach and to kiss his bleeding hands as a sign of devotion and to receive *grazie*. Today, the monastery where he lived and where his body now is kept, attracts hundreds of thousands of pilgrims each year. He is well known in Southern Italy and venerated by many as a saint. As Christopher McKevitt (1991) argues, Padre Pio turned himself into a living crucifix, replicating the suffering and sacrifice of Christ that turns death into life and brings blessings to man.

South Italian legends often tell that images or relics of saints had miraculously shown signs of life in the past. On its feast day, or on some other occasion, the image raised an arm, moved its eyes, spoke or showed other signs of animation. However, one type of such signs is more common than others: the capacity to exude such bodily substances as blood, sweat, tears or milk, and this theme is also fre-

quently encountered in legends of crucifixes. In some legends, the discharge is said to have been caused by damage inflicted, accidentally or wilfully, to the image.<sup>18</sup> Other legends say it was a response to dramatic social events or that it foreboded coming times of suffering and turmoil.<sup>19</sup>

The exudation of body fluids from the images and relics of saints was not only spoken about in legends, it was also believed to actually take place as a recurrent miracle. These liquids (often called 'holy manna') were believed to have miraculous properties.

The best known such cult is that of San Nicola in Bari. According to the faithful, the bones of the saint had the capacity to continuously excrete a miraculous 'manna'. This liquid accumulated in the tomb of the saint and, on his annual feast day, it was distributed in diluted and bottled form to the devout citizens of Bari and to pilgrims, the latter of whom arrived in great numbers from all over Southern Italy. In older times, the 'manna' could be sprinkled on the faithful; it was especially renowned for its ability to heal eye ailments. More generally, the 'manna' was held to cure all kinds of infirmities. It brought fertility to the newly married, protected home and family from misfortune and attacks by evil forces, protected boats in storms and facilitated childbirth. In Bari, we are informed, virtually every house had a bottle of this precious 'manna'.<sup>20</sup>

Another noteworthy example of miraculous discharges is the liquid that flowed from the urn of San Biagio in Maratea (Basilicata) every year on the third of February and on the first Sunday in May. The fluid was also supposed to emanate from the saint's statue and from the pillars of his chapel. It was attributed miraculous qualities, such as that of curing paralytics, and was distributed to the faithful. According to the legend, the exudation of 'manna', which by some was thought to be the sweat of the martyr, had on one occasion in 1620 been so copious that the chapel had been flooded by it. On another occasion in 1736, 'manna' started to stream from the walls, altars and pillars of the chapel in such abundance that the terrified people, as well as the priest, prayed to the saint to stop the miracle.<sup>21</sup>

Excretion of effluvia from saints could be also supposed to take place when their statues or relics were carried in a procession. Several such recurring marvels have been documented in Sicily.<sup>22</sup> When the relics (a molar tooth and a finger bone) and the statue of San Paolo were carried in the annual procession (on June 29) in Palazzolo Acreide, the statue was believed to 'sweat' continuously. The exudation was wiped off with small pieces of cloth, which were given to the devout crowd. Similar 'sweatings' and distributions of patches of

cloth wetted with the supposed liquid from statues of San Calogero took place in Agrigento, Naro and Aragona. In Butera, a priest had the duty of wiping dust from the statue of San Rocco during the annual procession, but the crowd believed that the statue was sweating and passionately tried to wipe off the imagined sweat with their own handkerchiefs. In all these cases, the pieces of cloth moistened by the supposed exudation were regarded as blessed. The faithful partook immediately of the blessings by kissing the patches or applying them to parts of the body suffering from ailments, or saved them to be used in times of illness or danger.

It was also quite common to wipe the image or relic with a piece of cloth, even if it was *not* thought to be exuding physical substances, as though the *grazia* of the saint could thereby be absorbed. The pieces of cloth were believed to be imbued with miraculous power and were therefore kept as personal protection or were used for healing illnesses.<sup>23</sup> At some sanctuaries, believers wiped the image with pieces of clothing that belonged to sick relatives who had remained at home, as though the *grazia* of the saint could be absorbed by the cloth and, when brought to the owner, would reinvigorate and heal him.<sup>24</sup> Hence, the saints' giving of *grazie* could be conceived in terms of emanations of an intangible liquid.

A related alleged phenomenon is the liquefaction of dried bodily substances of saints. The best known example of this is the 'blood' of San Gennaro, patron saint of Naples. According to the legend, San Gennaro was decapitated in Pozzuoli near Naples in A. D. 305. On this occasion, his faithful wet-nurse is supposed to have collected some of his blood in two glass bottles, which now are kept in the *duomo* of Naples. The blood is normally coagulated, but usually liquefies when exposed to the public during celebrations of the saint. The liquefactions are attended by large numbers of the faithful, who pray fervently for the miracle to take place and, when it has occurred, kiss the phials containing the liquid blood.<sup>25</sup>

Similar miracles of other portions of San Gennaro's blood were supposed to take place in Naples and nearby towns.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, in Naples, there were blood relics from other saints — San Giovanni Battista, San Stefano, San Luigi Gonzaga, San Lorenzo, San Alfonso Maria de Liguori and Santa Patrizia — that liquefied on certain days of the year in the churches where they were kept.<sup>27</sup> Miracles in which blood and fluids from saints turn from a solid to a liquid state are also documented in other parts of Campania: the *manna* of Sant'Andrea in Amalfi,<sup>28</sup> the blood of San Pantaleone in Ravello,<sup>29</sup> the blood of San Lorenzo in Avellino,<sup>30</sup> and the milk of the Virgin Mary, which

according to the legend exuded from a painting of her in the 15th century and is kept in the convent of Mater Domini on Vesuvius and the church of San Luigi in Naples.<sup>31</sup>

Some portions of the blood of Christ were believed to change miraculously in condition and colour. In Potenza (Basilicata), a relic of Christ's blood sometimes 'boiled' on its feast day (the Thursday after Easter),<sup>32</sup> and the spots of his 'Precious Blood', preserved on the Sacred Spines kept in Andria and Bari (Puglia), changed in colour to resemble fresh blood on Easter.<sup>33</sup> According to a devotional publication, these spots of blood become fresh on the Easter Fridays falling on the 25th of March (Annunciation) – thus the anniversary of both the incarnation and death of Christ. According to the same source, similar miracles take place also in the case of other Sacred Spines on such an anniversary; in 1932, this should have happened in Vietri (Basilicata), in Aversa, Bagnoli Irpino and Montefusco (Campania), in five monasteries and churches in Naples, and in a number of churches in Northern Italy.<sup>34</sup>

To conclude, the idea that saints excrete miraculous substances in the form of holy 'manna', blood, milk, sweat and tears has been a common feature of their cults. This excretion, as well as the liquefaction of dried substances, is an expression of the idea of the saints as being 'alive' and present in this world. The liquids are identified with the *grazia* of the saint. Saints are conceived of as being filled with *grazia* and to exude this *grazia* as a freely flowing gift to believers who have gathered in prayer and devotion. Whether the substances are imagined to flow freely from the saint or to liquefy inside a phial, they are attributed the power to heal illness and reinvigorate the body, to enhance the vital forces of the organism. Hence the *grazia* of the saint is identified with fluids from his or her body that have a benevolent impact on the bodies of those who appropriate them; there is a notion of transfer of vital force from saint to believer.

### *Blessings of Martyrdom*

The Christian cult of saints has its origin in the devotion to the martyrs of faith in the Early Church. The martyrs were commemorated at their burial places and, at some of these sites, churches (*martyrias*) were built, where the faithful gathered to celebrate Mass. Although the official practice of the Early Church was to worship the one God in these places, the veneration of martyrs focused on the wonder-working capacities of their relics. This cult of martyrs might be traced backed to the Graeco-Roman cult of heroes, which centred on the

physical remains of persons who were regarded to have had outstanding physical force and courage,<sup>35</sup> that is, to have had abundant vitality.

Martyred saints have continued to be of great importance in the Church. An expression of this is that, since the Council of Nicaea in 787, every consecrated altar must contain relics of at least one martyr. Many of the saints venerated in Southern Italy are supposed to have been martyred. The legends of their lives expatiate upon the events surrounding their untimely death and, in their iconography, the scene of martyrdom is often depicted in horrifying detail. Martyr saints are typically believed to help those who suffer illness at the part of the body where they themselves were tormented. Because of their own painful experience, it is assumed that they feel sympathy for those who suffer in a similar fashion. For example, Sant'Agata, whose breasts were cut off, protects women afflicted by ailments of the breasts and agalactia; Sant'Apollonia, whose jaws were broken and teeth extracted by her persecutors, cures ailments of the teeth; and San Lorenzo, who was burned to death on glowing coals, protects those suffering from burns.

When Christianity became an accepted religion in the late Roman Empire, the concept of sainthood was extended to include, beside martyrs, persons known to have been pious and ascetic, who had devotedly spread the gospel among the heathen, and those among the high clergy who had done especially much for the Church. The way in which these saints died is not commonly an important motif in their hagiographies, but it shall be noted that nearly all saints, martyrs as well as others, are celebrated annually on the day of their death. On this day, their powers are most strongly manifested; the death-day of a saint is thus the day on which his *grazie* can be expected to be most abundant.

The connection between the death of a martyr and his or her distribution of *grazie* is a theme that can be found in numerous popular legends. It might be told, for example, that a holy spring emerged at the place of martyrdom, where cut off body parts of the saint had been thrown after execution or where the corpse was buried. Numerous springs in Southern Italy are identified with such legendary places, and their waters are attributed healing powers.

The well inside the Church of Sant'Angelo in Licata (Sicily) can serve as an example. Sant'Angelo (the patron saint of Licata) is supposed to have been martyred in 1220, and the church to have been built at the place where he met with death and was buried. For a long time, according to the legend, no one dared to touch the place of

burial but, when a white lily grew up on the grave, which was close to the altar, this was taken as a sign that the saint wished to be removed from it. When the corpse was exhumed, it was discovered to emit a pleasant sweet odour. The body was put in a coffin made of silver. From the hole in the ground of the saint's former grave began to flow water that was perfectly clear and had a sweet aroma. From precisely where his remains had rested, sweet-smelling oil was exuded at times. A staircase was built leading down to the former grave so that devotees could drink of the blessed water and immerse themselves in it. On the eve of the feast of the saint, the oil again began to flow and the water gushed forth in such amounts that the floor of the church was flooded; on this day of the year the saint's miracles and *grazie* multiplied. In the past, the holy water from Sant'Angelo's grave was greatly venerated and was distributed in bottles to the faithful, who thought it had the capacity to heal illnesses.<sup>36</sup> In these and similar legends, beliefs and practices, the *grazia* of the saint, represented by the abundant flowing of water from a well, seemingly inexhaustible and free for everyone to enjoy gratuitously, is intimately connected with his violent death and his dead body.<sup>37</sup>

An element in the legends of some martyrs is that milk flows from their bodies after death. When San Paolo was beheaded, it was not blood, but milk, that flowed from his body.<sup>38</sup> The same miracle is said to have occurred when Catherine of Alexandria was decapitated,<sup>39</sup> and milk also gushed from the wounds of the martyred San Pantaleone, who for this reason is regarded in Southern Italy as the patron saint of wet-nurses.<sup>40</sup> Hence, in these cases the death of a saint is imagined to release a substance that is primordial nourishment and which, when produced by human beings (i. e. mother's milk), is given gratuitously and lovingly from mother to child.

Legends of saints who were not martyred might also contain an imagery of their bodies being filled with an abundance of a vital fluid that gushed out in connection with their death. We learn, for instance, from a biographer of San Giangiuseppe that:

'...one of the deceased saint's toes was bitten off with most regrettable devotion by the teeth of a man in the crowd, who wished to preserve it as a relic. And the blood from the wound flowed so copiously and so freely that many pieces of cloth were saturated with it; nor did it cease to flow till the precious corpse was interred'.<sup>41</sup>

The Sicilian cult of executed criminals provides further evidence of the importance of martyrdom in the cult of saints and for the notion of their *grazia*.<sup>42</sup> The cult, which to Roman Catholics of today

may appear unorthodox and bizarre, was focused on the graves of executed persons who were supposed to have deeply repented during their last days of life. These graves were located in (or by) churches that had been dedicated to the aid of the souls of those who had been executed. The souls of the executed, who in Palermo were called *armi di li corpi decullati* ('souls of the beheaded bodies'), or more briefly *decollati* ('beheaded'), were believed to dwell in Purgatory. The soul of the unrepentant executed criminal was thought to have a different fate: it was taken to Hell by the Devil or terrorized the living in the guise of a horrible ghost.<sup>43</sup>

The believers understood the executed, repented criminal as a kind of martyr. Since their life histories or the events of their death were especially evocative, some were singled out as especially powerful and worthy of veneration. As an example can be mentioned a certain peasant by the name of Francesco Frusteri, who was decapitated in 1817 in Paceco (near Trapani), because he had killed his own mother in connection with a quarrel between her and his wife. He was known to have shown exceptionally deep repentance. Among the laity in the area of Trapani, he was said to be a saint and to have performed extraordinary miracles, constituting a topic for popular poetry. Many went on foot from quite afar to visit his grave, where they honoured him and asked him for favours.

The souls of those who had been executed were believed to be capable of performing many kinds of miracles that were otherwise attributed to saints, such as curing illness and to rescue from serious injuries in accidents. However, they were considered to be especially helpful in matters involving violence and crime, and when someone had been treated unjustly or been betrayed in love. The reason behind this was that the souls knew well of such maladies from their own experience and, in their reformed state, were supposed to feel pity for those who suffered likewise. Furthermore, the souls were believed to be able to foretell future events and were therefore asked in prayer for advice and guidance.

The devotional practices of the believers were nearly identical to those performed in the cult of saints. The souls of those who had been executed could be prayed to wherever and whenever one wished, but it was most effective to approach them at their graves. Candles and money were brought there as offerings, and devout believers walked barefoot the final distance to the places of worship. Ex-votos in the form of paintings depicting miracles attributed to the souls, as well as votive wax offerings depicting human body parts that had been miraculously healed by the souls, were offered and displayed in their

churches. The believers considered objects connected with the execution as kinds of relics. When a hanging had taken place and the corpse was removed, the crowd who had witnessed the execution might rush to the gallows as everyone was eager to obtain a shred of the rope, which they considered to be a 'precious amulet'. Earth gathered from under the corpse of an executed person could be attributed miraculous capacities.<sup>44</sup>

The reason why the Church tolerated this cult – in which some persons of a character far from the Christian ideal could be venerated as were they saints – was that it coincided with a legitimate concern for the suffering souls in Purgatory. To assist those souls is a Christian duty as well as an act of compassion that earns indulgences to the helper. The grateful souls in Purgatory can reciprocate by acting as intercessors with God on behalf of the living. Since the 16th century, the fate of the souls of executed persons had been the concern of brotherhoods that recruited members among the upper strata of society. The mission of the fraternities was to comfort persons sentenced to death during their last three days of life and extend to them material and spiritual help, care for the burial of their bodies (since the families of the executed normally were not allowed to do so) and to perform *suffragi* for their souls in Purgatory – *suffragi* are prayers to God for the salvation of suffering souls in Purgatory as well as acts of piety in their name, such as almsgiving, penitences and sacrifices, that give them spiritual merits. The dedication of churches to the aid of the souls of those who had been executed was a result of the pious activity of such brotherhoods. In the popular cults, *suffragi* for the souls of executed persons seem not to have been a major concern but, since prayers to the souls in Purgatory for intercession were accepted by the Church, the prayers to the souls of the executed were tolerated. Although the Church certainly tried to suppress the most blatant departures from acceptable religious practice in the cult (such as the belief in 'miraculous' earth gathered from under a body at the place of execution), the acceptance of a relation of mutual help between the living and the souls made it possible for believers to practice their cult in churches, a cult which in its essence was a cult of wonder-working martyrs.<sup>45</sup>

Cults that focused on the graves of executed persons have not been documented elsewhere in Southern Italy, but victims of execution were conceived of as a source of power and blessing. In Molise in the early 19th century, the rope that had been used for a hanging was held to protect from bullets and to make invulnerable the one who carried a piece of it on his body.<sup>46</sup> In Calabria, such a rope was attrib-



uted the power to cure colic, and the bullet that had passed through the chest of an outlaw sentenced to death was believed to constitute an unfailing remedy against this ailment or to be a powerful protective amulet.<sup>47</sup> There is thus a striking similarity between the conception of these objects and the Roman Catholic veneration of relics consisting of implements supposedly used in the torture and killing of Christian martyrs. In Puglia, Campania and Calabria, souls of those who had been executed were prayed to for help and protection, but were foremost asked to reveal events of the future. The prayers often contained a standardised phrase in which they were invoked together with the souls (*anime*) of those who had been slain and drowned, that is, persons who also had suffered a premature death; the most common such expression was: 'three hanged, three slain, three drowned'.<sup>48</sup> This summoning of three triads of souls recalls the recurrent phrase of the Roman Catholic Mass, which appeals to the Holy Trinity of 'the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit'.

The killing of animals at the feast of saints could be performed in a way that evoked notions of martyrdom. Such killings typically had the form of a prolonged torture taking the form of a merry game, in which the winner was rewarded with the carcass or part of it. As an example can be mentioned one of the more spectacular of such games, held in Sant'Agata del Bianco (Calabria) on the day of the village patron saint, the martyr Sant'Agata. A living ram or calf was decorated with flowers and ribbons – a practice reminiscent of the decoration of images of patron saints on their feast days – and suspended by its hind legs from a rope that had been stretched over one of the streets. A group of young men, riding on mules, assembled at a distance and, in an order that had been decided by the drawing of lots, the men began to make individual assaults on the animal, slashing it violently with a sword as they passed it at full gallop. The blood from the animal's wounds gushed out over the attackers and the crowd cheered *viva sant'Agata* at each assault. The most fortunate of the men was he who managed to cut off the animal's head, which he speared on the tip of his sword. In triumph, he raised the severed head high in the air in front of the excited crowd, while loudly exclaiming the 'cry of joy': *viva sant'Agata!*<sup>49</sup>

Understood as rituals this and similar 'games' elaborate upon notions of martyrdom and sacrifice – an innocent victim is cruelly put to death and the death implies joy and blessing for others. Just as in the case of martyrs, the dead body is coveted and attributed great value.<sup>50</sup> In a Calabrian community (Bocchigliero), the bullets that had been used to kill animals during shooting games held at saints' feasts

were considered 'holy' and were kept with great care and veneration,<sup>51</sup> as though they had been used to kill Christian martyrs.

This outline of blessings imagined to proceed from martyrdom and sacrificial death in Southern Italy would be incomplete without a consideration of the Passion of Christ. The blood of Christ was considered enormously forceful by the Church as well as the laity. In the form of relics, as well as a more abstract concept, it was thought to be a supreme fluid of life, having the capacity to wash away sins and reinvigorate the soul and body.<sup>52</sup> The 'Precious Blood' was celebrated at a particular feast (the first Sunday in July) and was the object of distinct devotional practices.<sup>53</sup> When approaching the crucifix, especially on the feast days of locally venerated crucifixes and on Easter, the scars on Christ's body received a great deal of attention from believers — they were touched and kissed as an act of devotion and to receive blessings.<sup>54</sup> The Sacred Heart of Christ is worshipped as a particular 'devotion' within the Church. In this cult the heart is depicted in anatomical detail (a slightly asymmetrical heart with an aortic opening at the top). It is typically shown with a laceration in its side, from which flows blood, and it is punctured either by arrows, nails or by a ring of thorns.<sup>55</sup> In the next chapter, we will discuss in detail the Easter celebrations and the Eucharistic sacrifice, in which Christ renews His death on the Cross and offers believers to drink His blood and eat His flesh and thereby to receive divine blessings.

To conclude, martyrdom was (and still is) a highly evocative image in the cult of saints, closely connected with the saint's granting of *grazie* to the devotees. The image further inspired to the bloody 'martyring' of animals at the feasts of saints and the conception of victims of executions as 'martyrs'. Martyrdom implies, just as the idea of emanations of miraculous bodily fluids from saints and their images, an association between the release of vital humours from the body of the saint and the giving of *grazia*. While exudations are usually imagined to be relatively slow discharges of bodily fluid from saints, martyrdom typically implies a forceful gushing out of blood as the martyr is beheaded, cut with swords, pierced with arrows or otherwise violated so that blood is shed. The premature and bloody death of the martyr is a forceful epitome of the setting free of vital force — the body, the vital powers of which have not yet begun to wane because of illness or old age, is cut open and from it flows blood, the vital fluid *par excellence*.

The martyr typically does not resist the violation of his body. Following the example of Christ, who died on the cross for the benefit of mankind, the martyr submits to tortures and the fate of execution in

the conviction that this attitude is truly Christian and will benefit humanity in the long perspective. This image of the martyr as unselfishly giving up his life for the benefit of others corresponds to the notion of the saint as gratuitously offering *grazie* to human beings – the blood shed at martyrdom objectifies in the domain of the corporal and vital the *grazie* that saints altruistically grant to human beings.

### *Ambiguities of Carnality*

In the Christian world view, carnality is thought of as transient and impure, while the spiritual is glorified as transcendental and pure. In the South Italian popular cult of saints, however, the carnal is celebrated: there are the notions that the body of the saint is full of *grazie*, that its relic or image emits bodily fluids that heal and reinvigorate human beings and that the corporal death of the martyr brings blessings to the believers.

The reason why the carnal is attributed a positive value is that, when the blessings and *grazie* of the Divine are imagined as being present in the world of human beings of flesh and blood, these must then also belong to this world. The saint is a personification of the divine; the believers act towards his relic or image as though it were the saint in person; it is 'alive' and attributed biological functions. Its *grazie* – which can be all sorts of blessings, help and assets that the believer hopes to receive – are also expressed in the idiom of the biological; the notion of vital force becomes central, since such force is the most valuable asset of the body. Since the humidity and fluids of the body are intimately related to its vital force, we find an identification between *grazia* and liquids emitted by a saint – the bodily fluids of blood, sweat, tears and milk, as well as other liquids emanating from his body, image or site of death or burial, such as holy 'manna', prodigious oil and miraculous waters. Hence the saint mediates between the divine realm of God and the mundane world of human beings by personifying the Divine and making concrete and manifest its blessings. In the theological doctrines of the Church, this position of mediation is elaborated in the view of the saint as intercessor between God and man.

The celebration of the corporal aspect of the saint in an ideological framework that devalues the bodily is made possible by the notion of the saint as abstaining from, or being exempt from, bodily functions that are particularly closely associated with corruption and transience and by a conception of their bodies as extraordinarily pure.

Of some holy women it is said that they neither ate nor excreted bodily waste nor menstruated.<sup>56</sup> Hence they are imagined to have had no metabolism; their bodies were not the locus of the normal biological processes that sustain transient life. The idea of the absence of menstruation indicates a disassociation from sexuality and uncleanness.

Restrained sexuality is a dominant theme in the lives of saints. For instance, in a Sicilian town, Saint Luis was known for his chastity. It was told, that as an infant, he closed his eyes when he was nursed so as to avoid seeing his mother's breast, and on Fridays he refused to nurse at all.<sup>57</sup> Female saints most often remained virgins and some popular legends elaborate upon their firmness in rejecting suitors.<sup>58</sup> The Virgin Mary is entirely disconnected from sexuality. Not only did she conceive Christ without losing her virginity but, according to Catholic theology, her hymen was not even ruptured by the birth of Christ and she remained a virgin all her life.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, she herself is the fruit of an 'immaculate conception' miraculously impregnating her mother, Anna, and is thereby free from original sin. Mary is thus a perpetual virgin born of a virgin.

The notion of corporal purity is perhaps most clearly expressed in the belief that the corpses of saints do not decay. This alleged circumstance is often referred to in official processes of canonization. A necessary criterion for saintliness is the occurrence of miracles after death, and an incorrupt body is regarded as such a miracle. Often the incorrupt corpse is said to emit, instead of the foul stench of death, a wonderful aroma. An example of this idea has already been given (Sant' Angelo, patron of Licata), and another example is found in the legend of San Corrado, patron saint of the Sicilian town of Noto. It is told that his corpse had lain in a coffin for 160 years. When the coffin was opened, the body was found to be whole with all flesh intact. At the moment the lid was removed, a most sweet and pleasant fragrance was discerned, as though aromatic substances had been in the coffin.<sup>60</sup> We may understand the idea of this aroma not only as a positive sign of the absence of putrefaction but also as an olfactory representation of the saint's *grazia*: the foul smell of an ordinary corpse is replaced by a delightful aroma emitted by the saint, to be freely enjoyed with pleasure by believers.

The idea that the corpse of a saint is not touched by corruption could be taken among the laity as evidence that a person, considered to have been a devout Christian and whose remains were judged not to have decomposed normally, was a saint. In that case, a cult of that dead person could develop spontaneously without any initial

approval by the Church. One such example is Angela Iacobellis, who died in Naples in 1961 of leukaemia at the age of twelve. During her short life, she is said to have been deeply religious and to have shown the most remarkable piety. For instance, she is said to have given away her toys and weekly allowance to poor children, to have eaten food that she disliked as mortification and to have shivered with pain if she happened to hear someone swear. At least up to the late 1970s her corpse, kept in a glass coffin at a cemetery in Naples, was regarded as incorrupt. Her soul was prayed to, and persons testified that they had received help from her. In 1965, the followers of her cult took steps towards the opening of a process of canonization.<sup>61</sup>

Saints were commonly portrayed as children or as youngsters. For instance, the martyr San Giorgio, who is the patron saint of Modica (Sicily), is portrayed as a child. During the annual festival in his honour, his statue was carried around in the town and people shouted *Viva lu picciriddu di quattordici anni!* ('Long live the fourteen-year-old child!').<sup>62</sup> There was also an association between saintliness and childishness at many saints' feasts by the presence of children around the saint's image when it was carried in a procession or otherwise displayed. The children, who were to be under thirteen years of age, were dressed to resemble monks, angels, saints or cherubs.<sup>63</sup> Sometimes sick children dressed this way were made to participate so that they would be healed, and sometimes children who were thought to already have been healed by the saint participated in such costumes to fulfil of a vow made by their mothers. In both cases, the children symbolically sacrifice, by imitating holy and divine beings, some of their mundane life so as to be ready to receive, or give thanks for already having received, blessings and *grazie*.

It may furthermore be noted that, since the sixteenth century, a common theme in South Italian iconography has been the association between saints and *putti* (images of naked, beautiful and chubby children) and cherubs, in the form of winged heads of *putti*. Many reliquaries are decorated by *putti* and cherubs. The above mentioned San Corrado's relics in Noto (Sicily), for instance, are kept in a silver reliquary in the shape of a *putto*, and the reliquary of Santa Rosalia in Palermo, as well as her triumphal wagon in which the reliquary is transported at her festival, are richly decorated with *putti*.<sup>64</sup> In Christian iconography cherubs are more generally present in contexts in which divine grace, power and glory are to be represented.<sup>65</sup>

To associate saints with children is a way of expressing the purity of the saint. According to the Church, a child was cleaned of original sin through baptism. Since a child was innocent, it did not commit

sins until it was old enough to distinguish between right and wrong. When it reached this age and became a moral being, it should be confirmed (about the age of fourteen) in the Church, start to practice confession of sins and regularly receive the communion. This idea of the child as being blessed with innocence is found in the New Testament, for instance when Christ declares that 'Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it'.<sup>66</sup> The notion of the moral innocence of the child has been of great importance throughout the history of Christianity. According to this idealised view the child, unlike adults, is assumed to have a natural trust in people, not to be calculating in inter-personal relations and to wish in a naive way only for good to the world. These Christian conceptions appear to have been accepted by the laity. We are informed that, in a Sicilian town, small children were considered by definition to be 'innocent', and real evil was understood to be foreign to their nature. Until the age of fourteen, when the child received its first communion, its soul was thought to be in a permanent state of grace, which permitted the soul of a dead child to immediately enter into Paradise.<sup>67</sup> In short, the idealised image of the child resembles the saint, who abstains from sin, who is pure and blessed and who wishes only for good.

The association between saints and childhood, however, can also be construed as having another significance. A child invokes not only the human mind and body in a pure state, but also human vital force in its most vivacious and unconsumed form, before it has begun to wane by age. This quality of vitality corresponds to the abundant *grazia* that fills the saint. The image of the chubby, lively and graceful *putto* is a particularly forceful symbol of affluent and incorrupt vitality that blends with the image of the saint.

The discussion of the ambiguities of carnality can now be summed up. While witches personify the negative aspects of the carnal and the mundane – greed, pollution, transience, anti-social sexuality and so on – the saints embody notions of altruism, benevolence, purity and transcendence. They personify the blessings following upon the rejection of the carnal and mundane life but, at the same time, saints mediate between the divine and the mundane, they are divinity present in this world, and the bodily aspect of the saint is thus of great importance. In the context of the saint (and of Christ and other holy persons), the carnal is therefore represented as pure and excellent, and blood and body fluids from a saint are, in the realm of the corporal and mundane, the blessings that the Divine grants human beings.<sup>68</sup>

### *Abundance and Excess*

As was argued in the previous chapter, the notion of the saint's *grazie* as abundance and excess is logically related to *grazia* as given freely beyond what is obligatory and predictable.

In this chapter, we have encountered the notion of abundance numerous times. Saints are said to be 'full' of *grazie*. From the wound of the bitten toe of San Giangiuseppe's corpse, his blood flows 'copiously and freely'. The 'manna' from the urn of San Biago flows so profusely that his chapel is flooded; the miraculous water from Sant'Angelo's burial site also floods the floor of his church. More generally, the *grazie* of saints are seen as an unlimited resource; if others receive *grazie*, this does not imply that my own prospect of receiving *grazie* is diminished.

The notion of abundance in association with saints and their *grazie* was also expressed in other ways. Important relics were enclosed in costly reliquaries of silver and gold, decorated with precious jewels, conveying an image of great richness. A church's collection of relics and precious religious paraphernalia was called *tesoro* ('treasure'), a term which generally denotes, as in English, an immense value not a part of ordinary and daily economic transactions, which, if suddenly released, constitutes a huge addition to the everyday economy. A *tesoro* suggests abundance and the notion of the *extra* that is also an aspect of *grazia*.

At the saint's feast, the expression of divine abundance was intensified. The saint's image could be dressed in splendid and often extremely costly clothes. It could be moved in a procession on an exorbitantly decorated triumphal wagon. The procession could include lavishly decorated paraphernalia of various kinds and elaborate theatrical floats visualising significant events in the life of the saint. Spectacular performances could be put on, such as a child dressed up as an angel and made to 'fly' in the vicinity of the saint's statue by being suspended by ropes.<sup>69</sup> In the procession could be carried banners with pictures of the saint, to which had been attached a multitude of bank notes (offered to the saint by devotees). The main street was often brightly illuminated during the evening of the feast day.

However, the feast typically involved abundance and excesses of a profane nature as well. Loud music was played by bands and single individuals on bagpipes, tambourines, drums and other instruments. As a rule, lavish fireworks were set off with deafening explosions. Food and sweets were consumed in great amounts. Numerous

reports state that alcohol was drunk in abundance; some feasts have even been described as bacchanals.<sup>70</sup> Many feasts included public spectacles and games, such as horseraces and pole-climbing contests. The feast was typically taken as an occasion for a fair, at which there were travelling merchants, peasants who traded animals and agricultural produce, itinerant medical practitioners (such as vendors of herbal medicines) and a variety of entertainers. The atmosphere was one of excitement, as can be understood by the following description of a fair held in connection with the feast of Sant'Alfio in Trecastagne (Sicily): '... indescribable is the din, the chatter, the roar and the clamour of this inebriated crowd, which, shapeless and swarming, singing, playing, dancing and laughing, looks like a waving and stormy sea.'<sup>71</sup>

Thus there is excess and abundance of two kinds on the saint's feast. There is that of the saint, who is made to appear as immensely rich, an objectification of its abundant *grazia*. Another abundance is of a profane nature. The mundane and the carnal are enjoyed in a chaotic and exaggerated mode. The relation between these two abundances will be discussed below.

### ***Obtaining Grazie: Contagion and Consumption***

The saints 'full of *grazie*' were approached by believers who prayed for protection and help in all kinds of matters: in curing illness and infertility in both human beings and domestic animals, in keeping the family together in harmony, for good harvests or the successful outcome of other domestic undertakings, in protecting the home and the family from bad luck and evil forces and so on. More generally, saints were prayed to in the wish to *stare meglio* – to live a better life than that of the *miseria*, a term commonly used to describe the condition of poverty and hopelessness prevailing among large parts of the South Italian population. All this the saints were thought capable of conveying to human beings by means of their *grazie*. There seem to be principally three general notions of how *grazie* could be obtained from saints: (1) through contagion and consumption, (2) through transaction and (3) through sacrifice. These ways of obtaining blessings are not exclusive. In a particular cult, a practice relying on one of the three notions could often be employed in parallel with practices inspired by the other two and, in many practices, the notions were combined.

In the liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church, divine grace is often conveyed by the officiating priest through actions that involve a touch of the hand or a gesture indicating a touch, or the application



onto the body of blessed substances. In the popular cults of saints in Southern Italy, physical contact and proximity was of great importance. Almost every description of saints' feasts indicates that the believers tried to come as close as possible to the saint, preferably to have physical contact with it. Evidently, the believers thought that the prospect of receiving *grazia* from a saint was especially good when the image or relics were touched, caressed or kissed, particularly on the saint's feast day when his or her *grazie* were most abundant. Hence, the preferred proximity and contact with the saint rely on a notion that it is a source of *grazia*, and that the nearer one can get, the better the prospect of receiving *grazia*. The symbolisation of *grazia* in the idiom of bodily or other fluids could make the striving for proximity a striving for contact with such substances.

*Grazia* could also be obtained through consumption of food or drink. In the Mass, grace and blessings of the Lord are received through the consumption of the Eucharistic bread. In the South Italian cults of saints, supposed exudations from saints could be consumed, and the water from springs and wells associated with a saint or the death of a martyr could be drunk and believed to have miraculous capacities. At some feasts of saints, particular kinds of breads were baked and distributed to the faithful, who believed that the bread was blessed, that it protected and healed from illness or that it generally promoted well-being.<sup>72</sup> Bread could also be brought to the church on a saint's feast day to be blessed by the priest and then eaten.<sup>73</sup>

An obvious meaning in kissing a saint is to show affection, and perhaps also submission. However, it might also be argued that the widespread practice of kissing relics and images as well as objects associated with a saint, invoked notions of consumption. It has been noted earlier that kissing a person could sometimes be suggestive of consumption of the vital forces of that person. The kisses delivered to saints were sometimes hard and intense and repeated again and again. The image or enshrined relic was sucked rather than kissed, implying consumption of the saint's *grazia*.

In summary, believers approaching a saint typically behaved as though *grazia* was an entity in the physical world. Whether intangible or material, in the form of holy manna, exudations or certain foods, they wished to come near its source — the saint — and incorporate it in their own bodies.

### *Transactions*

The notion of transactions between saint and believers has commonly been understood, by anthropologists as well as folklorists, to be a

central feature of popular cults of saints in Southern Europe and Latin America.<sup>74</sup> Saint and believer, it is argued, form a reciprocal relation, in which acts by one party are returned by the other. This model undoubtedly describes a common idea among believers of how to gain *grazie*, although its importance has often been overstated.<sup>75</sup>

At the core of the idea of transaction is the assumption that a saint can be pleased. The saint has a wish for certain assets or services that the believer can offer or it pleases him that the believer performs certain acts. The believer on his part has a wish for assets or services that the saint can offer. Therefore saint and believer might agree to a mutually desirable exchange.

The transactional relationship is most explicit in the case of the *voto*, the vow. A believer vows to a saint that, if assistance is given in a specific matter, then a special offering will be made to the saint. In general, the greater the miraculous assistance asked for from the saint, the greater the offering promised by the believer. The saint indicates agreement to the 'contract' by performing the miracle for which the believer has asked.

Votive offerings could consist of items of value, such as money, personal jewellery, domestic animals, olive oil and candles (sometimes of huge size). When they had been offered, such items were usually displayed for a time near the saint's image. Money offered to a saint was supposed to be used by the clergy for charity or for meeting the expenses of the cult. Consumable goods could be sold, often on auction, and the money so obtained was also to be used in this way. The saint could also be offered things of immediate 'use', such as jewellery to adorn the statue or a precious mantel to be dressed in on the feast day.

Offerings could also consist of *ex-votos* that were permanently displayed at the saint's shrine: paintings of miraculous interventions, small replicas in silver or wax of a bodily part (or animal) that has been cured of illness, medical aids (such as crutches and corsets) that had become unnecessary after a miraculous recovery, the braid of a woman's hair, or the wedding dress that had been used in a longed for wedding that the saint was believed to have helped bring about.<sup>76</sup> These *ex-votos* can be understood to be pleasing for the saint to possess since their display serve to testify to his power. Surrounded by hundreds or thousands of pictures of miracles he has performed (in Sicily such paintings were called 'miracoli')<sup>77</sup> and of replicas of bodily parts he has healed, the saint appears immensely powerful.

The believer could also vow to perform a devotional act — make a strenuous pilgrimage to the saint's shrine, commission masses to be

read, dress in penitential habit for a period of time, practice charity, erect a street shrine in honour of the saint or perform acts of abstinence and self-mortification. For this latter purpose, as well as to gain spiritual merits, penitential instruments could be used, of which there were numerous varieties devised for different occasions and personal preferences.<sup>78</sup> It was quite common to promise to perform strict penitence in public at saints' feasts, such as walking to the saint with chained feet or dragging the tongue on the church floor. In the section on sacrifice (below), such penitences will be described in more detail. Here, one example is of particular interest.

In Melilli (Sicily) at the feast in honour of San Sebastiano, men from communities in the area as well as more remote places ran in groups of up to a hundred to the saint's church (a distance of at least 10 kilometres and often much longer). They were called *nudi* ('naked'), since they in past times were said to have ran completely naked. In more recent times, they were dressed in shorts or a loin-cloth and, while running, they held one hand at the back and one raised in the air. This peculiar gesture was intended as a remembrance of San Sebastiano, who is said to have been stripped naked, tied to a pole and shot with arrows when martyred. This is how he is portrayed in the wooden statue in the church of Melilli, except that he is not shown as an adult but as a gracious and vigorous child. The *nudi*, exhausted by hours of running and inebriated by their enthusiasm and the wine they had drunk during their ordeal, rushed into the church upon their arrival, hurled gifts of flowers at the statue, kissed it frenetically, performed a kind of dance in front of it and then left additional gifts by it. Most of the men had made a promise to the saint to do all this.<sup>79</sup>

The reason for assuming that the saint should accept the performance of acts of devotion as a counter-gift ought to be that he is pleased when human beings behave as true and devout Christians who renounce the worldly life and carnal preoccupations. The *nudi* in Melilli, by their 'nakedness' and hand gestures, explicitly imitate San Sebastiano in the anguish of martyrdom. In return for the miracles he has granted them, they express intense devotion by tormenting themselves like the martyr himself was tormented at his death. Symbolically they offer their lives to him, as he offered his life in spreading the Christian gospel for the salvation of mankind.

While the vow speaks of an idea of entering into a relation of balanced reciprocity with a saint, the relationship with the community patron saints and with certain other especially esteemed saints in the community church speaks of generalised reciprocity. As was

mentioned, people had intimate and personal relations with these saints. They were believed to provide constant protection and assistance in lesser and greater matters of daily life and were offered a continuous stream of small gifts. The ethnography indicates that there was little or no consideration of exchange in the sense that an act by one of the parties should necessarily be balanced by an act by the other, except when some miraculous intervention of exceptional importance was asked for or had been received. Hence, just as in South Italian social life, reciprocity tends to be of the generalised type if the partner is perceived as an intimate and trusted friend, while it tends to be of a balanced type if he is seen as more distant in the social space.<sup>80</sup> In the second case, we typically have the miracle-working saint situated outside the community, who is asked for assistance in particular matters whose accomplishment requires great divine power and in return is offered gifts of substantial value or the performance of acts that speak of deep devotion.

The type of relationship between saint and believer had consequences for the course of action followed by believers who had begun to lose confidence in the benevolence or powers of a saint. When a miracle-working saint outside the community did not respond to prayers for assistance, people could simply turn to another saint, hoping that he would be more generous or powerful. The community patron saint, however, is the only protector of the community; there is no one else to turn to. When a patron saint failed to protect his community despite the great need of the citizens, they could, collectively, mistreat him. For example, a patron saint who had been requested to put a stop to a heavy snowfall, could be brutally carried out of the church and put in the snow; if asked to put an end to disastrous rains, the saint could be put out in the rain. The same procedure could be followed in the case of a severe drought or if bush fires threatened the community; the saint was then exposed to the scorching sun or put in front of the approaching fire. Saints, if not sufficiently efficient, could also be spat upon, bombarded with rotten fruit, tied with ropes or thrown into the sea.<sup>81</sup>

Some scholars have understood such mistreatments as 'punishments' inflicted upon a saint who has not fulfilled his part of a 'contract' — devotion and gifts from the members of the community are expected to be paid back by saintly protection. It is doubtful, however, whether this view fully explains these practices. What they indicate is rather a wish to 'rouse' a divinity that appears to the believers to be indifferent. The saint is 'awakened' either by having his attention drastically drawn to the desperate situation of his

devout followers by exposing him to the same rain, snow or sun that torments them or by subjecting him to sacrilegious acts that, if all else has failed, should conquer his indifference so that he notices the prayers for protection. It should be noted that numerous saint's legends describe how sensitive saints are to sacrilegious acts and how the impious persons who commit them will suffer severe retaliation.<sup>82</sup> In the case of the communal sacrilege of an indifferent saint, however, those who commit it are not actually impious. On the contrary, they demonstrate that they still expect the saint to be willing to help them, if only he would 'wake up'.

If even these acts did not change the saint's indifference, the final solution was to agree on a new patron saint. The patron saints of communities were quite often replaced in the past because they had failed to protect the community (for instance, by not putting an end to epidemics); they were abandoned for other saints who seemed more considerate.<sup>83</sup>

### *Sacrifice*

The believer could also beg a saint for *grazie* while performing certain acts that were thought to increase the prospect of receiving assistance. However, most of these acts could also be performed as a fulfilment of a vow.

A believer praying to a saint for help in a certain matter could offer money in the saint's collection box in church, light candles in front of its picture, altar or shrine, or perform some act of self-mortification, such as fasting and abstaining from certain worldly pleasures. When believers asked a saint for *grazie* on his feast day, particularly if they were on pilgrimage to a wonder-working saint, acts of penitence and mortification were common and often severe. Some believers walked on foot for days or weeks to shrines far away, and it was very common to walk barefoot at least the final part of the way. Some walked to the saints with heavy iron chains attached to their feet<sup>84</sup> or carried a heavy stone or huge cross all the way.<sup>85</sup> A particularly widespread form of penitence, practised in sanctuaries and churches all over Southern Italy, was to drag the tongue over the floor of the holy building, from the entrance to the venerated image inside. This was done while crawling forward with such force that the tongue started to bleed. The eminent ethnographer Giuseppe Pitrè knew of 60 feasts of saints in Sicily alone where the faithful dragged the tongue over the floor.<sup>86</sup> Other ways of approaching a saint so as to express penitence, humbleness and submission were also common, such as walk-

ing on the knees or crawling on the floor. The practice of beating one's breast in front of an image, asking pardon for sins committed and praying for favours, was wide spread.<sup>87</sup>

Self-mortification could be elaborated into a ritual unique to a particular cult. For instance, in Guardia Sanframondi (Campania), as a devotion to the Vergine dell'Assunta on August 21, the so called *disciplinanti* walked in procession dressed in white chemises, holding a scourge in one hand and a crucifix or an authentic human skull in the other hand. The *battenti a sangue* followed them, mortifying the skin of their bare chests with a *spugna* (literally 'sponge', a piece of cork in which 33 sharp pins had been inserted) so that blood flowed.<sup>88</sup>

In the 19th century and earlier, it was quite common that people mortified themselves while participating in processions that had formed to beg a patron saint to produce rain in times of drought or to stop heavy rains. One report, which seems to concern more recent times in Potenza (Basilicata), tells that on such occasions a painting of the Vergine Adolorata (the Virgin of Sorrows) was carried in the procession. The participants walked barefoot, men lashed their shoulders with heavy ropes, women hit their chests with a stone and some persons carried heavy crosses. The procession moved to the sound of loud prayers, deafening cries and the chanting of the words *ora pro nobis* ('pray for us').<sup>89</sup>

Some saints were renowned for their great powers and for their frequent granting of prayers. To effectively petition such a saint, it was necessary to make a pilgrimage to his shrine. Pilgrims typically travelled in groups, and their conduct was ideally characterised by Christian friendship. A description of a pilgrimage to the sanctuary of San Michele on the Gargano peninsula relates that the pilgrims sang religious songs in unison during their long walk, and rested and ate together. When they reached the foot of the mountain, where the sanctuary is located in a cave near the summit, there was an outburst of joy, and kisses and mutual pardons were exchanged. The pilgrimage was considered to be a propitious occasion for putting an end to enmity and resentment and for entering into spiritual kinship. Peace was thereby made between families, offences were forgiven and *comparatico* relations were established.<sup>90</sup>

Hence, pilgrimage meant not only mortification through the hardships and sufferings of the journey – which were significant in older times when people walked long distances on foot and often spent the nights outdoors or on the floor of the shrine – but also a momentary creation of another mode of existence than ordinary life. The pilgrims left their homes and formed a new community in which the character

of social relations was intended to conform to the Christian ideal of friendship and peace, although in practice this was not always fully accomplished.<sup>91</sup> This significance of pilgrimage is stressed when the goal is located high on a mountain, which was often the case. Pilgrims then move from their ordinary sphere of life not only in the horizontal dimension, but in the vertical as well. They reach a solitary location closer to the divine realm of Heaven, from which they view the everyday mundane world far below, a perspective which is suggestive of having left that world for a 'higher' purpose; in this new perspective from high above, all ordinary objects and undertakings of the world below appear remote and insignificant. Hence the top of the mountain is particularly suitable for the symbolic creation of an alternative and 'elevated' mode of existence.

The acts carried out by the believer who prays to a saint for *grazie* essentially imply a sacrifice. The carnal body and the mundane world are rejected, as is personal independence; instead, the spiritual is cultivated and deep submission is shown to the divine. As we know, believers perform these acts at many saint's feasts in an atmosphere characterised by chaotic and excessive indulgence in profane undertakings and pleasures. Through the sharpened contrast between worldliness and spirituality, their sacrifice appears even greater. Believers give up money and other worldly valuables. This is done ostentatiously in front of the saint to catch his attention. Often the value of the gift is not very great in economic terms, but the crucial point is that the believers impoverish themselves; they become poorer than before. The believers renounce and attack their own flesh by means of often severe self-mortifications. They strive to conform to an ideal Christian way of life by treating fellow human beings as equals, by forgiving enemies, by showing devotion to saints and by being pious. In short, they abandon and sacrifice the carnal and the mundane, which is all around them in chaotic excess, in the prospect of receiving blessings from a saint who is full of abundance of another kind, an excess of *grazia* that could be received in the form of pure and blissful vitality that brings health and well-being.

Since many of these acts – offerings, pilgrimages and self-mortifications – are the same as those which could be promised in a vow to a saint, it would be possible to view them as inspired by an idea of a transactional relationship. The believer could perhaps perform them in the belief that they are pleasing to the saint and in the expectation of receiving from the saint an immediate return. Although this understanding is of some relevance, there is clearly also another dimension of these practices, in particular those which imply mortifications.

These are performed in a spirit that speaks not so much of an intention to please a saint, but rather of a hope that the sacrifices in themselves will bring about blessings. When these acts were performed as vows, there is also a sense that they, rather than pleasing the saint, through an intrinsic power have a benevolent and desirable effect on those who perform them. This good is obtained through sacrificing, but that which is sacrificed is not received in any sense by the saint; it is simply discarded.

In the Gospel of John (12: 25) it is written: 'The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.' This theme is central to the notions of Christ's self-sacrifice, of martyr death and of the Christian rejection of the mundane and carnal. While in Christian thought, sacrifice and rejection of the mundane and carnality are rewarded with spiritual blessings and ultimately with eternal blissful life, the devotees in the cult of saints very often ask for health and well-being in the mundane world. We encounter an apparent paradox: believers often mortify their flesh until the point of bodily exhaustion; at the same time, the *grazia* received from a saint is often conceived of as vital force, identified with blood or other fluids emitted by the saint. Why should one give up vital force in order to receive vital force?

The answer is that there is a difference in quality between the internal vitality discarded by the devotees and the vitality received externally from the saint. While the former is associated with transience, impurity and suffering, the latter is associated with transcendence, purity and blissful well-being. Hence, as Maurice Bloch argues in his theory of sacrifice as 'rebounding violence',<sup>92</sup> the vitality that is sacrificed and lost is inferior to that which is desired.

The assumed effectiveness of sacrifice in the contexts of cults of saints has an explicit rationale: the saint is a powerful divinity capable of helping those in need who express devotion and submission; or, accepting the theology of the Church, the saint is an intermediate to the omnipotent God, who has this power.

A corollary of this rationale is that the greater the devotion, submission, suffering and need, the greater the prospect of receiving help. Poverty is a state that, through moral imperative embedded in Christian ethics and egalitarian ideology, attracts wealth from the rich. A beggar who asks for alms has little success if he is well dressed and looks healthy and well fed. He has an increased possibility of receiving alms if he is dressed in rags and appears to be starving and ill. In that case, the difference in wealth and well-being between the beggar and the passers-by increases, and the Christian



moral imperative to share wealth becomes compelling. The saint sees pilgrims united in Christian fellowship, he sees enemies who forgive each other, he sees the deeply repentant and submissive sinner, he sees the poor devotee who renounces what little he has, he sees the flagellant who mercilessly torments his own flesh, he hears the desperate prayers of suffering humans for help and assistance – and in his compassion for these devout, poor Christians he bestows his *grazie* upon them freely and without asking for anything in return.

However, a more implicit notion of the effectiveness of sacrifice in the contexts of cults of saints can also be discerned. While poverty is a state that exercises a ‘force of attraction’ on assets in the social domain, this force merges with a supposition that, in the physiological domain, that which is low in vitality attracts vitality from that which has an abundance of life power. The merging of these two forces of attraction – both building upon the premise that that which has less has a force to attract matter from that which has more – was found in the practices and beliefs, discussed in Chapter 5, regarding unintentional appropriation of vitality. In such contexts, the state of low vitality is not created intentionally. It follows from natural phenomena, such as menstruation and pregnancy. In the mortifications by devotees approaching a saint, however, there is an intentional devitalization, sometimes taken to the extreme of a symbolic death, which coincides with the hope to receive *grazia*.

Thus, mortifications in the contexts of cults of saints might be understood as a strategy aiming at increasing the prospects of gaining superior vital force by discarding inferior vital force. The body is made ‘dry’ with respect to the latter sort of vitality so as to prepare it for a plentiful intake of the former sort. Just as patches of clothes used to absorb miraculous exudations from saints must be dry to perform well, the devotees need to be ‘dry’ of internal vitality. In this strategy, touching the saint becomes of great importance since it suggests the possibility of an immediate ‘physical’ transfer of vitality.

## EIGHT

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# GRAZIA AND CREATIVE FORCES OF NATURE

In this chapter we will discuss how saintly *grazia* connects not only with the domain of the body but also with the domain of nature. We will then consider how significances from these two domains merge in the Easter celebrations of the death and resurrection of Christ as well as in the Eucharistic sacrifice in Mass. Lastly, I will briefly comment on the relation between the Virgin Mary and Christ as a continuation of an archaic representation of the creative forces of the earth and vegetation.

### *Countryside Sanctuaries*

Collectively venerated images of saints were kept both in churches in villages and towns and in countryside shrines. Such shrines, commonly called 'sanctuaries', were most often dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary and thus housed a venerated image of her. Of the 512 churches in Southern Italy labelled 'sanctuaries' in official Roman Catholic publications, 433 (85%) have a Marian dedication, while the remaining are dedicated to various other saints.<sup>1</sup>

Most sanctuaries are located at specific geographical features of the landscape – typically on or near mountaintops, in or near caves, by springs, wells, streams and rivers, and in, or at the edge of, woods, thickets and groves. The location of numerous sanctuaries combines several of these geographical features. For instance, the sanctuary dedicated to the Trinity on Monte Autore (on the border between Abruzzo and Lazio) is situated in a natural cave high up on the mountain, at the foot of a 300-meter high perpendicular rock wall. In the rock, and also inside the cave, are the springs of a stream that descends through the forest below.<sup>2</sup> It may be noted that many pilgrims are said to have had a vague idea of the object of veneration. Most often they referred to it as *la Santissima* ('the most holy', feminine form), and many thought that they made a pilgrimage to the *Madonna*.<sup>3</sup>

On their saints' feast days, the most important sanctuaries were visited by many pilgrims who came in the hope of receiving *grazie*.

The above mentioned sanctuary on Monte Autore, for instance, attracted 60-70,000 pilgrims to the feast on the first Sunday after Easter in the early 1950th. To the less famous sanctuaries came pilgrims only from nearby towns and villages, sometimes just a few hundred.<sup>4</sup>

The origin of sanctuaries is a subject of local mythology.<sup>5</sup> One common theme is that the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared at the site and expressed her wish to have a sanctuary erected.<sup>6</sup> In such accounts, the Blessed Virgin typically appears high up on a mountain, in a cave, by a spring, well or stream, or in a tree, bush, grove or thicket. Legends of the origins of sanctuaries may also tell that an image of a saint was found at the place where the sanctuary was later erected (see below) or that the image had another origin but had chosen to be venerated at the sanctuary after having supernaturally moved itself there.

Legends connecting saints with springs, wells and rivers can also have other themes. As mentioned in the previous chapter, local legends may claim that a well or spring is located or came into existence where a saint was martyred or buried or where some of his or her body parts were disposed of after martyrdom. The association may also be that, for instance, a spring emerged from the earth at the place where a saint stamped his foot, prayed on his knees or struck the ground with a hoe.<sup>7</sup>

### *Legendary Origins of Images and Relics*

Let us now look more closely at one specific element in the local legends of saints: the alleged origin of images and relics. We will consider not only those that were worshipped at sanctuaries, but all images and relics that were collectively venerated. A legend may claim that the image had once been sculptured or painted by an artist who was able to complete his work only with help of divine powers or that it had been transported on land or sea and then expressed its wish by means of some miracle to be venerated at its present location.

The perhaps most common theme, however, is that the image or relic was found hidden at a certain place, often by persons who were led there by strange lights or other exceptional signs, such as oxen genuflecting in devotion. In some legends, the location is identical to the place where the image or relic later becomes venerated, while other legends say that it was found in one place and then brought to the place of veneration. This 'translation' as a rule included the miraculous intervention of the saint itself, who chose the place by, for

instance, moving itself or controlling the behaviour of oxen who pulled the cart on which the image or relic was loaded. The legends also often tell something about the history of the image or relic before it was found. For instance, it could long ago have been safeguarded from harm by invading troops by being hidden and then forgotten or it could have fallen off a ship manned by heathens.

In almost all these legends, the place where the image or relic was found is one of the following locations, or a combination of several.

1. *A tree, a bush or a thicket.* The image is found besides the trunk of a tree, or up among its branches, or hidden in a bush, grove or thicket.<sup>8</sup>

2. *A cave.* The statue or the painting is found in a cave, sometimes buried in the earth of its floor.<sup>9</sup> Relics could also be said to have been found in a cave and, in that case, the cave is typically said to have been the dwelling of a hermit saint at the time of his death.<sup>10</sup> A cave may also be pointed out as the former dwelling of a saint even if no relic is said to have been found there.<sup>11</sup>

3. *A well, a spring or a river.* The image is found floating on the water or deep down in a well or water reservoir dug in the ground.<sup>12</sup>

4. *Buried in earth.* The image or relic is usually found buried underground in a place outside inhabited and cultivated territory, but it may also be found under earth in or near a village or town or in the soil of a cultivated field.<sup>13</sup>

5. *In the sea or on the seashore.* The image is found floating in the waves of the sea, hauled up from the depths in the nets of fishermen or washed up on the shore. Sometimes it is said to have fallen off a ship from a distant land.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, from the geographical location of sanctuaries, from the legends of apparitions and from the legends of the origin of images and relics, it can be concluded that saints, and especially the Virgin Mary, were closely associated with vegetation in the form of trees, bushes and groves, with springs, streams, rivers and the sea, with caves and the subterranean realm, and with mountaintops. All these features of the landscape connote creative natural forces.

### *Creative Natural Forces*

In Europe, since prehistoric times, the earth has been conceived of as a creative force.<sup>15</sup> We find an early notion of earth as a womb, as having a female reproductive capacity. To this notion connects the idea of minerals as 'growing' in the earth, which was elaborated in the alchemy of medieval and early modern times; one of the great

projects of this science was to replicate this natural growth in the laboratory to produce one of the most refined of metals, namely gold. The chthonic productive forces have often been personified, and we find a multitude of figures imagined as engaged in labour deep in the bowels of the earth, such as dwarfs and gnomes<sup>16</sup> industriously mining or fairies spinning and weaving in subterranean chambers. Common are also legends of immense treasures buried in the earth and guarded by spirits or other beings; as has been mentioned, such legends were told in virtually every village in Southern Italy. The cave has long been thought of as a passage to the chthonic realm, and there are many legends telling of how human beings enter a cave and experience the marvels of the subterranean world and of how chthonic beings emerge from caves.

Mountaintops have likewise fascinated man since prehistoric times. As argued above, its solitary and elevated location close to the divine realm of heaven, high above the mundane business of the everyday world, makes it a particularly suitable place for interaction with divinity and for temporarily realising extraordinary modes of social life during pilgrimages. The top of the mountain can also be understood to suggest a kind of 'peak' of the powers embedded in the earth.

Water also has an ancient history in the symbolism of European societies; it is a primordial element necessary for life. In mythology, water is the origin of the world and the birthplace of gods. In legends, we find the association between life and water, expressed in the motifs of the 'Fountain of Youth' and the 'Water of Health' – waters that are rejuvenating and health-bringing and that give life back to the dead.<sup>17</sup> As we know, folk medicine attributed fertilising, reinvigorating and purifying qualities to water in nature. The forces of water have been personified by a multitude of beings. In the ethnography of Southern Italy, there are the *proneta*, a female water spirit inhabiting wells and streams,<sup>18</sup> and the *sirena* (siren), which was imagined as a woman with the tail of a fish who stored immense treasures of jewels and precious metals in her dwelling in the depths of the sea.<sup>19</sup> The spring and the well are locations at which the creative forces of the chthonic realm and the fertility of waters fuse.<sup>20</sup> The sea conveys a meaning of a creative force also because it is the source of fish; for communities that depend for survival on fishing, it thus is as important as the earth is for peasants.<sup>21</sup>

Vegetation springs from the earth, and the tree, with its roots deep in the earth and its crown reaching up towards heaven, is the most impressive manifestation of vegetal growth found in nature. In the

landscape thickets form a dense vegetal area that is comparatively inaccessible to human beings and therefore suggestive of containing hidden natural forces. In European history, we find innumerable expressions of an imagery of tree and forest containing a vital principle, often personified as various kinds of tree spirits, leaf-clad mummers etcetera,<sup>22</sup> and trees are commonly used as symbols of fecundity and plenty, such as the Italian *albero della cuccagna*, a greased pole raised at certain community celebrations and used for pole-climbing contests. At the top were hung hams, cheese and other attractive foodstuffs — prizes for those who managed to climb the pole.<sup>23</sup> Among the ancient Greeks and Romans, the grove and the forest were the abodes of the gods Pan, Faunus and Silvanus; in Sicily were the sacred forests of Minerva, Mars and Venus.<sup>24</sup> In the tradition of Christian nature mysticism, elaborated by Saint Francis, nature untouched by man, with its vegetation and wild animals, is conceived of as permeated with the presence of divinity.<sup>25</sup> The forest is wilderness and therefore, together with barren, inaccessible mountains, a tranquil environment in which contact with the Divine could be maximised, far from crowded and disturbing cities.<sup>26</sup>

The fecundity of the earth also makes the crops of the cultivated fields grow, and all over Europe we find beliefs and practices inspired by a conception of crops as containing a vital principle, which sometimes is zoo- or anthropomorphised: the customs of the first and the last sheaf, the Christmas goat made from straw, and so on.<sup>27</sup> Such symbolism has also been documented in traditional Southern Italy. At the harvest in Siculiana (Sicily), the very last part of a grain field was cut in such a manner that the straws of corn were progressively cut off higher and higher from the ground, and only the tops of the last straws were cut off.<sup>28</sup> Hence the harvest proceeded as though the field contained a force or an entity which was 'chased' into the last straws of grain and spared by the final and incomplete cutting. In Rocca Pia (Abruzzo), when the harvest of grain was brought home on a cart from the threshing grounds, a puppet, made of a pair of trousers and a jacket filled with straw and dressed in shoes and a hat, was put on top of the sacks filled with grain. With great joy, the cart was brought into the village, where the puppet was carried into one of the homes. It was treated to *pasta* and wine and playfully talked to as though it were a living person.<sup>29</sup> A comparable custom has been reported from the Gargano peninsula in Puglia. When the grain harvest had been excellent, some peasants dressed a child to resemble John the Baptist and placed him on the last cartload of grain brought home from the fields. This was done to ensure a

good harvest the following year.<sup>30</sup> Both these usages suggest a personification of the corn, created by the peasants to serve as a being with whom they could interact.

The fertile forces of nature and vegetation are especially suggestive in the springtime, a time of vegetal rebirth. At this time of the year, particularly in May, we find a concentration of saints' feasts and pilgrimages.<sup>31</sup> In the pilgrimages to sanctuaries, when these took place in the spring or the summer, flowers and green branches were often a prominent element. For instance, in pilgrimages to the sanctuary on Monte Autore (the first Sunday after Pentecost and July 26), men wore paper hats decorated with artificial flowers and women wore garlands of such flowers around their necks. Some also carried a stick decorated with flowers, or broke off branches from trees which they carried with them. Such customs were followed on numerous similar occasions in this area and elsewhere in Southern Italy.<sup>32</sup>

### *Obtaining Grazia at Sanctuaries*

The connection between saints, sanctuaries and the creative forces of nature came to clear expression in many practices performed to obtain *grazie*.

If the sanctuary was located in a cave, it was common to touch and caress its walls, as though these were saturated with blessed substance. Believers could also lay down on the earthen floor and roll on it or rub themselves against it.<sup>33</sup> In a pilgrimage to the hermitage of San Venafro in Abruzzo, devotees collected earth, stones and plaster from the walls of the shrine and rubbed these onto their bodies. Some pilgrims brought home stones, herbs and water from the site to be kept as protection.<sup>34</sup> If water oozed from the roof and walls of a cave, it was often considered holy. For instance, in a cave near the village of San Vittorino in Abruzzo in the month of April, one of the walls is often covered with drops of water. The faithful believed that this liquid, which they used to cure certain ailments, was miraculous *manna* exuded by the relics of two saints, both named San Vittorino, who were buried there.<sup>35</sup> Likewise, if the sanctuary was located by a spring or a well, this water was usually considered to be miraculous. It could be attributed the power to heal illness, promote fertility, to increase lactation, keep evil forces at bay and reinvigorate the soul and body. The believers drank from it, applied it to their bodies and often brought it home to be kept as a protective charm.<sup>36</sup> Similar beliefs concerned water from springs at which no sanctuary was located but that were nevertheless connected with a saint through

their names or legends and that, according to local traditions, were places for popular worship and thaumaturgic procedures.<sup>37</sup>

At many sanctuaries, incubation was practised: the night was spent on the bare earth by the shrine or on the floor inside. This practice, which was widespread in antiquity as a means of establishing rapport with chthonic deities,<sup>38</sup> has been recorded in virtually all parts of Southern Italy. Incubation was clearly not only a practical matter of getting rest after a long and arduous trek to a remote site where lodgings were unavailable or limited. It was considered by devotees to be a part of the cult of the saint, practised in the hope of receiving *grazie* as well as to receive revelations in dreams. We are informed, for instance, that incubation was practised in Abruzzo to promote the appearance of the saint in dreams, to get assurances of a good harvest, heal illness and receive other forms of assistance; childless couples had intercourse during the night in some sanctuaries, in the belief that a conception would miraculously take place.<sup>39</sup> In Taranto (Puglia), the faithful spent the night in the urban church of the saints Cosma and Damiano on their feast day, and miraculous recoveries were said to have taken place during sleep.<sup>40</sup> In Calabria at the feast of the Madonna di Pettoruto near San Sosti and at the feast of the Madonna in Francavilla Marittima, the faithful used to sleep in the sanctuaries in the conviction that ailments were thereby healed and that the healthy were helped in their needs.<sup>41</sup>

The practice of incubation fuses several significances. First, to sleep outdoors or on the hard floor of a sanctuary is an act of penitence, equivalent to fasting, flagellation and other forms of self-mortification. Second, as in numerous other practices, described above, that aimed at obtaining *grazia* through physical contact with stones and earth, there is a notion that the direct contact between body and earth during sleep had as an effect an absorption into the body of vitalising forces from earth.<sup>42</sup> Third, the emphasis on sleeping and dreaming — states in which revelations were received and healing took place — can be construed as another expression of the momentary creation of a different kind of existence during pilgrimages and at the feasts of saints. The recollection of dreams allows an understanding of dreaming as a state when the self is present in a transcendental and limitless realm. Events that have already occurred might be re-experienced, often in alternative versions, and the dreamer can live through episodes in the future. Events may be unrealistic, but experienced with the appearance of reality. In Southern Italy, the dead and saints are often said to have been encountered in dreams.<sup>43</sup> Hence dreams appear to constitute alternative modes of life where the



physical constraints of the mundane world do not necessarily apply. In sleep, the believer can dream that he meets the saints and receives their *grazie* – and this appears so real that when he awakes he thinks that *grazia* has been granted.

In pilgrimages to saints' shrines, many walked at least a part of the way to the sanctuary barefoot, as a customary display of humility and devotion. Devotees also often walked barefoot, or with their feet dressed only in white stockings, in the processions arranged on the feast days of patron saints in urban settings. This practice can be understood to be inspired, at least to some extent, by a notion that chthonic forces – cum – *grazia* may be let into the body by means of physical contact with the earth. The theme of the bare sole of the foot touching earth and allowing entry into the body of chthonic forces is ancient. It can be found in numerous myths and beliefs, such as in those connecting to 'mono-sandalism' (having one foot bare and the other dressed), in the legend of Antaeus (the Greek giant who was invincible as long as he stood on the earth) and in practices such as walking barefoot at holy places and running barefoot on dewy grass in reinvigorating springtime ceremonies.<sup>44</sup> We may note that, in medieval times, witches were thought to draw their powers from earth; thus a witch, when captured and taken into custody, should be lifted clear from the ground so that she was deprived of force.<sup>45</sup> In this case, the chthonic forces were 'diabolised'; in the Roman Catholic dichotomy between the realm of God in Heaven and the subterranean realm of the Devil, they were connected with the latter.

Hence, incubation and walking barefoot are practices in which we again find a self-sacrifice in which a person mortifies the own flesh to prepare the body for an intake of superior vital force from an external source. A parallel can be discerned with the likewise ancient practice of annual and seasonal blood-letting. Unwanted humours were evacuated from the body, often at times of the year when 'pure' vital force from natural sources (such as dew or water from rivers, lakes and the sea) was appropriated through ablutions and other practices in order to reinvigorate the body.

### *Merging of Divine and Natural Forces*

The conclusion that follows from the material presented above is that the *grazia* of saints and the productive forces of nature merge. It can be argued that the fusion is based on a qualitative similarity between the two. The *grazia* of saints, conceived of as an asexual and pure vital

force, exists in an inexhaustible amount and is ideally received freely. The forces of nature, in their positive and creative aspects, also are external to man and society and are received freely. Man need not give anything in exchange for the water of the spring, for the chthonic energies or for the fertile power of the earth. He only has to collect or harness them. The forces appear as elemental, asexual, pure, immense and inexhaustible, albeit at the same time as they are inherently unreliable, just as the granting of *grazie* by the saints.

One may thus say that the saints of the countryside sanctuaries — just as the deities of pagan cults which they succeeded, often in unbroken succession at the old sites of worship<sup>46</sup> — personify the productive forces of nature. Each cave, spring, tree and grove is a unique source of natural force; when merged with the *grazia* of a saint, the saint also needs to be unique: hence the multitude of Madonnas populating the South Italian countryside. The legends of origins of images and relics tell us that the creative natural forces were also associated with the saints venerated in community churches. While the location of sanctuaries is a spatial merging of the saint with the productive forces of nature, the legends are a mythological merging.

It was concluded in the previous chapter that saints personify divine power and blessing; they mediate between God and man by expressing in a bodily idiom the limitless *grazie* of the Divine. Now we have found another aspect of their mediation: divine force merges with the productive forces of nature, and a saint personifies these merged forces. Hence, the saint translates both abstract divine power and natural forces into human vitality.

The association between the Virgin Mary and the productive and fertile forces of earth and nature is more accentuated than in the case of any other saint. The reason for this is to be found in the notion of her motherhood. In Roman Catholic thought, this notion is central in the devotion to the Virgin Mary. She is venerated because she is the mother of Christ, the incarnated God. Motherhood as a powerful and primordial symbol for fertile creation, nurturing and altruistic love is through her incorporated in a de-sexualised form as a positive quality in the Roman Catholic religion. In the popular cults of the Virgin Mary, the notion of her motherhood fuses with an archaic conception of the earth as a mother and the recognition of springtime as a season during which the earth gives birth to vegetation. The similarity between popular cults of the Virgin Mary and the pagan worship of earth goddesses representing the fertility of the soil has been commented upon extensively.<sup>47</sup>

A suggestive example of the continuity of pagan cults with the cult of the Virgin Mary is found at Enna, a town located in a part of Sicily with a particularly productive wheat agriculture. During the Hellenistic period, the mountain on which the town is built was a principal seat of worship of Demeter – the Greek goddess of crops, especially of wheat – and in Roman times of Ceres, the goddess protecting agricultural fertility as well as the fecundity of animals and men. Until the Christianization of interior Sicily in the eleventh century, a temple dedicated to Ceres and her daughter Proserpina was an object of pilgrimages. At the place of this temple, incorporating one of its old pillars, was built a church dedicated to the Madonna. Here, up to the mid-nineteenth century, old images of Ceres and Proserpina were taken as representations of the Virgin Mary and Christ, despite Proserpina being female. At the turn of the century, the devotion centred upon a proper image of the Virgin Mary, which was offered gifts of large sheaves of grain and bunches of wild flowers on her feast day.<sup>48</sup>

However, in relation to man, the forces of nature are not only positive and productive; they have a destructive aspect as well. The fertility of the soil may sometimes appear to be withheld, unfavourable weather may destroy crops and the earth itself can harm man through landslides and earthquakes. Nature appears as uncontrollable and unpredictable – it offers blessings but can also inflict horrible suffering. This dual aspect of nature could be related in traditional Southern Italy to the supernatural domain in two ways. First, the saints and God were connected with both the creative and the destructive aspect. Their blessings merged with the creative power, while natural disasters were understood to be their punishment for sins committed. Second, while the creative power of nature was associated with the saints and God, the destructive power was linked to their contrasting evil and devilish beings.

The most evident examples of this latter association are ideas connecting to strong winds, whirlwinds and hail storms. These potent natural phenomena are hardly ever of any advantage in agriculture; to the contrary, they threaten the peasant's home and crops with destruction. They were, as we know from Chapter 5, identified with evil forces, typically with witches and malign spirits of the dead. We also find examples of how natural phenomena of a more positive character could be associated with evil forces. The spirits of the dead were held to inhabit wells, springs and streams, especially at night, and all over Southern Italy can be found various precautions and many legends that speak of the dangers thought to threaten when

approaching these places during the night.<sup>49</sup> Caves<sup>50</sup> and trees<sup>51</sup> were also sometimes held to be the dwelling place of the spirits of human beings, as were woods and thickets.<sup>52</sup> As a rule, it was thought that encounters with the spirits of the dead at these places were dangerous and brought harm. Thus the evil *spiriti* of the dead were conceived to dwell in several of the natural loci which were also associated with the saints. In circumstances related to danger and death – such as in darkness, at night, when a death had occurred in the vicinity, in the presence of certain species of trees with sinister connotations (see below, Chapter 10) – the natural forces implicated by the locations inspired associations not with fertility and creative energies but rather with the destructive power of death.

### *The Passion of Christ*

Norman Douglas (1955: 258) sums up the three main facets of the South Italian devotion to Christ:

‘... the adult Jesus – the teacher, the God – is practically unknown. He is too remote from themselves and the ordinary activities of their daily lives; he is not married, like his mother; he has no trade, like his father (Mark calls him a carpenter); moreover, the maxims of the Sermon on the Mount are so repugnant to the South Italian as to be almost incomprehensible... Three tangibly-human aspects of Christ’s life figure here: the *bambino*-cult ... next, the youthful Jesus, beloved of local female mystics; and lastly the Crucified...’

As when saints are given a childish appearance or otherwise associated with childhood, the image of Christ as a child evokes notions of an innocent and asexual human being filled with pure life force in an unconsumed and pristine form. In the Roman Catholic Church, a certain cult of Christ as a child has developed, the cult of *Gesù Bambino*. In Southern Italy, the image of Christ as a child was particularly brought forth at Christmas, when images of baby Christs were displayed in churches and homes.

Concerning the second aspect of Christ that Douglas mentions, the youthful Jesus, little is written in South Italian ethnography. The affection for the young Christ among devout female Catholics is, however, well known from history and has been found to include a sensual and erotic imagery in which sentiments of suffering and love are central.<sup>53</sup>

What will primarily concern us here is the crucified Christ, which is the most important aspect of Christ in the Roman Catholic Church as well as in South Italian popular devotion. According to Christian

thought, Christ through his self-sacrifice took upon himself the sins of mankind, redeemed the world and offered man a path to salvation. The cross is the emblem of Christian faith and a central feature of most Catholic churches. On the interior walls of all Catholic churches can be found fourteen crosses, usually accompanied by plaques or paintings, depicting the fourteen stations of the cross, that is, scenes from the Passion of Christ. Believers are advised to pray and contemplate Christ's sufferings in front of these. In the sacrament of Communion, believers partake in the blessing of the incarnated God in his act of self-sacrifice. Easter, when the death and resurrection of Christ are celebrated, is the most important event of the liturgical year. In the towns and villages of Southern Italy, Easter was celebrated with great solemnity and devotion.

The preliminaries to Easter are Carnival and Lent. In Southern Italy, Carnival was often considered to begin on the day of Sant'Antonio (January 17), but it was most intensely celebrated during the three days prior to Lent. As in other parts of Roman Catholic Europe, Carnival was characterized by abstaining from work in favour of feasting, indulgence in food and drink, and by public pranks and masquerades typically performed in a chaotic, licentious and orgiastic manner. The festivities were purely secular and nearly all of the carnival figures – such as Pulcinella, Harlequin, the Giant, Death, the Turk, the *Carabiniere*, the Wild Man, the Hunchback, the Beggar, the Dancing Bear, the Gypsy, the Doctor, the Magician – have nothing to do with Christian religion; several are clearly continuities of pagan mythological figures.<sup>54</sup> The end of Carnival was typically marked by the destruction of a puppet personifying Carnival, often called *Carnevale*. This event could be elaborated so as to include a mock trial against the puppet, followed by its 'execution', or a feigned funeral procession in which the 'corpse' was carried out from the village and destroyed.<sup>55</sup>

The first day in Lent is Ash Wednesday. On this day, the churches were filled with believers, many of whom had joyfully indulged in the pleasures of Carnival until midnight the previous day. Mass was celebrated in an atmosphere of penitence and sorrow, and the priest marked the forehead of each person with ash while he declared: *Memento homo, quia pulvis es et in pulverem reverteris* (Remember man, dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return).<sup>56</sup>

For the Roman Catholic Church, Lent is a sacred period in which all believers shall sanctify themselves (*'santificarsi'*) by means of more frequent prayers, works of charity, penitence and self-mortification, and by fasting all days except Sundays. The kind of fast to be

observed is the *diguno ecclesiastico*, which is not a total fast but moderation in the consumption of food.<sup>57</sup> The observance of fasting is inspired, according to the Church, by 'mortification and penitence as a preventive measure against sin or as a means of compensation for sins already committed' and can be practised as an act of virtue so as to 'restrain the desires of the flesh, render the mind more fit for contemplation ... [and] impetrate, together with the prayer, spiritual and secular benefits...'<sup>58</sup> By observing the fast, it is not only the individual who mortifies himself, but, still according to the Church, it is the Church itself 'that spiritualises itself, that purifies itself'.<sup>59</sup> In sum, fasting is understood as a rejection of the carnal and impure dimension of man so that the spiritual dimension can be cultivated and cleansed. Furthermore, the abstinence from consuming meat, which was commanded for all Fridays, should also be observed on Saturdays during Lent. This can be understood as stressing the rejection of carnality during this time: consuming meat suggests an addition to the carnal component of man.<sup>60</sup> Although certainly not all South Italians adhered sternly to these orders, many did so, and the period as a whole was characterized among the laity by an emphasis on spiritual matters while mundane pleasures were frowned upon.

During Easter Week, everyday life was increasingly replaced by a devotional mode of life focused on the Passion of Christ. Ideally, no work was to be done; feasting and card-games were banned. Some persons fasted more rigorously, consuming only water and bread, or abstained totally from food on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday.<sup>61</sup> It is obligatory for Roman Catholics to visit the church for a confession and for receiving the Communion at least once a year, usually at Easter (the 'Easter duty'). In some communities, masked penitents walked the streets in procession, thereby expressing their repentance and devotion to Christ.<sup>62</sup> Christ could be mourned by observing some of the practices that were otherwise customary when mourning a deceased family member. In Bovallino (Calabria), for instance, the home was not cleaned during Easter Week, persons did not wash themselves and the women did not do their hair.<sup>63</sup> Another mourning custom was to cover the mirrors of the home; this could also be done during Easter Week.<sup>64</sup>

When Douglas in the text cited above says that the maxims of the Sermon on the Mount are 'repugnant' and 'almost incomprehensible' to the South Italian, he describes a moral attitude that is a corollary of negative reciprocity, and which in some communities appears to have been rather pervasive in everyday life. However, at Lent and Easter, as well as on certain other occasions (such as on pilgrimages), a

religious mode of living was temporarily created, ideally characterized by Christian love and altruism.

The devotional mode of life during Lent entailed that enmities should be forgotten or peacefully settled. This peacemaking was intensified during Easter Week. The first day of Easter week is Palm Sunday, commemorating the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. On this day, every church was adorned with branches of palm and olive trees, understood to signify peace and friendship. Among the laity twigs from olive trees or palm leaves were offered as gifts of amity and fellowship to relatives, friends and neighbours, and such gifts could also be made to those with whom one was in a state of enmity as an invitation to reconciliation.<sup>65</sup> Other days of the Holy Week could also be customary occasions for settling peace. In Lanciano (Abruzzo), for instance, the church bells were sounded on Maundy Thursday as a call for reconciliation and all, especially those who had been open enemies during the year, were supposed to embrace and kiss each other as a sign of peace, Christian brotherhood and mutual forgiveness.<sup>66</sup> In Sicily, Easter Sunday was a day on which peace between antagonistic persons and families should be settled; in some communities this was done publicly with embraces and kisses in the town square.<sup>67</sup>

The most important days of the Holy Week are Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday, the *triduo sacro*.<sup>68</sup> After *Gloria* was sung at Mass on Thursday, the Church went into mourning. Until the resurrection, celebrated on Saturday at noon, Christ was spoken of as dead, the decorations were removed from the altars, the holy water founts were emptied, all lamps and candles (except those by the sepulchre) were extinguished and the church-bells were not tolled. A consecrated Host was solemnly deposited in a ciborium and placed on an altar which, together with its decorations, was commonly called the *sepulcro* (sepulchre). According to the Church, the *sepulcro* is intended to glorify the institution of the Eucharist, but the laity understood it as representing, or rather *being*, the grave of Christ.

In South Italian churches, the *sepulcro* included some sort of representation of scenes from Christ's Passion.<sup>69</sup> Typically, a Crucifix constituted a centrepiece, and a multitude of fresh flowers and burning candles were part of the scenery. In many parts of Southern Italy, people brought with them to church plates with whole grain or legumes, which had been left for some weeks to germinate in the dark so that the sprouts had grown long, thin and pale, and put them by the *sepulcro*. Sometimes the seeds had been germinated in a wooden

box in the shape of a cross, thus further stressing the connection between the sprouting seeds and Christ. The *sepolcro* received great attention among the laity. In larger cities, many people dressed in dark clothes of mourning visited one church after the other admiring the splendour of their *sepolcri* and kissing the images of the crucified Christ. These visits assumed the form of condolence calls, similar to those made in the case of an ordinary death.<sup>70</sup>

In many communities the Passion and death of Christ were publicly enacted on Good Friday.<sup>71</sup> A procession was formed in which pictures or huge three-dimensional images of the Stations of the Cross were carried or in which scenes from the Passion were represented by living persons. The participation of children – representing monks (hence dressed in a habit and with shaven heads), apostles, saints, angels, the thirty-three years of Christ's life etcetera – in these celebrations was a common feature.<sup>72</sup> The procession had the character of a mortuary procession, sometimes accompanied by a band playing funeral hymns, in which an often life-size and extremely realistic effigy of the dead and blood-stained Christ was carried on a bier through the principal streets of the town. In many communities, virtually all inhabitants joined the procession, dressed in mourning. Many walked barefoot as an act of penitence and many wept from emotion; in some communities, masked penitents participated. At the outskirts of many towns, a Calvary with a *via crucis* (the Way of the Cross) was permanently constructed on a hill and, in these communities, the procession visited the Calvary.

In numerous communities in Calabria, Puglia and Sicily, devout men publicly practised strict self-mortification on Maundy Thursday or Good Friday as penitence for sins committed. This was often disavowed or prohibited by the clergy, but the practice nevertheless survived owing to the persistence of the devotees. In a Calabrian village, for instance, a group of men (the *battenti*, the 'beaters') rushed up and down the streets dressed only in a loincloth, hitting themselves on their sides, legs and arms, and cutting themselves with pieces of glass, or with bloodletting instruments borrowed from the barber, until they became 'as red as shrimps' with blood. Another group of men (the *inchiovati*, the 'nailed') walked in a silent procession, dressed in long, white shrouds, with their arms stretched out and bound to a long cross-piece of wood which they carried on their shoulders, seemingly nailed to a cross. A procession of a third group of men (the *intanagliati*, the 'impinced') followed them. These men had attached heavy pincers to the skin of their arms and walked in a cadenced manner so that the tossing of the pincers aggravated their



sufferings.<sup>73</sup> In Maglie (Puglia), similar scenes could be seen on Good Friday. Young men wearing crowns of thorn on their heads lashed themselves on the shoulders with knotted ropes. They were followed by a procession of 'repentant sinners', who carried huge stones, extremely heavy crosses or iron scourges with which they, at least in older times, lashed themselves until they were bloody. After them followed in procession boys dressed as angels, carrying replicas of the implements supposed to have been used in the crucifixion, and girls singing religious hymns. Lastly, a bier was carried with an effigy of the dead Christ, accompanied by a statue of the Madonna surrounded by a crowd of women dressed in mourning.<sup>74</sup> Hence, while the men tended to imitate the suffering Christ, the women tended to associate themselves with the grieving Madonna.<sup>75</sup>

On Easter Eve the services in church began in the morning when a priest lighted and consecrated the 'new fire' outside its entrance. The fire was brought inside the church and used to light the candles and lamps, which had been extinguished since Maundy Thursday. The 'new water' was blessed, and the holy water fonts and the baptismal font were filled. A mass was celebrated and, when the *Gloria* was sung at noon, the church bells were tolled to announce the resurrection of Christ. In some areas, it was the custom not to re-light the hearth in the early morning with glowing embers remaining from the evening before, as was usually done, but to light it later in the day using the blessed 'new fire' that had been received at the church.<sup>76</sup> Many also brought home the blessed 'new water'. They drank from it, used it when cooking Easter dinner, sprinkled the house with it or conserved it as a sacred fluid to be used to keep evil forces at bay. Sometimes the priest went out on a tour of the parish and blessed the homes with the 'new water'.<sup>77</sup>

The laity conceived of the moment when the church bells announced the resurrection of Christ as sacred and charged with benevolent and regenerative powers.<sup>78</sup> People fell on their knees, kissed the ground and prayed, wherever they might be. Women combed their hair in the belief that it would grow long and beautiful. Some rolled on the ground or in the meadows to cure ailments of the stomach, and small children could be rolled in their beds by their mothers for the same reason. Others found a cure against ailments of the skin by bathing in the sea. Infants were encouraged to take their first steps so that they would learn to walk sooner or their mothers whirled about with them in a merry dance so that they would grow strong and healthy. Peasants hurried to sow vegetables so that they would receive a plentiful harvest. Some held hens in their arms,

believing that the fowls would lay plenty of eggs, while others threw earth onto fruit trees so that they would bear much fruit. Objects relating to Christ's resurrection were considered to be endowed with a fertile force. In Salaparuta (Sicily), the dust swept from the church the first time after the resurrection was spread over the fields to make them fertile.<sup>79</sup> In Mandaradoni di Briatico (Calabria), the sprouts from the *sepolcro* were dug down, together with olive twigs blessed on Palm Sunday, in the earth of the grain fields and the vineyards to obtain a good harvest.<sup>80</sup> The notion of renewal at the moment of Christ's resurrection was also expressed by the practice of throwing out of the windows of the home old and useless domestic objects.<sup>81</sup>

When the fast had been broken, the typical Easter foods were eaten. Lamb was a traditional dish, and this relates to the close association between this animal and Christ. In the Holy Scripture, Christ is compared with a sacrificial lamb<sup>82</sup> and, in the imagery of the Church, he is commonly likened with a lamb; for instance, in the prayers of the Mass he is referred to as the 'Lamb of God'. In some local celebrations of Easter in Southern Italy, we find what appears to be practices derived from this association. For instance, in the Good Friday procession in Siderno (Calabria), the most devout believers, after having cut the throat of a white lamb, dragged its body, trickling with blood, along the streets of the town.<sup>83</sup>

Eggs were another traditional Easter dish and were often included in Easter breads.<sup>84</sup> A whole, boiled and shelled egg (or more) was inserted into the dough so that it was more or less enclosed by the baked bread. Such breads, which were usually sweetened, could be of various shapes – a heart, a rooster, a human body, a priest, a fish or a pigeon. The breads, customary gifts to children and between the betrothed, were eaten by many 'out of devotion' (*di devozione*) and believed to bring physical and spiritual blessings.

In many communities the reunion between the resurrected Christ and the Virgin Mary was enacted in joyful public ceremonies on Easter Sunday. An image of Christ and one of the Blessed Virgin were carried through the streets in separate processions which then joined, and the two images were made to meet.<sup>85</sup> On Easter Sunday or Monday, it was the custom in many areas to enjoy merry picnics in the countryside, often at a sanctuary, and there feast on the Easter dishes. The atmosphere was one of happiness and pleasure – the long time of Lent had finally passed, the fast was over and the countryside could be enjoyed when the vegetation was at the height of its fresh, green period.<sup>86</sup> As a Sicilian proverb quoted at this time of the year states:<sup>87</sup>

*Predichi e battuti*  
*Doppu Pasqua su' finuti.*

(‘Sermons and flagellations  
After Easter they are over’.)

The Church celebrates the time between Easter and Pentecost as a great, joyful feast.

These were the principal events of Carnival, Lent and Easter. From their sequence emerges a pattern familiar to us from the penitences and sacrifices of the cult of saints. Man is construed as having a dual nature: carnal and spiritual. The carnal and mundane component is renounced and, when this has been accomplished, blessings are received — blessings that are gratuitously given in limitless amounts and associated with both the vital force of the bodily realm and with the productive forces of nature. In the cult of saints, this sequence involves those who are devoted to a particular saint; in the case of Christ’s Passion, the sequence encompasses the cosmos, involving all Christians.<sup>88</sup> Let us discuss this in more detail.

The Carnival celebrations stresses man’s carnal element. The precise forms that this emphasis could take have certainly numerous other dimensions, since the local celebrations of Carnivals are often occasions for making ritual statements about features of the social setting, such as social stratification and age group and gender relations, but this will not be discussed here. During Carnival, people indulge in worldly pleasures, they often masquerade as animals and behave ‘as animals’, the Christian religion is often ridiculed and negated by displays of blatant pagan imagery; the God-given social hierarchy is inverted and the ruling elite is mocked. Ceremonial enactments of conflicts and acts of aggression are common. All this is done in a chaotic and exaggerated manner. This mode of behaviour is abruptly ended and replaced by its opposite when Lent begins. The impersonation of *carnevale* is put to death and the ‘corpse’ disposed off, and from Ash Wednesday until Easter there is an emphasis on the spiritual and a rejection of the carnal. The carnal body is compared to ashes, worldly pleasures should be avoided, the flesh should be mortified, enmities should be put to an end and be replaced by peace and Christian brotherhood, and everyone should devote himself to the spiritual. Hence a bifurcation of man in a carnal and a spiritual side is efficiently reified by the sharp contrast between the modes of conduct of Carnival and Lent.

The rejection of carnality reaches its climax on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. During these days, everyday life was replaced by a

mode of life deeply concerned with the spiritual and permeated with notions of dying and death. The renouncement of the carnal body becomes intense, often involving total fasts and extremely violent and bloody attacks on the own body. The Passion of Christ is not only commemorated by the ceremonies in church and on the streets of villages and towns, it is actually re-lived. The events of the Passion are spoken of in the present tense – ‘Christ is now dead’, ‘Christ is now resurrected’, and so on. The emotional involvement is very intense.

With the resurrection of Christ, the state of the ultimate negation of the carnal body – corporal death – is suddenly ended and heavenly *grazia* permeates the world in a cosmic regeneration. All who have renounced the mundane and the carnal during Lent, all who during the Holy Week have identified themselves with the suffering and dying Christ or with the grieving Madonna will be regenerated, as is Christ, into the newness of life and joy.

People appropriate the heavenly *grazia* that permeates the world by immediate contact with the earth and vegetation as they roll on the ground or in the grass. They have picnics on the countryside, which at this time of the year abounds with fresh, green vegetation. Often the picnics are held at sanctuaries, located at natural features such as springs and caves, which are associated through local religious practices with receiving heavenly-cum-natural fertility. People eat Easter eggs and ‘blessed’ Easter breads. The egg is a symbol of fertility and the regeneration of life<sup>89</sup> and, since bread was identified with Christ, the breads baked with eggs suggest the resurrected Christ. Easter lamb, an emblem of Christ, is also eaten. We learn that the butchers in a Calabrian village prepared themselves so that they were ready when the church-bells announced Christ’s resurrection to decapitate all the lambs that were to be eaten. All the bloody heads were thrown to the crowd that had gathered for the occasion.<sup>90</sup> This custom dramatizes a shift from an identification with Christ during his Passion, to an alienation from him at the end of Easter, when ordinary life is to be resumed. As external to those who celebrate Easter, Christ can be consumed in the form of a sacrificial lamb.<sup>91</sup> In the Mass celebrated in church, they consume the Eucharist, which is the blood and flesh of the resurrected Christ, conveying his grace to the congregation. More generally, all kinds of foods were enjoyed in abundance after this period of partial or total fasting.

The sacrificial abandonment of internal and inferior vitality for external and superior vitality is made to coincide in the sequence of Carnival, Lent and Easter with a natural regeneration of new life out

of decay and death; meanings are transposed between the liturgical and the natural calendars.<sup>92</sup> The scarcity of food among the peasants in the early spring coincides with the Lenten fast, so that unwanted states of scarcity and hunger can be reconstrued as pious acts of penitence that promise blessings to come.<sup>93</sup> The resurrection of Christ corresponds to the bursting forth of vegetation in spring, and the two events are associated not only by contemporaneity but also by the green leaves abounding in the celebration of Palm Sunday and by the germinating seeds at the *sepulcro*. The heavenly *grazia* bestowed to mankind by Christ's self-sacrifice blends with the seemingly freely flowing natural fecundity that at this time makes the landscape green and flourishing, makes the first crops ripen and promises that the peasant's pantries will soon be filled with provisions.

Both nature in the spring and the Passion of Christ follow a sequence according to which misery, suffering and death will be followed by new life; to be renewed, one must die. The Passion of Christ is a scenario that demonstrates, in the bodily domain, that the abandonment of carnality will lead to newness of life. As argued, this merging of springtime vegetal regeneration with the giving of divine *grazia* is also present in the cult of saints, but not as pervasively, in that the pilgrimages to countryside sanctuaries were most common in the month of May.

Hence we have encountered still another dimension of sacrifice. In the cults of saints, the reception of external superior vitality as a consequence of abandoning internal inferior vitality could be rationalised as a divine premium. Analytically, forces of attraction, located in a physical and a social dimension, are at work: that which suffers scarcity exercises a power of attraction towards that which has plenty. Now, we have found notions that are modelled after a natural sequence found in the annual death and regeneration of vegetation. Like nature and vegetation, human beings can be renewed from decay and death to newness of life. This sequence, however, does not concern vital force so much as life in a more abstract sense. In principle, it is not through abandoning internal vitality in one and the same life that external vitality might be gained. Rather, it is death that will be followed by rebirth and a new life. Therefore the acts of penitence are intensified to culminate in symbolic death. In the practices of Easter performed after the resurrection, the notion of a regeneration of life from death is fused with a notion of gaining new vigour through the appropriation of external vitality. There is a sense rebirth, but there is also an appropriation of a vitality external to the self from the abundance of regenerated life in nature and in the body of Christ.

### *The Eucharist*

The body of Christ is of great importance in ideas and practices of receiving his blessings. As we know, relics of his blood were venerated, his pierced Sacred Heart was adored and the scars on his body were touched with veneration at Easter. However, the most important way for believers to receive blessings and *grazia* from the body of Christ was through the Eucharist.

In the Roman Catholic Mass, the Eucharistic sacrifice is a condensed representation of Christ's incarnation, crucifixion and the redemption of sin through his death. The Eucharist is, for the Church '...the summary of the faith, the centre of gravitation of Christian piety, the polar star which orients all the activity of the Catholic Church'.<sup>94</sup> The Eucharistic sacrifice has the capacity to absorb meanings from diverse social environments, and its significance is therefore complex and shifting over time, spanning from the creation of national identities to the formation of religious sentiments in the individual.<sup>95</sup> It has served as a unifying emblem for the Roman Catholic doctrine at times when it has been challenged by alternative interpretations of the Holy Scripture.

The view of the Church is that, by the miracle of transubstantiation, the Eucharistic bread and wine, although in external appearance unchanged, in their essential substance transform into the actual flesh and blood of Christ. Through the transubstantiation Christ becomes physically present in the congregation. His self-sacrifice on the cross is renewed during each Mass (which therefore is a new Easter) and, through the consumption of the Holy Host in Communion, the faithful share in the spiritual merits earned by Christ on the cross. Through the consumption, they are, still according to the Church, subject to four main supernatural effects: (1) they attain an individual union with Christ by consuming his flesh and blood; (2) a social union is formed among those who partake of the Host, since they eat from the same holy food, from the same flesh and blood; (3) the Eucharist conveys to the faithful the promise of bodily resurrection on judgement day; and (4) it supplies the faithful with heavenly grace. Christ gives his flesh and blood in the appearance of wine and bread, emblems of life, 'because life springs from his death'.

Mass consists of three principal phases: (1) the Offertory, in which the un-consecrated bread and wine are prepared for the sacrifice; (2) the Canon, which is the renewed sacrifice of Christ and has as its principal event the Consecration, when bread and wine are transubstantiated into Christ's body and blood, followed by the Fraction,

when the officiating priest breaks the Eucharistic wafer in three pieces; and finally (3) Communion, when the congregation receives the Eucharist and is blessed by the priest. A person who is to receive the Eucharist must be reconciled with God, meaning that he must have confessed his mortal sins. A person who knows himself to have committed such sins should therefore confess prior to partaking in Communion.

In the Roman Catholic Church, the Host is made of unleavened bread, baked of wheat. It has the form of a thin wafer, which is stamped with an image of Christ on the cross. The wine must be mixed with some water, so as to be identified with the 'blood and water', which, according to the Scripture (John 19: 34), flowed from the wound in the crucified Christ's side. Normally, the laity receive only the bread, while the clergy consume both wine and bread. According to the doctrine of the Church, the resurrection of Christ implied a unification of his blood, flesh, soul and divinity, and this means that in the bread is also present the blood (and soul and divinity) and in the wine also the flesh (and soul and divinity). Among the dispositions which were, in the period of time with which we are concerned, required of those who participated in the Eucharistic Communion, we may note that they should ideally have observed the *diguno eucaristico*. This was a total fast in which the believers abstained from both water and food from midnight until the moment when the Eucharist was received. Hence this fast, held prior to the renewed Easter in Mass, corresponds to the Lenten fast preceding Easter.

It cannot be stressed enough that the bread and wine are understood to be the *actual* flesh and blood of Christ. This is the central point in the doctrine of transubstantiation, and the Catholic Church has forcefully rejected such teachings (as those of the French theologian Berengarius of Tours, ca. 1005-1088) that declare that the Eucharistic bread and wine are merely symbols of Christ's flesh and blood, as well as the Lutheran idea of 'consubstantion'.<sup>96</sup> The notion that the Eucharist is the actual flesh of Christ is reflected by a number of practices of the Church, in which the consecrated bread is venerated as though it were a part of Christ. Before the consecrated Host, a light shall burn continuously as a perpetual reminder of the Eucharistic presence and, in front of it, prayers can be addressed to Christ. In the Mass, the priest 'elevates' the consecrated Host, he raises it high so that it can be adored by the congregation. The consecrated Host may also be exposed to believers in a monstrance (a transparent shrine) so that it can be worshipped and kissed. In the ritual of the *Quarantore*, it

is solemnly exposed in a church for 40 hours during which believers who pray and meditate over its significance shall be present at all times. The Eucharist is celebrated annually at the feast of Corpus Christi, held the Thursday after Trinity Sunday (that is, late May or early June), and on this day in Southern Italy Holy Hosts are carried by the clergy, enclosed in monstrances, through the streets of towns and villages in solemn processions. In summary, the consecrated Host is the flesh of Christ and is worshipped as though it were a forceful relic of him.<sup>97</sup> Among the laity, the Host was seen as a superior fount of *grazie* and attributed a generic reinvigorating capacity.

The identity between the Holy Host and the body of Christ was not only a theological doctrine of the Church, expressed in its liturgy. It was widely accepted among the laity, inspiring since the Middle Ages a tradition of popular pious legends telling of how Hosts have miraculously transformed to also assume the external appearance of flesh and blood, usually as a response to some sacrilegious act by a disbeliever in the doctrine of the transubstantiation or by a non-Christian.<sup>98</sup> Such legends have also been recorded in South Italian oral tradition.<sup>99</sup>

The Holy Host has the external appearance of bread, and bread occupied an exclusive position among the foodstuffs in Southern Italy.<sup>100</sup> Bread was the epitome for food in general and was understood to be the foremost among the blessings from God; if a meal did not contain bread, it was not considered to be complete. Many peasants' meals consisted only of bread with something added to it (*'companatico'*), such as a few olives, a little oil, an onion, an egg or salted sardines. The most highly valued kind of bread was that made from wheat, but the bread that was consumed daily was, among the poor, often made from other kinds of grain, such as barley, rye, oats or maize. Wheat was indeed commonly grown by peasants but was often sold off to obtain much needed cash and bread of wheat was thus in many areas eaten only as festive food and in case of sickness, since it was held, as mentioned in Chapter 3, to be especially nurturing and health-bringing.

Bread was closely connected, or rather identified, with Christ and God. It was treated with religious reverence. In Campania has been documented the practice to impress each loaf of bread with the sign of the cross before it was put into the oven.<sup>101</sup> Hence it was made to resemble the Eucharistic wafer, which also has a cross on it. In Calabria, a popular saying among peasants was: *il pane è il volto stesso del Signore* ('the bread is the face of the Lord').<sup>102</sup> The reverent treatment of bread was elaborated into an entire code of conduct. In Sicily,



a loaf of bread should never be placed upside-down, nor should it be marked or pierced with a knife. Before bread was cut, it should first be kissed, then blessed and finally declared that it was a *grazia di Diu* ('grace of God'). If bread was accidentally dropped, it should immediately be picked up with the words *grazia di Diu*, and if bread crumbs had fallen to the ground, these were to be picked up and, if not consumed, put away so that they were not stepped upon. Bread (and pasta) should not be disdained, even if it was of poor quality, without adding an expression that it was nevertheless 'a grace of God'. An oath could be sworn on a piece of bread, using the expression *Pi sta santa grazia di Diu!* ('On this grace of God').<sup>103</sup> Similar codes of conduct expressing respect and reverence for bread have been documented all over Southern Italy.<sup>104</sup>

Some customs related to the cultivation of grain, and especially that of wheat, speak of the connection between these crops and Christ. These customs seem to have been most common in Sicily and, although practices of a religious character could be incorporated in various types of agrarian work in this region, this was especially the case when the work concerned grain. In Sicily, during the work of harvesting grain, sacred songs were intoned time after time, and a recurrent phrase in all of these was *Sia lodatu lu Santu Sagramentu* ('Praised is the Holy Sacrament'). These songs also praised the Virgin Mary and various saints, and thanks and hails were directed to Mary and the Holy Spirit. Religious songs were also intoned during the work of threshing; in these, the Lord and the saints were again hailed and thanked. A recurrent refrain was a praise of the Holy Sacrament. *Credo* and *Pater* prayers were also read.<sup>105</sup>

The identification between bread and Christ constituted a theme in oral tradition as well. In a Calabrian tale, the Virgin Mary, pursued by Herod's soldiers, hides her child in an oven, and there Christ is transformed into a loaf of bread.<sup>106</sup> A Sicilian riddle plays upon an analogy between the succession of events in the Passion of Christ and the sequence of works necessary to turn ripe grain on the fields into bread.<sup>107</sup>

During Easter Week, the connection between Christ and bread, and sometimes with food in general, was intensified. In Puglia, bread should not be cut with knife during this week, since it was equated with Christ himself;<sup>108</sup> in Sicily, Good Friday was the only day of the year on which it was forbidden to bake bread, as this would 'burn' Christ;<sup>109</sup> in Abruzzo, bread should not be roasted and no food should be cut with a knife, since the first of these acts would burn the body of Christ and the second would make blood gush from his wounds.<sup>110</sup>

In the Eucharistic sacrifice, we again find the sequence of abandoning internal, inferior vitality for external, superior vitality. The believers renounce their carnal bodies by fasting. They confess their sins, which is a submission to the Divine as well as a verbal rejection of carnal and mundane temptations. They engage in spiritual devotion by participating in Mass, dense with prayers and hymns. In the Canon of the Mass, Christ sacrifices himself again in a renewed Easter; he altruistically gives out his flesh and blood for the benefit of the faithful. Then, in Communion, the congregation receives his *grazie* through the consumption of his body. The individual is unified with God by eating his flesh and with the others of the congregation through the commensality of Mass.<sup>111</sup> A promise of transcendence through eternal spiritual life is received, and even a promise of eternal *corporal* life through the resurrection on Judgement Day.

What makes the Eucharistic sacrifice so powerful a ritual, and unique among the ways of receiving *grazie* in Southern Italy, is that it centres upon the act of man-eating; it suggests the appropriation of vitality by consuming the bodily matter of another human being. We have earlier had reason to discuss ideas and practices relating to anthropophagy: the reluctance to eat meat for a period following a death in the family, and the witches' desire for human blood and flesh. In these cases, anthropophagy appears as a possible, but morally reprehensible, way to appropriate another person's vitality which evokes horror and repugnance. In the Mass, the appropriation of vitality by consuming another person's flesh and blood has been freed from negative connotations and made to appear as a sacred way to receive *grazie* and unite with the Divine. Principally three notions make this possible.

First, Christ is understood as pure and having the ability to come to life again after death. Thereby his flesh is freed from all associations to repugnant decomposition of bodily matter after death. Second, the dogma of transubstantiation declares the existence of blood and flesh with the outer appearance of wine and bread, and hence allows the otherwise horrifying act of anthropophagy to take the outer form of the consumption of a commonplace foodstuff. Third, there is the emphasis on Christ's divinity and self-sacrifice. Christ does not resist carnal death and, with the authority of God incarnate, he invites all who wish to be saved to eat his flesh and drink his blood (John 6: 34-59). Hence it is not unmoral and wicked to consume his flesh and blood, but this is instead a devotional Christian act.

Once again we see that, when divine blessings and human transcendence are represented, idioms are used which pertain to the same

mundane and carnal world that is refuted and devaluated. The food necessary for the physical existence of man in his carnal and transient aspect is considered to be a blessing from God. In the Eucharist, bread is merged with the flesh of Christ and viewed as a supreme source of divine *grazia* and the principal instrument for acquiring transcendence after death.

It was concluded earlier in this chapter that the Blessed Virgin is associated with the productive forces of the earth that give birth to vegetation. Now we have found that vegetation, in the form of grain, relates to her son Christ. These connections can be represented as:

Mary : Christ :: Earth : Vegetation (Grain)

A number of specific expressions of this relation can be mentioned. While the fertile spring season is closely associated with the *grazie* of the Virgin Mary, the feast of *Maria Addolorata* (the Mother of Sorrows) is celebrated on September 15, in immediate connection with the autumn equinox. At this time, the agricultural year has essentially come to an end. As *Maria Addolorata*, the Virgin Mary is associated with death — she is agonized by the Seven Sorrows caused by her son's death. She is often depicted as the *Pietà*, grieving with the body of Christ in her arms. To celebrate this aspect of the Virgin Mary when the fertility of nature begin to wane, when the vegetation has reached its peak of luxuriance and begins to wither and die, expresses a notion of her as mother earth grieving over the death of vegetation.

In popular prints, the Virgin Mary is sometimes depicted with ears of corns in her hands.<sup>112</sup> Since motherhood is an attribute of the Virgin, and since her son Christ is associated with bread and grain, these pictures can be interpreted as depicting an earth mother with a vegetative son. Offerings of sheaves of grain, ears of corn and wheat were common in some cults of the Virgin Mary; these were placed before an image of her or showered upon it.<sup>113</sup> These practices also express an association between her and grain.

In Sicily, a popular Christmas gift was a skilfully laboured miniature fruit made of wax — such as a lemon, orange, pine cone or prickly pear-fig — containing an image of Christ as a child. Such miniature fruits could also hide an image of some popular saint, such as Santa Rosalia or Sant'Agata, and be given as presents on other occasions. In Palermo, the artisans manufacturing these delicate wax miniatures were so plentiful that the street where most of them had their workshops was named after them and hence called *via dei Bambinai* ('baby-makers' street'). Sweets in the form of a fruit with a baby

Christ resting on top of it, or in the form of the baby Christ alone, were also popular at Christmas.<sup>114</sup> According to one Sicilian source, the birth of Christ was celebrated in church on Christmas Eve in the following manner. A cloth had been hung in front of the high altar, and was drawn away at midnight, '...revealing a wax figure of the *Bamminu* lying in a sort of nest made of fruit-laden branches of orange trees and artificial flowers'.<sup>115</sup> Hence the birth of Christ was in all these representations portrayed as a vegetal birth; he is like a fruit of trees or plants nourished by the earth.

A widespread image of Christ's birth was the Christmas crib, kept in private homes. In this representation again, his birth is associated with vegetation and nature. The birth is represented as occurring in a rural setting, inside a shed or a cave, and Christ rests among straws of hay in a crib. The image of the birth taking place in a cave is found in some apocryphal texts, but not in the Scripture proper,<sup>116</sup> and might be seen as connecting to the symbolism of the cave as an opening into the realm of chthonic forces. We must also note that, in the calendar, his birth occurs at a time when the new year begins. During that year, the earth will give birth to a new generation of annual plants and reinvigorate perennial ones.

The historical roots of the metaphoric relation [Mary : Christ :: Earth : Vegetation (Grain)] will not be discussed in detail here, but it is clear that the relation pertains to a religious tradition with a remarkable persistence over time in South European and Near Eastern cultures. Early in history, we find the triad of an Earth Mother, who becomes impregnated by a male Sky God and begets a child identified with vegetation — thus corresponding to the Christian God, the Blessed Virgin Mary and Christ. The pair of the suffering Earth Goddess and her child, the young God, who dies and resurrects in the springtime and is connected with vegetation, is a related religious constellation of ancient origin.<sup>117</sup>

## NINE

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# FROM TRANSIENCE TO TRANSCENDENCE

The transience of the human organism implies that its vital force is liable to diminish, and we have discussed ideas of how individuals might replenish this force. Notions of *transcending* the perishable flesh will be the subject of the following two chapters – representations of corporal death as followed by another kind of existence or by a new and similar one. In this chapter, focusing on the form of tombs and on ideas of the soul's career in the afterlife, we will discuss conceptions of death as followed by an unchanging and eternal form of being. The next chapter will be concerned with a notion of the human lifespan as repetitive and death as regenerative, that is, the end of one life connects with the coming into existence of another.

Robert Hertz's essay, 'A Contribution to the Study of the Collective Representation of Death' (1960, originally published 1907), set the direction for modern anthropological studies of death and burial customs. Stressing the social dimension of death, this study was the first consistent application of Durkheimian sociology to this field of inquiry. Hertz draws a number of conclusions relevant to South Italian practices and beliefs. In the following discussion, three of Hertz's insights will be considered.

First, death in society is not an instantaneous event coinciding with the termination of the bodily functions, but instead a slow process extending over a long period of time, typically over several years. Hertz calls the duration from physical death to 'completed' death the 'intermediary period'.

Second, in order to understand practices and beliefs relating to death, the duration of death is understood to have three dimensions which are often correlated: the corpse, the soul of the deceased, and the mourners. Focusing his essay on the subject of secondary burial, Hertz shows that it is common for the actual transformation of the corpse to correspond to the imagined fate of the soul and the symbolic condition of the bereaved.

Third, the 'intermediary period' implies a transformation of the deceased's body – 'while the old body falls to ruins, a new body takes shape' (p. 48). This 'new body' is stable and unchanging, often

consisting of the bones of the corpse; hence the transformation of the remains typically involves a change from a humid to a dry state. More generally, we can expect to find notions both of destruction and of construction in relation to the corpse; a destruction of the 'old body', which in its state of putrefaction most often (but not always) brings forth sentiments of repulsion and disgust, and the construction of a new, purified and incorruptible body. Having acquired a new body, the deceased is regarded as one among the ancestors and may be considered a source of blessings.

Hertz organises his ethnographic material in three sections, each dealing with one of the dimensions of the duration of death. It is appropriate to present the South Italian ethnography in the same way, starting with the corpse, then turning to the imagined fate of the soul, and then finally proceeding to the bereaved.

### *Corpses and 'New Bodies'*

The forms of disposal of the dead in Southern Italy, from the time of the unification of Italy to today, show great variation. Important changes have taken place, and the regional variation is also notable. The documentation of the subject is sparse but nevertheless sufficient for outlining the principal forms of burial and the formulation of some hypotheses concerning their cultural meanings.

#### **Burial in church**

Burial in church was the normal practice up to the second half of the 19th century. In most communities, it was replaced over the following decades by disposal of the dead in cemeteries located outside urban territory.<sup>1</sup> However, burial in church was still practised at the beginning of the 20th century in some areas,<sup>2</sup> and still today takes place in exceptional cases of important members of the clergy and noble families. The abolition of burial in church, which took place also in other Roman Catholic countries in Europe at this time, was the consequence of changing attitudes towards death, inspiring to a campaign against the practice, which in liberal minded and progressively inclined circles was seen as insanitary and disgusting.<sup>3</sup>

There was, however, strong resistance against the new order among the un-educated laity, the traditionally minded nobility and the clergy.<sup>4</sup> Many claimed that burial in church was a sacred custom for the benefit of the dead and thought that, if the dead were not buried there, their souls would not be able to reach Heaven. The presence of the corpse in church implied that the soul of the dead

person was protected by the divine powers and that its transition to Heaven was facilitated. When resting in the house of God – with its holy objects, relics and rites – the deceased was in a certain sense already incorporated in the divine sphere of God, Christ, the angels and the saints. The nobility was reluctant to give up the traditional burial places in private graves and chapels of churches. The resistance on the part of the clergy and the Church was not only motivated by religious considerations: the administration of burial in church was a significant source of income which was lost with the introduction of municipal suburban cemeteries.

Some categories of people were not allowed to be buried in church or in its yard, and their souls were thus denied holy protection. This was the case, of course, with non-Christians (such as those who confessed to the Jewish religion) but the interdict also applied to certain others. Those who had refused to be absolved and therefore died in mortal sin were disposed of outside consecrated earth. At least up to the 19th century, their corpses could be dumped over some slope outside town.<sup>5</sup> As already mentioned, unbaptised children, not considered to be Christians, could be disposed of in the fields outside inhabited territory, to be consumed by wild animals, or thrown into some deep cavern.<sup>6</sup> Among the laity, however, there was a desire to have unbaptised children buried in consecrated earth. The foetuses of procured abortions, as well as corpses of unwanted children who had been killed by their mothers after a concealed birth, were sometimes secretly brought to church where they were hidden in some cavity of the outer walls.<sup>7</sup>

The graves in church were of two general types: public and private. The public graves most often had the form of a large pit in the church floor, covered by a stone slab, in which the corpses were deposited. The bodies were mingled with each other; fresh cadavers were placed upon decaying ones. Live lime could be sprinkled over them in order to reduce the smell of putrefaction. If the church had a suitable yard, this could be used as a burial ground. Corpses in wooden coffins were also placed in public pits, heaped upon each other, and the pits could when necessary be cleaned out and the bones re-buried in an ossuary or another pit in the church yard.<sup>8</sup>

The private graves consisted of a space reserved for the permanent burial of an individual. Burial in this type of grave was preferred and was usually arranged for by all those who had the means to do so and could obtain the necessary permission from the church. In practice this meant that the rich and well-to-do were buried in private graves, while the majority of the population was interred in common graves.

The private grave could be a wall niche sealed by a stone slab, a stone-clad chamber below the church floor covered by a slab of stone or a free-standing sarcophagus placed on the floor. Hence most of these graves were constructed so that direct contact with the earth was avoided and the corpse rested enclosed in stone, some above ground level. If subterranean catacombs were used, then the graves were indeed below ground, but the burial spaces were still above floor level since they usually consisted of wall niches. The corpse was sometimes placed in a sealed zinc coffin, thereby avoiding the smell of putrefaction and safeguarding the public from the dangerous 'miasma' assumed to be emitted by decaying bodies. Although some reports indicate that the bones of an older grave were occasionally removed and the site used for a new burial, this seems to have been unusual and to have occurred only after a comparatively long period (several decades or centuries). The private grave was conceived of as the permanent resting place for the remains of the departed; inscriptions or plaques indicated the identity of the individual corpses. It was preferred to bury a person together with dead members of the family. This was done by entombing the corpses in a niche of a larger size, in niches close to each other or by some other arrangement. Aristocratic families often had a private burial chapel, either in a parish church or erected on their own land.

Thus the essential characteristics of the two forms of burial in church was that the poor were buried in contact with the earth and lost their identity after decomposition of the flesh, when the dry bones were mingled with the bones of other deceased. Those who had a choice preferred to be buried in such a way that direct contact between the corpse and earth was avoided, the identity of the body was preserved and the grave was permanent and clearly marked as being that of the deceased. In the case of the rich and the aristocracy, not only individual identity was preserved in death; family identity and unity were also maintained.

The preferred form of burial can be seen as being inspired by a wish to create what Hertz calls an incorruptible and 'new body' for the departed, which rests in a 'home' inhabited by the likewise incorruptible bodies of deceased relatives.

To create the 'new body', the integrity of the corporal remains must be upheld – therefrom the preference of burying the corpse in physical isolation from other corpses. To understand why burial in the earth was avoided if possible and the corpse instead preferably enclosed in stone, we must consider the symbolic implications of these two types of burial.



Decomposition of the flesh in an earthen grave is a precarious process, highly dependent on the condition of the earth. Wet, compact earth prolongs the decomposition of flesh, sometimes up to decades, a fact that ought to have been well-known to South Italians of that time due to the re-use of burial ground, which meant that corpses in varying degrees of decay were unearthed. Burial in earth hence implies a risk that the corpse will undergo a long period of decomposition until it has assumed the form of a relatively unchanging and dry skeleton. Beside this actual implication, earth is an element suggestive of instability and impurity – it is more or less humid, it is an element in constant flux in which organic matter slowly dissolves. Earth used for burial associates with the impurity of decaying corpses buried there; from this earth emerge foul smells and there crawl worms that feed on the corrupting flesh of the deceased. Graveyard earth is contiguous with the flesh of the dead who have been buried there, it is the transformed flesh of corpses.

Stone, on the other hand, is a stable element. It is dry and unchanging and has no connotations of impurity. Earth is to stone as flesh is to bone. When the corpse is placed in a grave of stone, it is embedded in stone and symbolically becomes contiguous with this element. The association between the dead and stone is stressed by engraving the name and dates of birth and death on the stone slab enclosing the grave, and, in the case of some elaborate graves of the wealthy, by a stone bust or statue of the dead. Through this symbolic petrification, the issue of the actual transformation of the corpse in the stone chamber becomes of little importance. It can neither be observed visually, nor, if the chamber is properly sealed or an airtight zinc coffin used, olfactory perceived. While the transformation of the corpse in the earth was quite a preoccupation among South Italians – it has already been mentioned (Chapter 4) that people talked about worms feeding at the corpse, and other worries concerning bodies buried in earth will be discussed below – there seems to have been little concern with the actual fate of a corpse buried in a stone grave. Burial in a stone grave suggests an immediate creation of the ‘new’ and incorruptible body.

Why, then, should the deceased preferably be given a ‘new’, incorruptible body? The principal motive is that physical death must be denied. Although an individual certainly could have a personal wish to maintain himself in a permanent form after death, motivated by an impulse to avoid the annihilation of personality implied by death, and therefore arrange to be buried in a stone grave, the principal motive for constructing such graves ought to be sought in the

interests of the living relatives. By burying their kin in permanent graves they, in a sense, deny their physical death. The deceased continue to be present in this world, but in a purified and permanent form that transcends the limitations of the transient flesh, doomed to disintegration. Not only individual death is thereby denied, but also the disruption of the family brought about by the passing away of its mortal members. The dead were preferably put to rest in a family grave, which can be construed as a transcendental 'home' of the family. This grave conveys an image of an ideal and superior family. While the existence of the family was actually threatened by the death of its members and by inevitable internal ruptures and divisions over time into new nuclear units, the family in such a 'home' can only grow in size, and its unity will remain unbroken.<sup>9</sup>

### **Mummification**

A form of burial stressing the rapid transformation of the corpse into a new and stable form was practised in the Capuchin convents of Sicily until about 1880.<sup>10</sup> The corpses of monks, priests and bishops, as well as of the rich and well-to-do who had been willing to pay for it, were desiccated according to a special procedure. The body was first placed for a time on a grid, where the juices of putrefaction were free to leave it, and then moved to a ventilated drying chamber. After eight to twelve months, it had become completely dry and mummified. The corpse was then washed with vinegar and, if it was a less important person, dressed in sackcloth, or in the personal clothes of choice in the case of an important individual. Thereafter it was placed in the convent's catacombs. The mummy could be laid in a coffin (which could have a wooden lid, a transparent glass lid or no lid at all), deposited in an open niche or affixed to the wall in an upright position. The deceased's name, title and date of death were indicated by a sign attached to the mummy, or to the coffin or niche.

A number of sources describe similar procedures of mummification in older times, although it is not clear for how long they continued to be practised. According to a report from Cosenza (Calabria), the bodies of the dead were desiccated and then kept in a church where they could be viewed by the public.<sup>11</sup> In Oppido (Basilicata), the corpses of priests were kept for a time in a vault under the choir of the town's main church.<sup>12</sup> Wooden stalls lined the walls of the vault, each with a seat with a hole in it. In these, the corpses were seated, fully dressed in cassock and surplice and with a priest's cap on the head, just as though they had been officiating in the choir above. The perforated seat allowed the juices of putrefaction to leave

the corpse, which therefore dried comparatively rapidly. The remains of old corpses were removed and re-buried in a grave located in the centre of the church's cemetery.

In Naples in the seventeenth century, corpses of notable persons were desiccated in the catacombs of San Gaudioso under the church of Santa Maria della Sanità.<sup>13</sup> The dead were placed in seats cut from stone, which had an opening at the bottom so that the fluids of putrefaction could drain. This operation was called *scolare* ('to drain', 'to dry') and after a couple of years resulted in a desiccated mummy. The mummy was thereafter stretched out and placed in a niche, or partially walled into the catacomb in an upright position so that only the front part of the cranium and some protruding parts of the skeleton were visible. On the wall that enclosed the mummy were painted the distinctive clothes of the person in question and his occupational attributes, such as a sword if he had been a military officer or a palette if he had been an artist, creating the impression that the dead was dressed in the clothes and carried the attributes. This procedure can be seen as a variant of the symbolic 'petrification' discussed above: the skeleton is not only enclosed in a stone chamber, it is actually made part of the mortar wall of a catacomb dug out in tuff stone.

A travel book written in the first half of the nineteenth century describes the activity of a certain burial association in Naples.<sup>14</sup> When a member died, the corpse was placed in a subterranean vault, which had been filled with a special kind of earth that was able to prevent putrefaction and dry the corpse rapidly, creating a mummy. The mummy was put on display for a few days each year in one of several subterranean chapels of the Santa Chiara church. The more money a member had contributed to the society, the more numerous were the days of display during the year. The mummy was dressed in clothes the person had worn while alive and suspended by the wall in an upright position by means of ropes. At the wall above it hung a large placard on which the dead person's name and dates of birth and death were written. Sometimes a loving epitaph was added by a mourner. The chapels were illuminated by torches and decorated with flowers and religious pictures. Relatives and friends visited the dead and prayed for their souls.

In these kinds of 'burial', two features are stressed that also characterise the preferred burial in church: contact with earth is totally avoided (except when it has an exceptional drying property) and the individuality of the corpse is well preserved. Mummification prevents it from becoming a fleshless skeleton, virtually impossible to distinguish from any other, since flesh and skin are ideally preserved

to the extent that facial features are still recognisable. In the case of important citizens, the individuality of the corpse is emphasised by distinctive clothes once worn or by painting clothes onto a wall enclosing it. The 'new body' is the 'old body' transformed by mummification.

There were no family graves at these cemeteries. The Capuchin catacombs originated as burial grounds for monks and, as long as they were used solely as such, family graves were not conceivable as a monk lives without a family in a brotherhood. When lay persons were also allowed to be buried there, their mummies were, at least at the Capuchin convent in Palermo, arranged in the catacombs so that children, virgins, married women, ordinary males of the laity, 'professional' lay males, priests and Capuchin monks all had separate departments. Hence the components of the family (husband, wife and children) are kept separate. Instead the deceased are arranged in non-reproductive classes, defined with reference to spiritual matters. Each class of persons shares characteristics that put them in a particular relation to the Divine and the prospect of salvation – children are innocent, virgins have preserved their purity, married women should have combined their family life with piety, 'professional' lay men, owing to their education and position in society, have faced spiritual problems different from 'ordinary' men, priests have devoted their life to the service of God and monks have renounced the mundane world. Presumably, for some among the laity religious ideas of individual transcendence and salvation superseded the sense of family belonging, making this form of burial preferable to the family grave.

#### **Burial at extra-urban cemeteries**

When burial in the new cemeteries located in urban outskirts became an established practice, the distinction between individual and public graves was sometimes maintained. The poor, who could not afford another kind of burial, could be buried in a pit. The burial system used between ca. 1760 and 1889 at the cemetery at Poggio Reale in the outskirts of Naples, nowadays called *Camposanto Vecchio*,<sup>15</sup> may serve as an example. In a certain area, 365 large pits had been dug out, each covered with a stone slab. Each of these pits was used on only one day of the year. Its cover was removed and all corpses that arrived to the cemetery were dumped into it, without being placed in coffins. The volcanic soil ensured rapid decomposition so that the pit was ready to receive a new load of bodies annually.

More commonly, however, the institution of these cemeteries permitted poor people individual graves, although for a limited time.

The body was interred at the cemetery, most often in a wooden coffin, and the grave was marked with a wooden cross. According to some reports, these crosses bore no text, but could be marked merely with a number.<sup>16</sup> The identity of the corpse could, at least in Calabria and Basilicata, be indicated by placing in the coffin an identity card of the dead or a small glass bottle containing a piece of paper with name and birth and death dates.<sup>17</sup>

The cemetery's interment field was re-used. New graves were dug in an area of old ones when a certain time had passed, normally 2 to 10 years. When decomposed remains from previous burials were found, these were placed in a communal ossuary. If payment had been received in advance from a departed person or his relatives, bones could be individually exhumed and put into a small zinc casket that was placed in a niche in the ossuary. These niches were most often covered by a slab with an inscription stating the identity of the remains. The exhumation meant that secondary burial *de facto* was practised but, according to the available information, was lacking ritual elaboration. The practice in the area of Naples constitutes a notable exception from this, which will be discussed below.

As when the dead were buried in church, those who could afford it arranged for an individual and permanent grave in the cemetery. The architectural form of these graves varied, but the method used for entombment was usually the same. The fresh corpse was, without prior burial in earth, placed in a coffin made of zinc which by means of soldering was permanently sealed.

The simplest burial place was the individual niche, in which the coffin was placed. The niche could be located on the inner side of the cemetery wall, in freestanding shelf-like structures made from brick stone or concrete, in the walls of chapels or other buildings, or in the walls of underground catacombs. The niche was closed with a stone or marble slab on which was inscribed the identity of the entombed person. To the slab could also be attached a virtually indestructible ceramicised photograph of the dead, a holder for flowers and an oil-lamp. These niches were procured from the cemetery management or obtained through membership in a *confraternita* – a burial association allowed to erect grave buildings on the cemetery.

Those who could afford it erected a family *edicola* in the cemetery. These had the appearance of small chapels (the term *edicola* is used both for the grave building of a family and for a small Christian chapel) and varied in size, from small structures less than 10 square meters to impressive buildings many times that size. The *edicola* contained niches for burial in its inner walls and sometimes, in the case

of more elaborate structures, also in the walls of a subterranean crypt. The *edicola* was intended to be the permanent tomb 'house' for the family, expected to stand for centuries and therefore built in stone, concrete or other durable materials (wood was never used). It had a door with a lock, to which the family had keys and could therefore visit their dead whenever they wished during the opening hours of the cemetery. Some sophisticated *edicole* housed stone busts of the dead, hence an iconic 'petrification' of them. At a focal location inside the building, an altar-like table was usually set up on which photographs of the departed family members were mingled with pictures of saints, a crucifix, candles, burning oil lamps and, preferably, fresh flowers. At this 'grave shrine', prayers were addressed to the dead as well as to the divine powers.

As the economic standard gradually improved during the 20th century, more and more people were able to procure at least an individual niche for entombment, and interment became less frequent. A turning point in several regions, as in Calabria and Molise, were the years after World War Two, when interment was abandoned at most cemeteries and even the poorest were allowed to be entombed at the expense of the municipality. Information concerning attitudes relating to this change in burial practices is scant in the ethnographic sources, but one work informs that in Zaccanopoli (Calabria), people preferred (in the 1970s) '... not to be buried under the earth because the corpse is destroyed and for fear of water'.<sup>18</sup> Hence, in this community, interment was expressly associated with the destruction of the corpse and, as it seems, raised fears that the period of decomposition would be long as a result of the humidity of the earth.

The construction of family *edicole* has become more and more common. One change in their appearance that is worth noting are the new architectural designs. Some of these recently constructed family graves have been given the exterior appearance of miniature, flashy, downtown office buildings, with a facade of smoke-coloured glass and aluminium, and have thus adopted modern architectural idioms expressing wealth and prestige. The interior design, however, is still that of a chapel.

Visits to the graves of deceased relatives were generally frequent, especially by women, and of a casual nature. The cemetery during daytime was not seen as frightening, but rather a familiar place where deceased relatives and friends rested. The fresh flowers at the grave testified for relatives and other visitors of the ongoing relationship between the living and the dead.<sup>19</sup> It might also be argued that, without the addition of this organic matter, the tomb of stone, with

elements of metal and ceramic, appears *too* timeless and sterile to adequately serve as a place for the intimate relation between living and dead. Fresh flowers, which soon wither and die, bring to the permanent grave notions of the rapid passing and fragility of life.

Thus, the abolition of burial in church caused no radical shift in crucial aspects of the disposal of the dead. The ideal form of burial was the same: an individual space for the corpse, the graves of the members of one family kept together and set apart from the graves of other families, avoidance of direct contact between the corpse and earth associating with humidity, instability and impurity, and a rapid creation of a new and purified body out of the old, decaying one by burying the dead in stone or concrete compartments, implying a symbolic petrification. The use of coffins made of zinc, which immediately and effectively hides all evidence of putrefaction, aids in this creation. The prevalence of family *edicole* means in a sense a continuance of the practice of burial in church, since they are made to resemble chapels, miniature churches. At the same time, they are private houses, dignified and appropriate transcendental homes for deceased family members. The parts of modern Italian cemeteries in which *edicole* are located are cities of the dead where each family has its own 'tomb home' along the narrow streets.

### **Double burial in Naples**

In the area of Naples, double burial is widely practised today. This form of burial is at least a century old,<sup>20</sup> but it is the near-contemporary customs, which are well documented, that will be described here.<sup>21</sup>

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the fresh corpse is washed in surgical alcohol – a liquid that, according to those who use it for this purpose, 'disinfects and cleans, without moistening' – and dressed in light clothes. It is thereafter enclosed in a wooden coffin and given a first burial in the earth. A picture of the deceased's patron saint is usually placed in the coffin, as well as a small bottle containing a paper with the name and dates of birth and death. This latter object is placed in the coffin because it, as people say, 'assures his identity even after putrefaction'.<sup>22</sup>

The grave can be located either in the basement of one of the multi-storied buildings of burial associations or in an internment field on the cemetery grounds. The first option is preferred, as the covered earth ensures that no rain wets the earth, and thereby prolongs the time necessary for the decomposition and desiccation of the corpse, which is the process expressly desired. It can be noted that, in case of

burial in uncovered earth, the soul of the dead person was thought to feel that the earth 'becomes heavy when it rains'.<sup>23</sup>

The corpse is exhumed after a period of 18-24 months if it has been buried in covered earth, or after approximately 36 months in uncovered earth. The exhumation is an extremely important moment attended by the departed's close relatives. If the corpse has been transformed into a virtually fleshless and unbroken skeleton, the relatives are content and declare that they have 'definitely lost' the relative. If, however, the decomposition has been incomplete and the corpse is still, as it is said, 'wet' or 'fresh', there is great disappointment. The relatives ponder the cause of the incomplete decomposition, the main reasons coming to mind being that the deceased lived sinfully, that something went wrong during the time of dying or at the moment of death (see the next section) or that they themselves did not adequately perform the proper duties towards the deceased's soul. Whatever the reason is thought to be, the corpse must be re-buried in earth for another period, after which a new exhumation will take place.

If the decomposition has been found to be satisfying, the bones are prepared for the second burial. This work is done by gravediggers, sometimes with the help of some elderly relative of the deceased. The bones are brushed clean and washed with surgical alcohol, again 'to avoid wetting the remains'. They are then sprinkled with naphthalene so that they will be better conserved. Finally, they are wrapped in a shroud.

Then the secondary burial immediately takes place in the presence of the relatives who have participated in the exhumation. The wrapped remains are placed in a niche which is closed with a stone slab. This entombment is performed without any specific ceremonies or symbolic elaboration — a circumstance that suggests that the transition of the deceased from a transient to a transcendental state has already essentially been completed and therefore inspires no further concern. After the secondary burial, the attendants eat together at a close relative's home, marking the end of the period of mourning. Thereafter, the near relatives may again dress in coloured clothes, after having worn only grey, or black and white, as a sign of mourning, and a widow or a widower can re-marry without being criticised.

If no arrangement has been made to bury the dead together with family members, the remains are placed in an individual niche, located either in structures belonging to the cemetery or in the grave building of a *confraternita*. It is preferred, however, to keep family members together after death, which can be done by procuring a



family niche in the building of a *confraternita* or by erecting a family *edicola* with several niches.

It is thought that humidity disturb the dead not only in the first but also in the second grave. A recurring theme in legends telling of how souls of the dead appear in dreams to the living is that of the soaked niche. The soul of a dead relative appears in a dream and explains that he or she is much troubled because the resting place is soaked by water. When checking the niche, the person who has had the dream finds the corpse to have been wetted by water, which may have originated from a leaking water pipe or the like.<sup>24</sup> It may also be noted that a Neapolitanian colloquial word for burial niche is *fornetto*, which literally translates as 'little oven', a term that might be understood as alluding to the ideal 'dry' state of the corpse buried in the niche.

Hence the burial practice of the area of Naples clearly expresses an intention to facilitate the creation of a purified and unchanging 'new body' for the deceased, which consists of dry bones that have been cleaned from decaying flesh and is entombed in stone. The burial practices also express the desire to bury family members together. The ideal of avoiding contact between the corpse and earth, which we have found in burial practices elsewhere in Southern Italy, is limited to wet earth, however, which prolongs the destruction of the 'old body' and the creation of the new incorruptible one. Contact with ordinary earth is, on the contrary, of crucial importance in the primary burial. This anomaly, compared with burial practices in other parts of Southern Italy, has a geological explanation. It is clear that contact between earth and corpse is desired for one specific reason – the function of the earth to efficiently transform the corpse into a dry skeleton purified from flesh. The porous volcanic soil of the area of Naples is ideal for this purpose, since decomposition takes place rapidly and reliably. In most other parts of Southern Italy, burial in earth is not equally good for creating a permanent and incorruptible 'new body' and is therefore avoided in favour of entombment of the fresh corpse in zinc caskets in stone compartments.

### **Cremation**

To swiftly destroy the old body and create a new, stable, purified representation of the deceased was hence an ideal common to the forms of burial discussed thus far. A procedure that rapidly accomplishes the first of these tasks is cremation. Among the Romans, cremation was used parallel with inhumation until about 400 B. C.<sup>25</sup> From that time until the reign of Emperor Hadrian (A. D. 117-138), cremation

was the dominant form of disposal of the dead, but was thereafter over a couple of centuries gradually replaced with inhumation. With the Christianizing of the Empire, cremation was abandoned as an ordinary burial practice and has since then not been used as such in Italy until the second half of the 19th century. At that time, cremation became available as an alternative to interment and entombment in order to satisfy the demands of liberal opinion primarily in the northern part of the country. The Roman Catholic Church, however, forbade cremation until 1963,<sup>26</sup> when the Church modified its opinion and accepted it. Today this form of disposal of the dead has become a quite ordinary practice in Northern Italy, although still less used than other forms, while it is very unusual in the Southern part of the country. The city of Naples, for instance, with more than one million inhabitants, had as late as in 1982 no facilities for cremation.<sup>27</sup>

The ban on cremation in the Early Church was a corollary to the doctrine of bodily resurrection on Judgement Day — the total destruction of the corpse made resurrection impossible.<sup>28</sup> In later theology, the ban has never been clearly motivated. It has been acknowledged that cremation is not contrary to any natural or revealed truth, but it is nevertheless maintained that it is repugnant to Christians and irreconcilable with the Christian piety for the dead.<sup>29</sup> It is held to be a departure from a long and uninterrupted tradition of inhumation, which has been given deep significance relating to the immortality of the soul and the faith in the resurrection of the flesh, and which goes back to the Judaic tradition as it is documented in certain passages in the Holy Scripture. Corporal death followed by inhumation is there described as a temporary state which will be succeeded by a new life.

Among the laity of Southern Italy, cremation was seen as fundamentally alien to Christian sentiments and as an irreverent treatment of the corpse.<sup>30</sup> It can be assumed that this opinion is based on a notion that, while bones suggest individuality and permanence after decomposition, ashes suggest nothingness. When we discuss cyclic regeneration of life from death in Chapter 10, yet another reason will emerge for why cremation has been unacceptable for such a long time as a normal form of disposal of the dead in Italy.

### *Souls*

In traditional Southern Italy, a distinction was made between a 'bad death' and a 'good death'. The type of death was thought to influence

the deceased's afterlife and thereby also the further relationship between the soul and the living.

The essential requirements for a 'good death' were three: (1) acceptance on behalf of the dying person, (2) taking place in the home, where the traditional ceremonies were performed, and (3) in old age. A case of death meeting these requirements allowed the spiritual component of the dead to become a soul (*anima*) which dwelled for a time in Purgatory, before it was accepted into Heaven. The 'bad death', on the other hand, resulted in a *spirito* ('spirit'). The spirit was thought to roam restlessly on earth and to be dangerous to the living. As it was produced by the absence of one or more of the essential requirements for a 'good death', a 'bad death' could be suffered in a variety of ways.

First, if a dying person feared death and did not accept that his corporal life had come to an end, a 'bad death' was suffered. A death was also 'bad' if the dying person was tormented by a lengthy death agony and did not die even though wishing for it. These conceptions centre on the circumstance that the dying person is clinging to the world of the living, which suggests that his or her soul will not rest in peace but will be bothered by a wish to stay with the living. Thus, it is believed in Naples that the soul of a person who dies without accepting death forever will remain in the house in which death took place.<sup>31</sup>

Second, a death suffered outside the home was also a 'bad death'. Such a death, caused by accident, murder or the fact that it took place in hospital, resulted in a spirit that haunted the place where it had occurred. It was believed in Modica (Sicily) that the 'condemned souls' of those who had died in the hospital haunted its premises, and these spirits were so feared that many could only be brought there by force or when unconscious.<sup>32</sup> Still today in Southern Italy, many families prefer to take their relatives home from hospital when there is no more hope for recovery, so that death can take place in the home; the body of an already departed person can also be brought home from hospital and kept there until the funeral.<sup>33</sup>

A death away from the home meant that the practices which were to take place there could not be properly performed. As indicated (Chapter 3), many of these practices aimed to control the initial phase of death and thereby give an appropriate direction to the process – to create an imagery of death as being a shift from carnal life to another transcendental form of existence. If the practices were not performed, such control was not exercised. The consequence would be that the dead person's spirit wandered about aimlessly on earth,

restless, distressed and harmful to the living. In case of a 'bad death', the soul could also be thought to have to dwell forever in Hell,<sup>34</sup> a realm that can be construed as an eternal intermediary state between the mundane and the other-worldly, an eternal state of dying (cf. Chapter 6, p. 100f). The notion of Hell was, however, not much elaborated.<sup>35</sup>

If a violent death had taken place in the open, a kind of 'cenotaph' was often constructed on the site. If close to the home of the family, the 'cenotaph' was normally erected by the relatives of the deceased and consisted of a cross or an inscribed stone plaque with the departed person's name, together with an oil lamp, fresh or artificial flowers and a picture of a saint. Hence it closely resembled a grave. If instead a person met with death in the open far away from home, the 'cenotaph' was constructed by local people there. It was not necessary for them to know the deceased personally, not even to know his identity. In that case, it most often consisted only of a simple cross, or of a cairn to which passers-by added stones while saying a prayer. These latter cenotaphs were constructed in order to placate and control the spirit of the dead, thereby making it less harmful to the living.<sup>36</sup> Certain procedures (involving the burning of coal and wood and the sprinkling of salt and holy water) could also be performed at the place of a violent death, but with the intention of freeing it from the spirit.<sup>37</sup>

The 'cenotaphs' and their related beliefs indicate a conception that something vital of the person is left at the place where a violent death has occurred. A life, and usually also actual blood, had been 'spilt' on the ground, and remain there. Something essential of the dead cannot be removed from the place and put in an ordinary grave together with the body and hence another 'grave' must be constructed there. For the relatives of the dead person this undertaking can be assumed to have the same motives as an ordinary burial of the corpse: to represent the deceased in a permanent form and provide a dwelling in which to stay. This 'burial' implies rest and peace for the soul. Those who construct such a 'grave' for a stranger do so defensively. There is a sense that the dead threaten the living, that they will take from their lives for the purpose of returning to mundane life. It was a common belief that one could be possessed by the spirit produced by a violent death, for instance when passing by the place of the disgrace where the spirit roamed.<sup>38</sup> Given a dwelling place, the spirit is placated and brought under control. Exorcism could also be performed, as though the life spilt on the ground could be destroyed by fire, as though the ground could be cleansed from it by water and salt.

These ideas can be compared to the beliefs and practices, discussed earlier, relating to the place of death of martyrs, in which these were conceived of as sources of blessings. The notion of vital force released by the untimely and violent death of a healthy and vigorous person is in these cases merged with an image of sacred blessings received from martyred and pure saints who voluntarily give up their life for the benefit of others. The life 'spilt' on these occasions is free for others to appropriate. The ordinary violent death, however, implicates a strong reluctance on behalf of the victim to die, which must be dealt with so that the dead person will not pose a threat to others in their wish to regain life.

It was a troublesome situation for a family if one of its members died away from the home and the body could not be brought back. One way to handle such a problem, documented in some Calabrian villages, was to construct an image of the deceased and place it in his bed. The domestic mourning ceremonies were then held as though the effigy was the corpse of the deceased.<sup>39</sup> By symbolically creating the presence of the deceased, the death could be brought under control in the centre of the domestic sphere.

Ideally, all close relatives should be present at wakes and funerals. If this was not the case, it created another troublesome situation. In early 19th century Trapani (Sicily) 'stand-ins' were adopted at funerals to symbolically attain this ideal. When important family members were missing and could not attend the funeral ceremonies, certain women (*mmasciature*, 'ambassadors') were paid to act as representatives. When one of these appeared in the home of the bereaved family, she announced the name of the person in whose place she had come and expressed excuses for him or her not having been able to arrive in person. She then displayed conventional signs of grief: she spoke of the sorrow that death had caused, she praised the virtues of the departed and she cried loudly.<sup>40</sup> The presence of family members at the moment of death was also desirable. In Naples, it is held that the absence of a close family member by the deathbed could cause the dying person to 'refute his own death and doom himself to perdition'.<sup>41</sup>

This emphasis on the presence of family members at the final moments of the dying person's life and at the funeral might be seen as expressing, beside the care and love that ideally should permeate kinship relations, a notion that they all, through their presence and participation in the death practices, agree to the symbolic objective of these: to terminate the earthly existence of the dead one and direct him towards the transcendental realm of the other world. If kinsmen

were missing, it suggested that some family members might disagree, wishing instead that the dead should continue to be among the living and that he would therefore have reason to cling to the world of the living. An expression of the ideal acceptance of death on behalf of the mourners is the widespread custom, in the case of interment, that each of them should throw a handful of earth upon the coffin. By doing so, they actively participate in burying the dead.

In Calabria, a dead child should not be excessively cried over because it would irritate Saint Peter, who would close the door to Paradise for its soul and not open it again until the crying had ceased,<sup>42</sup> or the crying would annoy the angels so much that they would chase the child out of Paradise.<sup>43</sup> In Sicily, it was said that God himself would chase the child from Paradise.<sup>44</sup> In Abruzzo, excessive crying over deceased persons of all ages was reprobated. It was said that too many tears caused the soul to suffer; that it hindered the soul from finding peace; that too many tears made the road to the other world, where the dead rest in peace, slippery and thus made the voyage more difficult; or that the tears wet the shirt of the dead person, which was bad, since it either made for immense suffering or hindered a swift walk to the other world.<sup>45</sup>

Thus these sayings and beliefs express a conception that excessive crying, which indicates that the bereaved do not accept death and wish for the deceased to return to life, will disturb the process of death. The passage from the mundane world to the transcendental realm will be painful and difficult, and might even be reversed to some extent.<sup>46</sup> We should note that, in several of the sayings reported from Abruzzo, the disturbance of the process of dying is described as caused by the wetness of the tears rather than by the sorrow that brings them forth. This relates to the notion of death as a process of drying, to which humidity is an impediment.

The third type of 'bad death' struck a person in his active years. In many parts of Southern Italy, it was held that the spirit of the one who had been killed, or who had suffered a premature death by accident or suicide, stayed on earth until the day on which he had been destined to pass away. The appointed length of life was often said to have been decided by God; this was a long life ended by a natural death.<sup>47</sup>

The spirit resulting from an untimely death was often thought to take a non-human appearance. As mentioned, it could appear as a whirlwind, a strong and sudden wind or a storm. The spirit could also assume animal shape (a bird, a large cat or dog, a snake, a moth) or appear as a skeleton or as flames of fire.<sup>48</sup> Whatever its appearance,

such a spirit was frightening and dangerous. It could attack the living and cause them to suffer illness.

A premature death has similar implications as one which is not accepted: it suggests that the soul has a strong wish to live and that it is envious of the living. This is an outspoken idea in contemporary Naples,<sup>49</sup> and is implied elsewhere in Southern Italy by the belief already mentioned that spirits resulting from a violent death could take possession of the bodies of men and women.

Another kind of troubling death was that of an unbaptised child. According to the Church, the souls of unbaptized children have a special fate. Since they have not been freed from original sin through baptism, they cannot be accepted into Heaven, neither directly nor after a period in Purgatory, but since they are free from personal sin they do not deserve punishment in Hell. Instead they are thought to exist in a state of *limbo*, where they forever enjoy a certain bliss. Among the laity, however, it could be thought that their spirits remained on earth, often disturbing the living although not being really dangerous. In several regions of Southern Italy, they were believed to appear in the form of the *monachiello* – the ‘little monk’, a term that thus is one further indication of the death connotations of monks – which was a small and capricious spirit, essentially domestic and keen on performing practical jokes.<sup>50</sup> The *monachiello* could be of great help if a friendly relationship was maintained with him. He could protect the home and bring riches to the family, but he could also be of annoyance. The belief in small, domestic and capricious spirits was widespread all over Italy, as well as in many other European countries, and thus it seems as though the idea of the fate of the unbaptised child’s spirit sometimes fused with the image of this supernatural being. The connection is apparently established through the ‘childish’ traits of the spirit: he is small, capricious and relatively harmless.

Hence the fate of the dead, unbaptized child was imagined to be very different from that of the baptised, which was thought to become a little angel in Heaven. These different ideas can be understood not only to derive from the doctrines of the Church, but also to reflect the absence of regular ceremonies at the death of an unbaptized child. No such ceremonies seem to have been performed; it could not be given the Extreme Unction or the Viaticum, and it was denied Christian burial. No symbolic control had thus been gained over its death, inspiring the belief that the spirit would roam on earth for an indefinite time. Its spirit was not as those of adults, however: envious of the life of the living and truly dangerous. It was the spirit

of a child who not yet had become a social being, understanding and participating in the life of adults.

Let us now turn to the 'good death', in which the initial phase of death is controlled and the process of death is given a purposeful and proper direction. The dead person begins to abandon the mundane form of existence for another in the transcendental realm; the soul atones for its sins for a time in Purgatory, before being accepted into Heaven.<sup>51</sup> Among the laity, Purgatory was imagined as a subterranean, burning inferno where souls were tormented by heat and flames. A soul's stay in Purgatory could be shortened if the living performed *suffragi* – that is, prayed for the salvation of the soul and bestowed it with spiritual merits through devotional acts made in its name. Although everyone could perform *suffragi* for a particular soul in Purgatory, the relatives of the deceased most strongly felt this duty. It was common to include a petition for relatives in Purgatory while praying to the saints, the Virgin Mary, Christ or God. The prayers could be accompanied by a donation of money in collection boxes in the church and by the lighting of candles. Acts of abstinence to help souls in Purgatory could also be performed, and masses commissioned in their names. For the poor, paying for these masses was a substantial expense afforded only with much sacrifice.<sup>52</sup>

Acts of charity in their names were another form of *suffragio* for the dead. The most common was alms of food or money to poor people in the community or to itinerant beggars. The alms could be offered on a number of occasions. Poor people could join a funeral procession and afterwards be offered food, and leftovers from the funeral meal could be given away to the poor.<sup>53</sup> Food and money could be offered to beggars on certain days of the year dedicated to the commemoration of the dead, or when bread had been baked in the home, or more generally whenever it was considered appropriate. Beggars in Sicily could approach presumptive benefactors using expressions such as: *Pi l'arma di li so' muorti: un pizzuddu di pani* ('for the sake of the souls of your departed ones, a piece of bread'), or, stressing the prospects of the dead helping the living in return: *L'Armuzzi Santi di lu Priatoriu cci lu pàanu: un guranu!* ('The Blessed Souls in Purgatory will reward you: a coin!').<sup>54</sup>

The alms of food offered to beggars and the poor were not, however, seen only as good deeds of charity made in the name of a departed person to aid his soul. Some people thought that food offered in this way somehow reached the dead person and nurtured him.<sup>55</sup> The idea that the dead were in need of food was also expressed by other customs. As can be recalled from Chapter 4, the souls of the



dead were offered water and food in the home on All Souls Day and certain other occasions. Food could also be offered to the dead at their graves. According to a report from Roccanova (Basilicata) in the 1950s, some poor women poured red wine over a thick slice of bread on All Souls Day, placed it in a bouquet of wild flowers and deposited this offering by the crosses of their relatives' earthen graves.<sup>56</sup> Such gifts of wine, bread and other foodstuffs at graves have also been documented in Abruzzo, Molise and Calabria.<sup>57</sup>

Hence, the living relatives wished to offer the deceased food, and more generally to help them, but there were no physical receivers (apart from the corpse in the grave). The poor were willing to take advantage of this by acting as representatives of the dead and recipients of the concerns that were meant for them. They could do this as they share some important characteristics with the dead, being deprived of wealth and belongings and in need of assistance. Furthermore, the poor person in need of alms from the public is often without living kinsmen, a state recalling the fate of the soul of the departed now separated from living kin. In the case of the itinerant beggar, the similarity with the dead is further stressed by the absence of a home: the beggar wanders on earth homeless while the soul of the dead has commenced upon a journey towards the realms of the other world.<sup>58</sup> The symbolic association between beggars and the dead has been documented in Europe since antiquity.<sup>59</sup>

According to Christian morals, assistance to the souls in Purgatory is an obligation for the living, an expression of the help that fellow Christians should offer each other in times of trouble. Those who pray for the dead can expect that also they will be prayed for by the living when they have passed away. As mentioned, one of the few kinds of voluntary associations commonly found in Southern Italy were burial brotherhoods (*confraternite*), in which living members cared for the burial of those who had died and prayed for their souls.

Both in the view of the Church and in the belief of the laity, the souls in Purgatory reciprocate the concerns of the living and assist their fellow Christians on earth.<sup>60</sup> In prayer, the living could approach their relatives in Purgatory and ask them for favours. Such prayers were accepted by the Church only if they asked for intercession, petitioning the soul to forward requests to God.<sup>61</sup> According to the Church, the souls of the dead were only intermediaries, and supernatural intervention occurring when praying to them should be attributed to God. Although some among the laity surely accepted this theological distinction, others did not think much about it: the souls in Purgatory were prayed to, and if the prayers proved to have

been heard and granted, it was the soul that had been prayed to who was given the credit. In practice, the dead were thus attributed supernatural powers to interfere in this world. When a person's soul was thought to have been admitted into Heaven, it needed no further assistance from the living. The contacts between it and the living were assumed to be terminated or only occasional.

The help the living could expect from souls in Purgatory, according to the Roman Catholic Church, was to petition God to grant the living favours (*grazie*) and blessings. Among the laity, it was not normally thought that souls had great supernatural power and therefore prayers for help involving miraculous intervention were directed to more potent divine beings: the saints, Christ and the Virgin Mary. It was generally believed that one important way for the dead to help their living relatives was to appear in dreams and give advice, reveal secrets and foretell coming events.<sup>62</sup> These communications often concerned family matters, but they could also relate to other issues. Two common themes were that the dead, most often by way of appearing in a dream, could reveal the location of buried golden treasures or foretell the winning numbers of the game of *lotto*.<sup>63</sup>

With reference to the soul, the idea of Purgatory reflects what Hertz calls the 'intermediary' period, during which the deceased is neither alive nor yet fully dead. Since not yet finally dead, he is attributed needs that the living can help in satisfying, and the soul is also thought to be able to help the living. It has left the mundane world, however, and any help extended is thus insubstantial — typically to supply information and forward prayers to God. The soul cannot grant substantial *grazie*, as the saints, who are in a sense fully 'alive' and, through the identification between image and saint, present in this world.

The time a soul would spend in Purgatory was understood to depend on three principal factors. (1) Sinfulness — in Purgatory the soul atoned for sins committed during life; consequently, the more and graver the sins, the longer the time in Purgatory. (2) Indulgences earned during life through practising abstinence and mortification, by performing acts of charity and so on shortened the time in Purgatory. (3) *Suffragi* of relatives and other persons concerned with the fate of the soul — if plentiful, the stay in Purgatory was abbreviated.

The atonement for sins in Purgatory was conceived as a purification of the soul — the Italian word *purgatorio* derives from the Latin verb *purgare*, 'to cleanse'. The relation between sin and the length of time spent in Purgatory can be seen as derived from a notion of death as a separation of the carnal and the spiritual components of man. To

sin is to depart from the rightful moral norms of Christians and to give in to the temptations of the flesh and other worldly desires; sinning therefore means that the carnal side of man is emphasised. The means for gaining indulgences, that is, acts of charity, fasts, mortifications and other forms of abstentions, are the opposite of sins; they imply a rejection of carnality and worldly concerns. *Suffragi* are a way for the living to bestow the soul in Purgatory with indulgences *post mortem*.<sup>64</sup>

Hence, the more 'carnal' a person has been when alive, the longer the time necessary for the separation of carnal and spiritual components, conceived of as a purification of the soul. This time is shortened for a person who already has rejected carnality and cultivated the spiritual when alive. As long as the carnal component is still present, the dead is still on the move from an earlier form of existence in the direction towards another transient form – in need of help from the living and able to reciprocate their concerns. A corollary of this view of sin and a necessary period of purification is the idea that persons who have not sinned will by-pass Purgatory. As we know, the saint was thought to rise directly to Heaven as was the baptised child no older than seven years of age.

Hertz shows that it is common that the imagined fate of the soul reflects the actual transformation of the corpse. In the South Italian ethnography, a number of such correspondences can be found.

First, there is the general correspondence between, on the one hand, the destruction of the old body and the reconstruction of a new, incorruptible body and, on the other hand, the soul's imagined journey from the mundane world to a transcendental realm. In both dimensions, the dead moves from the temporary and transient towards the eternal and unchanging. The temporal correspondence between these two processes will be discussed at the end of this chapter, since there is also correlation with the length of mourning.

Second, the practice of burying corpses underground so that their flesh dissolved in earth corresponds to the spatial location of Purgatory, a subterranean domain where the deceased were purified. In the case of exhumation of bones and the placement of them in ossuaries, there is also a correspondence between this change of location and the soul's transfer from the chthonic to the heavenly realm.

Third, the transformation of the corpse after death essentially entails a change from humid to dry. The humid flesh disintegrates and leaves the dry bones bare, or the flesh dries up (as in the case of Capuchin burial) and a mummy is created. This drying process corresponds to the idea of Purgatory as a place where the dead suffer from

being burned with fire for a period of time – and therefore, as argued in Chapter 3, are thought to become thirsty. In Sicily, it was believed that the soul of the one who had been burnt to death in an accident was exempted from Purgatory and was forwarded directly to Heaven, 'since the flames had tried him in this world'.<sup>65</sup> Hence this idea directly correlates an event in which the body is subject to heat and flames with the passage of the soul through Purgatory. We have noticed a number of beliefs, legends and sayings indicate that humidity in relation to the corpse was understood to disturb the peace of the soul or the journey towards the other world: the Neapolitan belief that the dead buried in uncovered earth are troubled by rain; the legends in Naples of dead who, in their second grave, are disturbed by water leaking in (an increased humidity in an already dried body that suggests a regress to a painful transitory position between living and dead); the sayings that the wetness of the mourners' tears is an impediment to the soul's passage to God and the afterlife.

Fourth, the transformation of the corpse implies a purification. The putrefying flesh of the corpse is gradually dissolved and, when this process has come to an end, the clean bones remain. This cleansing from flesh corresponds to the purification in Purgatory, in which sins, that is emphasised carnality, are gradually atoned for and cleaned away. As mentioned earlier, at an exhumation in Naples when the flesh of a corpse was found to have dissolved incompletely, this brought to mind the idea that the deceased had committed many sins. Hence, in this case, when the condition of the corpse becomes inspectable through the practice of double burial, the time taken for the purification of the bones from putrefying flesh is believed to be directly correlated to the number of sins committed by the deceased.

Hence, an incorrupt corpse could either be thought to be that of a great sinner or, as mentioned (Chapter 7), that of a saint. This ambiguity derives from two different assumptions concerning the cause of the state of the corpse. The absence of normal decay in the case of a sinner relates to a notion of the body having a quality of exaggerated carnality that prolongs the process of putrefaction. Thus the corpse is not exempted from the process of corruption; on the contrary, putrefaction will take place but over such a long time that, at the moment when a normal body would be decomposed, that of the sinner appears as comparatively incorrupt. The absence of putrefaction in the case of a saint is 'true'; the saint is understood to be pure and therefore disassociated from corruption.<sup>66</sup>

Finally, the parallel between the fates of body and soul can also be discerned in the similarity between the family grave and what can be

called the domestic 'family shrine'. In virtually every home, there was a shrine-like arrangement where photographs of recently or long since dead relatives were mingled with images of saints, of Mary and of Christ. In the shrine could also be kept locks of hair from the dead, as well as various objects which were conceived as holy (crosses, rosaries, bottles containing blessed water, twigs from the olive tree that had been blessed on Palm Sunday and so on) and religious objects and charms that had been brought back from pilgrimages to saints' shrines (stones, waters, oils, dried herbs and flowers, as well as plaques, buttons, medallions, trinkets etc.). In front of the images of dead relatives and holy figures were placed flowers and burning candles or oil lamps, in recent times plastic flowers and miniature electric illumination have become common. The shrine was a centre of domestic religious activities. Prayers were said for the salvation of souls in Purgatory, and these souls, as well as the divine protectors of the family, were asked for assistance.<sup>67</sup>

While the bodies of the dead were gathered in the family grave, their icons were assembled at the family shrine. The shrine can be construed as an image of the deceased relatives already in Heaven, their souls being close to the saints and God. It was quite similar to the 'grave shrine' of a family *edicola*, where photographs of dead relatives were also mingled with images of divine beings. Just as the family grave, these shrines convey an image of the family as a permanent entity transcending the carnal and mundane lives of its members, but it situates this family in the realm of Heaven, where the souls and divine beings have an eternal and unchanging existence. Such an effort to locate the ideal family in a transcendental realm is also expressed by the practice of burial in church, a 'heavenly mansion', and the construction of *edicole* in the fashion of chapels.

It must be noted that this image of the family as unified in the heavenly realm is irreconcilable with the view of the Church that every person is judged according to individual merit. On the basis of this judgement, everyone is allotted a position in Hell, Purgatory or in the hierarchy of Heaven, where exemplary Christians have privileged positions close to God and the Virgin Mary, while the not so perfect ones are assigned lower rank. In the realm of Heaven, there is no need for reproduction and procreation since the souls cannot die, and hence no need for the family.<sup>68</sup>

### ***Mourners***

Chapter 4 discussed the food practices of the members of a household in which a death had occurred. Food was not consumed at all as long

as the corpse was kept in the home. For three or more days after burial, during the period of most intense mourning, the function of the household to sustain the life of its members by producing cooked food was interrupted. Instead, nourishment was brought to the family by relatives and friends according to the custom of *consuolo*. It was argued that these practices reflect a notion of the family members as initially being in a state of death, broken by the input of vital force through the *consuolo* food. Thereafter, the household started to function more normally, but its members still lived under a shadow of death for an extended period of time.

While mourning was most intense, the fire in the hearth was put out and not lit again during a period of three to ten days.<sup>69</sup> This custom relates to the circumstance that the hearth was the epitome of the home and family, and its burning fire was associated with the life and continuity of the family and its members. The fire was normally kept burning or glowing all day to be re-lit each morning by the glowing embers from the previous evening. The fire 'slept' during night, just as the family did, and was 'awakened' in the morning; it had a 'life' of its own and it would 'die' if not properly fed. Putting out the fire signified that death had struck the household (for details on the symbolism of the hearth, see the next chapter). During this period of intense mourning, it was also common to stop the clocks in the home. This practice can also be taken to indicate a state of death, as a clock usually runs continuously and the sound of a pendulum is reminiscent of human heartbeats.

As long as the corpse of an adult was kept in the home prior to burial, it was surrounded by relatives, friends and neighbours who arrived to pay their respects. The men sometimes retired to another room after having visited the deceased, but the women stayed in the *camera ardente* where periods of silence were interrupted by wailing over the departed, by intonations of lamentations, in which the virtues of the deceased were praised and the grief of the bereaved described,<sup>70</sup> and by recitations of prayers for the salvation of his or her soul. Expressions of grief were expected to be shown more intensely by members of the deceased's household than by more distant relatives<sup>71</sup> and much more intensely by women than by men. It was common in the nineteenth century, in the case of the premature death of an adult man that women of the family tore their hair, scratched their faces until blood flowed and violently beat themselves on the shoulders, breast or head. On such occasions, a woman could also throw herself onto the corpse or the ground, beat her head against a wall, tear her clothes into shreds and emit loud and terrible screams. The

hair that was torn off was sometimes placed in the hands, by the feet or on the breast of the corpse, or onto the coffin if the corpse had already been placed in it.<sup>72</sup>

All these violent acts were understood as expressions of immense grief and pain and can be taken as conventionalized enactments of a wish to die, supposed to be felt by bereaved women, especially widows. The practice of tearing out hair and placing it on the corpse suggests a unification with the deceased as well as a symbolic devitalization; hair, as we know, has connotations of vital force. Other practices that indicate such a unification have been documented in some Calabrian communities. A widow was expected to put on her deceased husbands' jacket and, having done so, be the first to intone lamentations.<sup>73</sup> During the first three days of mourning, the close consanguine and affinal female relatives were customarily seated on the mattress taken from the deceased's bed and placed on the earthen floor.<sup>74</sup>

The length of time a person was expected to mourn depended on gender and genealogical distance.<sup>75</sup> The period also varied according to local codes of conduct, but a widow should usually mourn her husband for the remainder of her life (or until an eventual re-marriage); a widower should mourn his wife for some years or until re-marriage; parents and adult children should be mourned for a period of some years; brothers, sisters and grandparents for one year; uncles, aunts and cousins for some months. Children under seven years of age were not formally mourned at all, at least not among the common people.

Often a distinction was made between 'strict mourning' (*lutto stretto*) and ordinary mourning. Strict mourning was observed for a period after the death of a parent, spouse or adult child. It entailed complete abstention from lighthearted amusements and a more general refrainment from all activities that were not absolutely necessary. Hence one should stay at home unless there was a compelling reason to go outdoors. A widow was often expected to remain secluded at home for a long time, sometimes a year or longer, leaving the house only to visit church and her late husband's grave. Strict mourning also implied dressing in black or dark clothes. Black and dark colours indicated death, and black ribbons were attached to the entrance of the house to signify that the household was in mourning. Ordinary mourning was less strict. When mourning was even less strict, it could be called *lutto dimezzato* ('half mourning'), observed when an uncle, aunt or cousin had died. Generally the codes of mourning were more demanding for women than for men.

A particular set of mourning practices understood to signify the grief of the bereaved was to abstain, in some particular ways, from what was normal orderliness and cleanliness. It was quite common in the southern provinces for a woman to refrain from changing her chemise for a long time (a month, or several months, or even an entire year or longer) after the death of a close relative, especially in the case of the death of her husband.<sup>76</sup> Men could refrain from shaving or trimming the beard for some weeks or even a year.<sup>77</sup> As long as the corpse was kept in the home, or during the period of intense mourning, or for the first thirty days after the death or even longer, the bereaved often refrained from sweeping or otherwise cleaning the home.<sup>78</sup> The grief of the bereaved was expected to be so intense that they did not bother with their personal hygiene and the tidiness of their home. Those who did not conform to this code of mourning were spoken badly of; they were said to feel no deep sorrow.<sup>79</sup>

These practices can be understood not only to be indicative of a denial of life, however, but also to act out a conception that the bereaved and their home were contaminated by death and therefore in a state of pollution.<sup>80</sup> This notion is also manifest in other practices relating to the presence of the deceased in the home. The dead body was ambiguous — on the one hand it still evoked the living person, and could hence be kissed and spoken to, while on the other hand it was disintegrating bodily matter from which pollution and death threatened to spread to the living. This latter aspect inspired purifying ceremonies of the home involving sprinkling water and burning incense,<sup>81</sup> as well as numerous other beliefs and practices concerned with purification and removal of entities connected with the deceased.<sup>82</sup>

To sum up: mourning had three important aspects: (1) grief; (2) a conception of the members of the household as being in an initial state of death and later as denying life and (3) a concern with the negative aspect of death as a state of disintegration and corruption. The activities expressing these aspects were stereotyped, and the person, especially the woman who had lost her husband, who failed to produce them publicly in the expected manner was likely to be severely criticised for not mourning seriously. She was thought to stain the honour of the deceased and of the family and was viewed as morally questionable.

It is important to note that the intensity of the expressions of these aspects was largely dependent upon which category of family member had passed away. Generally they were most intense in cases of the premature death of an adult man, a bit less intense in cases of



premature death of an unmarried adult son, not as intense in cases of the premature death of a female member of the family or death at an old age. When a young child had died, expressions of these aspects were downplayed or absent. While the corpse of an adult was usually dressed in black or dark clothes, a deceased child was dressed in white. Flowers were placed in the child's hands and a garland of flowers could be draped around the head. The funeral of a child was, at least among common people, often given a festive and gay appearance.<sup>83</sup> The smallest of the church-bells sounded joyfully (this was recommended by the Church), merry music could be played by a band and the corpse could be followed to the grave by children dressed as angels — all this was explained with reference to the idea that a child was without sin and therefore after death became a little angel in Paradise. After the funeral a feast could be held, at which people amused themselves with drinking and dancing.

These significant differences between death practices relating to diverse categories of family members indicate that the notion of death as sorrowful and polluting was stressed when the death severely disrupted the family as a unit reproducing over time. As Robert Hertz (1960) was the first to consistently point out, death-related ideas and practices are not primarily occasioned by physical death as such, but by the demise of a social being and are therefore highly dependent upon the deceased's social position.

The most disruptive death was the premature death of the family head. As the principal bread-winner and official 'manager' of the household's economic activities, his death implied a serious threat to its continuity. The household should ideally continue to exist under the formal leadership of the eldest son; if there were no son, the mother might assume the role of household head. In these cases, however, the household was in a sense a different household, since it had a new head. However, if there was no son to take over the position of leader, there was impending risk that the family of the household would cease to exist — the widow with her children might be incorporated into her parental family or, if the widow re-marries, they might become members of a new, or already existing, household of another man. The widow may also be forced to separate the family by boarding children in other households or even in institutions.

Also the death of an adult unmarried son seriously threatened the family, since a son, when his father dies, was expected to take over his position as leader of the family. Furthermore, unmarried sons usually contributed substantially to the household's economy with their labour. The death of an adult daughter, of the mother, or of an

elderly member of the family did not pose a threat of similar magnitude to the household. An unmarried adult daughter was destined in any case to be married away and would therefore cease to be a member of the household; significantly, her funeral often contained elements of the celebration of marriage.<sup>84</sup> The mother could be replaced if the family head found himself a new wife, which he commonly did, and an elderly member of the household was not crucial to its continuity. Nor did the death of a young child pose in most cases a serious threat to the continuity of the family. Infant mortality was high, and most families lost one or more children. However, as a married couple usually begot many children, they were likely to see some of their children grow up and marry.

In summary, the death that threatened the continuity of the family over time was the most negative one. While family graves and the placing of personal portraits of deceased family members in the 'grave shrine' and in the 'domestic shrine' speak of an effort to construct ideal representations of family continuity and unity, the notion of the family in a state of death and of its members as denying life during mourning is a negative image of the family when it is threatened by the transience of human flesh.

That females were expected to act out this negative image more intensely than men can be understood to be a consequence of women being more closely associated than men with the carnal aspect of human existence, and thereby with physical reproduction. Physiological death is a threat to the continuity of the family as a reproductive unit. Death strikes against carnality, against biological life, and it is therefore women that are expected to be struck hardest. Men, on the other hand, were related to family continuity in a more abstract sense, for instance, through the practice of patrilineal inheritance of family name.

### *Correlations*

Just as the transformation of the deceased's 'old' body into a 'new', incorruptible body and the transference of the soul from the mundane realm through Purgatory to Heaven take place over a limited period of time, so the mourning period of the living has a definitive duration.

There is a notion that the deceased, despite physical death, has not been finally removed from mundane existence, that he is in a sense still a member of the household. The dead person is fresh in the memory of the living, and the family is frequently reminded of him

through habits and domestic objects of the person. During this period, the household can be said to have a member who is dead and thus must adjust to this circumstance by denying life. The mourning of the family comes to an end, however, and the time when it ends can be made to coincide with the termination of the other aspects of the duration of death. This correlation seems to be most evident in Naples, where mourning ends after the secondary funeral, hence when the duration necessary for the successful creation of the deceased's 'new body' has come to an end. These durations of death are also projected upon the duration involving the soul. In Naples, the commemorative masses for the soul of the deceased are commissioned less frequently after the second burial and cease completely some year after it, when it is held that the deceased has atoned for his sins in Purgatory and is released from it.<sup>85</sup>

In other parts of Southern Italy, a correlation in time between the end of the three aspects of the duration of death seems to have been occasional and vague. As mentioned, the soul of the person who burnt to death could be believed to go straight to Heaven. The ideas of the normal length of time that the soul of an adult had to stay in Purgatory – if the person had been neither exceptionally sinful nor remarkably pious and if the *suffragi* for the soul had been ordinary – were imprecise and could shift according to context. It was thought that certain practices could liberate a soul from Purgatory after only a short time (from a week to a few years).<sup>86</sup> According to reports from Sicily, the location of the soul in the other world (whether it was in Heaven or in Purgatory) could be indicated by certain omens occurring three months after the person's death or by divinatory practices.<sup>87</sup> As will be described in detail in the next chapter, the dead were said to return to their former homes every All Souls Day, and these dead could be understood to be souls dwelling in Purgatory. The *suffragi* for the soul and the assistance thought to be obtained from it tended to decrease after a couple of years, but people could nevertheless assume, according to a report from Sicily, that none of their departed relatives had yet been forwarded to Heaven, although they thought that this would surely happen some time in the future.<sup>88</sup>

The end of the three aspects of the duration of death seems to have been directly correlated only in Naples, this presumably because of the practice of double burial. The condition of the corpse thereby becomes evident and inspires to conclusions regarding the state of the soul and whether or not one should continue to mourn. In other areas, the 'new body' was created instantaneously through the practice of entombment; when earth burial was used, the condition of the

corpse was inspectable only when an earthen grave eventually was re-used.

To conclude, in general, the 'new body' had been formed within five years, often earlier. At that time, mourning had ceased for all family members except for many widows, and the contact between the living family members and the soul were only occasional. The three aspects of the duration of death are summarised in the following figure.

state	physical death		final death	
	alive	duration of death	duration of death	finally dead
<b>body</b>	organic body (humid)	destruction of organic body/ construction of 'new' body (drying)		'new' body (dry)
<b>soul</b>	soul in carnal body	soul in Purgatory		soul in Heaven
<b>family</b>	intact	mourning; disrupted; frequent contacts with soul		mourning ended; reconstructed; occasional contacts with soul

Figure 5. Three aspects of the duration of death.

## CYCLIC REGENERATION

Chapter 8 focused on the merging, especially notable in springtime, of the creative forces of nature with the *grazia* of saints and of Christ. We shall now give our attention to a set of notions that also relate natural cycles of life and death to the regeneration of human beings, but which are essentially non-Christian and are temporally located in the late autumn and at mid-winter. These notions are expressed primarily by beliefs and practices connected to the major calendrical celebrations in the time between All Souls and Epiphany, and we must first consider four recurring themes of these celebrations: (1) the idea of the presence of the dead among the living, (2) the imagery of children receiving gifts from the dead or from Befana or other mythological beings, (3) the ceremonial consumption and distribution to the poor (acting as representatives of the dead) of whole grains and legumes, and (4) the idea of annual regeneration.

### *Themes of Late Autumn and Mid-Winter Celebrations*

#### **Presence of the dead**

In several regions, the dead were said to have a respite from their sufferings in Purgatory in the period from All Souls Day (November 2) to Epiphany (January 6), during which they rested in their former homes among their living relatives.<sup>1</sup> The notion of the dead as present among the living at this time of the year is also expressed by numerous beliefs and practices connected to specific days. In these contexts, however, the dead were not necessarily specified to be dwelling in Purgatory, but were the dead in a more general sense, in which it was essentially of no concern where in the other world, according to Roman Catholic doctrine, they were.

It was a common idea all over Southern Italy that on the night prior to All Souls Day the dead rose from their graves, walked in procession through the town, attended Mass in church, which was read by a deceased priest, and then visited their former homes. The conception of the dead as being present on this night could inspire in some communities the custom of displaying hollowed pumpkins,

with holes cut in the shape of eyes, nose and mouth of a human skull, with a burning candle inside.<sup>2</sup> During the night, bands of youths using chalk sometimes painted images of skeletons and skulls on the doors of houses.<sup>3</sup> In Montenero di Bisaccia (Molise) on All Souls Eve, small lit candles were attached to the back of cockroaches, which were set free to crawl around on the church floor.<sup>4</sup> This event presumably took place at the service for the dead in the evening, and can hardly be anything but a suggestive visualization of the presence of the dead among the living.<sup>5</sup> The cockroaches with their candles moved about in the dusk of the church, each following its own route, just like the souls of the dead on their way back home. They were carried by insects which, just like the returning dead, emerge from the subterranean realm, shun light and move about only in the darkness of night. Furthermore, when moving on a floor, a cockroach makes a clattering noise resembling the rattling of dry bones.

All Souls Day was a day of concern for the dead. As we know, water and food were often placed on a table in the home so that the dead could refresh themselves during the night. The graves of deceased family members were visited and taken care of, and Masses were read in church for the salvation of their souls. Beggars roamed the streets and asked for alms to be offered as a *suffragio* for the dead.

Food could also be left on the dinner table on Christmas as an offering to the souls of the dead, who were thought to arrive during the night.<sup>6</sup> Offerings of food placed on a table or by the hearth could also be made with the verbally expressed intention that the infant Jesus and Mary would eat from the food when they visited the home or that the Christmas log 'would have something to eat'.<sup>7</sup> Since the dead in other contexts were understood to have a certain presence in the hearth (see below), we can also discern a gift of food to them behind these verbalised rationalisations.

In a number of communities in Molise, Puglia and Calabria, it was held that the night of Epiphany was a time when the dead visited their homes, and a table was set in the home with offerings of water and food.<sup>8</sup> In some villages in Basilicata, however, Epiphany was a day of mourning, when it was believed that the dead greatly suffered – some said that this was because they 'went further down' or 'sank deeper into the earth of the cemetery'.<sup>9</sup> This idea may be understood as expressing a conception that the dead were now moving away from the living after a period in which they had been closer to them.

The presence of the dead among the living implied potential dangers. For instance, the dead who visited the living on this day were sometimes called *spiriti* instead of *anime*, hence the term normally

used for the evil spirits of the dead remaining on earth,<sup>10</sup> and people were said to have died or become dumb at the chock of seeing the dead on All Souls.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, there is an implication that if the living do not care well for the dead and show them appropriate respect, the dead will be discontent and pose a threat to the living.<sup>12</sup> This possibility is the subject of a legend, recorded in Miggiano (Puglia).<sup>13</sup> It tells that the living once ceased to care for the dead by prayers, masses and charity in their name. To re-awaken their affection, the dead, having asked God for permission, sent a horrible hail storm over the community, which badly damaged the houses as well as the harvest. The people wished to know the cause of the catastrophe and consulted a hermit, who told them that God had punished them for not caring properly for their poor dead. The living repented and performed penitences, and started to love their dead again.

#### **Gifts to children**

In most parts of Sicily and in some areas of northwestern Puglia, children were made to believe that their dead relatives, when they visited their homes in the night prior to All Souls Day, offered them gifts – the *cose dei morti* ('things from the dead').<sup>14</sup> These presents were in reality given by their parents or other relatives. Gifts of smaller size were most often placed in one of the child's shoes or socks or in an adult's more capacious shoe or sock. In Puglia, a sock used for this purpose could consequently be called *la calzetta dei morti* ('the sock of the dead').<sup>15</sup> It was the custom in some communities to place the sock or shoe by the hearth, because the dead were said to enter the house through the chimney.<sup>16</sup>

Nice gifts were given to children who were considered to have behaved well during the year, while some of those who were judged to have misbehaved found objects that disappointed them. Typical attractive gifts were toys, sweets, dried figs, nuts, chestnuts, roasted chick-peas, coins and clothes. Shoes, as well as sweets shaped as shoes, were a customary gift. Among the unattractive gifts, it seems that pieces of charcoal and worn out shoes were the most common, and we are informed that braids of garlic, orange peels and rotten onions were also given.

A customary type of sweet at this time of the year was prepared of a base of grated almonds and sugar, sometimes from flour, burnt sugar and water, and shaped to resemble certain figures and objects.<sup>17</sup> On All Souls Day, and sometimes also on other festive days in the late autumn, common forms for this type of sweet, in Sicily and Calabria, were images of *anime purganti* ('souls in purgatory'), *ossa dei morti*

(‘bones of the dead’), which had the colour and form of human bones, and *fave dei morti*, resembling broad beans. The sweets could also be fashioned as human skeletons or skulls or given the form of, and be called, *Gesù Bambino* (‘Jesus the Child’) and *Occhi di Santa Lucia* (‘Eyes of Santa Lucia’). The sweets were eaten by the whole family, although particularly enjoyed by children, and they were among the gifts that the dead (or certain mythological figures, see below), were supposed to bring to the young descendants of their families.

In Calabria, it could be ‘saints’ that offered gifts (sometimes placed in a sock) to children on the night prior to All Saints Day.<sup>18</sup> In Bari and Molfetta (Puglia), children were instead made to believe that San Nicola brought them gifts on the night preceding his feast day (December 6). The saint was said to enter the home through the chimney (or through fissures at the window) and place his gifts in shoes or socks that had been hung by the hearth.<sup>19</sup> San Nicola is regarded as the patron of children, presumably because his hagiography tells of two miracles in which he showed concern for children. In some areas of Sicily, children were made to believe that the *Strenna* or *La vecchia* (‘The Old Woman’) brought them gifts on the night prior to Christmas or New Year.<sup>20</sup> The *Strenna* was described as an extremely old and ugly woman. Her name is formed by the word *strenna*, which means a gift given at annual feast days, such as Christmas.<sup>21</sup>

However, the most common imagery in continental Southern Italy was that *Befana* brought children gifts on the night prior to Epiphany.<sup>22</sup> Her name is derived from *Epifania*, and she was imagined as an old and ugly woman. Like the Sicilian *Strenna*, she was a non-Christian figure, a kind of fairy. She was often said to enter the house through the chimney (or to live there). The usual imagery was that she deposited gifts in the shoes or socks of the children, which had often been placed by the hearth for this reason. The gifts were basically the same as those offered by the dead in Sicily. *Befana* was said to know everything about the family; thus she could give pleasant gifts to well-behaved children and ashes or other useless things to naughty ones.

Dead relatives thus brought gifts to children on All Souls Day, as did a number of mythological figures during late autumn and at midwinter. There are reasons to assume that these figures, in this context, represent deceased relatives. They are supposed to appear in the home at a time when the dead are conceived as being present among the living and as visiting their former homes. *Befana* and the Sicilian *Strenna* are portrayed as extremely old, as old as deceased relatives would have been had they been alive.<sup>23</sup> The figures also have



a domestic character. They know how the children have behaved during the year in such detail as though they had been family members. Furthermore, San Nicola and Befana, like the dead, are associated with the hearth, a recurring symbol of the family; it was there they left their gifts.

As it now has been mentioned several times that the hearth was a symbol for home and family, it may be in place to qualify the statement. The hearth was the centre of domestic life.<sup>24</sup> The dinner table was placed close to it, and in the evenings the family gathered by it to chat, tell stories, recite prayers and make handicrafts. It was by the hearth that guests were received. In the times prior to the introduction of gas or electric stoves, the fire of the hearth was often kept alive all hours of the day.

The hearth was thus the 'heart' of the home. In Abruzzo, the word *fóche*, ('fire', 'hearth') was used as a synonym for 'home' and for 'family'.<sup>25</sup> The hearth was treated with great respect. In Abruzzo, and elsewhere, it was forbidden to spit in it, and no leftovers of food or other kinds of rubbish were to be thrown there.<sup>26</sup> Solemn oaths could be sworn in its name.<sup>27</sup> In some villages in Abruzzo, a newborn child was placed by the hearth for a moment,<sup>28</sup> and in certain areas of Campania, the father carried his newborn first son three times around the hearth.<sup>29</sup> These customs emphasise the belonging of the child to the home and the family. It may be noted that a similar procedure in certain villages of Abruzzo was used for domesticating a cat, so that it would never abandon the house — it was passed three times around the fireplace chain.<sup>30</sup>

As the epitome for the home and the family, the hearth also comprised deceased members of the family. To touch, toss or swing the chain of the hearth — especially on All Souls, during the period from All Souls to Epiphany or when a death in the family had recently been suffered — was thought in Abruzzo and Molise to disturb the dead.<sup>31</sup> In Puglia, it was believed that keeping a tripod in the domestic fire without suspending a pot from it troubled the souls in Purgatory.<sup>32</sup> The sparks from the hearth were, in some villages in Abruzzo, called *parinde*, a term relating to the word *parente* ('parent', 'relative');<sup>33</sup> in Campania, it was said that every spark from half-extinct firebrands represents a soul flying to the other world.<sup>34</sup>

While the hearth thus represented home and family, its burning fire was associated with the continuity of the family over time, as well as the life of individual family members. In Abruzzo, the expression *ha 'rmòrte lu fòhce* ('the fire has died out') meant that the last living member of a family had died.<sup>35</sup> In Modica, Sicily, it was held that if

the domestic fire died during the Easter Eve dinner, this was an omen that one of the family members would die damned within a year.<sup>36</sup> In some villages in Abruzzo, it was believed that, if the huge *ceppo di Natale* (Christmas log), burned all the time to Epiphany, re-lit each evening, this foretold a long life for the head of the house.<sup>37</sup> In certain parts of Calabria, the Christmas log was lit together with as many lesser logs as was the number of members of the family.<sup>38</sup> In Calabria, it was also the custom *not* to lit the Christmas log if an important family member had died during the year.<sup>39</sup> Like the custom of putting out the fire in the hearth during the first days of deep mourning, this is an expression, at the year's major family celebration, of the disruption of the family and a household struck by death. Earlier, we discussed the 'lamp metaphor' in humoral medicine and the association between a burning candle or oil-lamp and a dying or recently deceased person. In all these customs we see expressions of the analogy between the 'life' of a fire and the life of a human being, or the supra-individual continuity of a family.

The close association between the fire of the hearth and the family is also expressed by a number of beliefs concerning unbaptized children. To fetch fire from other homes in order to re-light the hearth was considered inappropriate by some when there was an unbaptized child in the home.<sup>40</sup> If fire from one's own hearth was offered to other families, this would harm the child,<sup>41</sup> or make it bad-tempered and disrespectful to its father.<sup>42</sup> These beliefs thus express an intuition that the integrity of the domestic fire was crucial in a period when the child's identity had not yet been socially determined by the ceremony of baptism. The idea that the child would be disrespectful to its father suggests that the disruption of the integrity of the fire (by lending it out) would correspond to a disruption of family concord.

Two further things should be said concerning the relation between the deceased and children. On All Souls children could roam the streets of the village or town and ask for gifts, reminding all that this day was dedicated to *suffragi* for the dead. For instance, they could repeatedly cry out *l'aneme di murte* ('the souls of the dead', Puglian dialect) or carry hollow pumpkins fashioned as human skulls, illuminated from the inside by a candle.<sup>43</sup> Sometimes children mingled with beggars, who were also asking for alms. The children were given nuts, almonds, dried figs, pomegranates, roasted chestnuts, sweets, oranges and sometimes coins; in San Vito Chietino (Abruzzo) they were offered boiled legumes (chick-peas, beans and broad beans). At least in one community (Cerignola), the children collected their gifts in socks.

Second, not only socks and shoes were recurrent elements in the imagery of gifts to children, but in Sicily also the soles of the feet. Sicilian children were made to believe that the dead, when they entered the homes on the night prior to All Souls Day, tickled the soles of the children's feet with their nails,<sup>44</sup> and the street-urchins took the opportunity to frighten smaller children by roaming the streets and calling out in a woeful and drawn-out tone: *Li morti vennu e ti grattanu li pedi!* ('The dead are coming and will scratch your feet!').<sup>45</sup> In Milazzo, the dead were said to lacerate the soles of children's feet with a grater<sup>46</sup> and, in Vicari, where children were instead made to believe that the *Vecchia Strina* brought them gifts on New Years night, she was also said to mistreat their feet in this particular way.<sup>47</sup>

#### **Ceremonial consumption of whole legumes and grain**

Typical gifts to beggars roaming the streets on All Souls, offered as a *suffragio* for deceased family members, were dishes based on boiled legumes (most often broad beans) or whole grain, or both, and people themselves consumed such food on this day.<sup>48</sup> The dishes could also contain other ingredients. For instance, in certain areas of Puglia, many well-to-do families boiled great quantities of chick-peas or whole grains, seasoned with red pomegranate juice, and offered this dish to the poor on All Souls as a *suffragio* for the souls of deceased relatives.<sup>49</sup> In other areas of Puglia, whole grains and corn kernels were boiled with red wine and consumed 'as a devotion to the souls of the dead'.<sup>50</sup> In the Southern regions, these customary dishes, which could also be eaten on some other occasions, were often called *cuccia*,<sup>51</sup> especially when they were culinarily more elaborate. Some people considered broad beans to be the food of the dead, and the food offerings that were left at a table in the home on All Souls Eve sometimes consisted of such beans. It shall be recalled that sweets in the form of broad beans, called *fave dei morti* ('broad beans of the dead'), were popular at this time of the year in some regions.<sup>52</sup>

In numerous communities the same kinds of food were ceremoniously eaten and distributed to the poor on the day of San Nicola.<sup>53</sup> In some areas of the South, no food made from flour was to be eaten on this day; instead a soup based on soaked and cooked whole grain was the customary dish.<sup>54</sup> This ban on eating flour, also effective on some other occasions during late autumn and mid-winter, can be understood as stressing the importance of the *whole* seed of grain. It is not the substance of the food that is crucial for it as a ceremonial dish, but rather its form — whole seeds.

In large areas of the South, consumption and distribution to the poor of whole grains and legumes also took place on Santa Lucia's day (December 13).<sup>55</sup> In most parts of Sicily, bread from grain was not to be eaten, nor was any other foodstuff that contained flour from grain. The food, consumed as a 'devotional observance', should instead consist of legumes, vegetables, cooked chestnuts, pudding and bread made from chestnut or chick-pea flour, or *cuccia* based on boiled whole grain, sometimes also containing legumes, and often seasoned with milk, honey, red wine or roasted broad beans.<sup>56</sup> Also in Calabria, *cuccia* was the traditional dish on this day, offered to the poor and consumed as well by the donors, who thought that it was 'blessed food'.<sup>57</sup> According to one description, *cuccia* contained whole grain that had been boiled together with honey, hazelnuts, dried orange peels and pomegranate seeds. In some Calabrian villages, it was the custom to make donations of legumes and dried figs to the poor. In the area of Gargano (Puglia), broad beans were cooked and consumed 'out of devotion'.<sup>58</sup>

Dishes containing whole grains or legumes were also ceremoniously consumed and distributed to the poor on some other days in the weeks around mid-winter, most commonly, it seems, on New Years Eve<sup>59</sup> and on the day of Sant'Antonio (January 17).<sup>60</sup> On this latter day, there were persons and families in Sicily who, as on the day of Santa Lucia, abstained from eating bread.<sup>61</sup>

Raw seeds could be offered to the poor and to the dead. According to a report from Molise, offerings of uncooked whole grain and corn kernels were brought to the church at the afternoon service on All Souls Eve as a *suffragio* for the dead. All families brought with them a contribution; a portion of chosen seeds was carried by a child of each family, who was expected to show sorrow and reverence, to a corner of the church where heaps of grain were forming.<sup>62</sup> In Laureana di Borrello (Calabria), gifts of raw grain, maize, beans and oats (as well as oil) were brought to the church as a gift to the dead, later to be sold by the clergy to pay for Masses for the dead.<sup>63</sup> In Vicari (Sicily), broad beans were distributed on Christmas Eve to the poor, who considered them to be blessed. They sowed the beans on their rented fields and believed that they would give an abundant harvest.<sup>64</sup>

Nuts were another food typical of late autumn and winter. It was the custom to indulge in hazelnuts, walnuts, almonds and chestnuts at all the major feasts during this period. Nuts were consumed *au naturelle* or could be used for various sweets (such as *confetti*, that is, sugared almonds) and in cakes. Whole nuts could also be offered to the poor as a *suffragio* for the dead,<sup>65</sup> although this seems not to been

as common as the alms consisting of dishes made from whole grains and legumes. Dried figs were also a popular snack at the feast days of late autumn and wintertime, and they could be offered as gifts to beggars.<sup>66</sup>

If we look beyond this time of the year, we find some other occasions on which dishes of the *cuccia* type could be ceremoniously eaten and distributed to the poor. The only occasion when this seems to have been observed more generally, however, was on Saint Joseph's Day (March 19). Apart from this day, such consumption and distribution were local usages, connected to the celebration of patron saints or certain other Christian festivals.<sup>67</sup> The same holds for the consumption of nuts, which were a characteristic snack in many local celebrations of saints at various times of the year. For instance, on the island of Ischia on September 8, the *fešta delle noci* ('feast of the nuts') is celebrated. At this feast, held in honour of the Madonna, nuts were a prominent feature; nothing else was to be sold at the stalls of the travelling peddlers.<sup>68</sup>

As argued in Chapter 9, beggars, when offered alms as a *suffragio* for the dead, represent the dead. Hence the dead, in the guise of beggars and poor, or more directly through offerings of food or seeds placed in the home or in the church, were supplied with whole grain and legumes. It can be noted that this practice has also been documented in other European societies. John Lawson, for instance, concludes (1910: 536), on the basis of evidence from Greece and Sardinia and from the Romans, that: 'It is not unlikely ... that the use of boiled beans or grain in the service of the dead is an old custom common to the coasts of the Mediterranean'.<sup>69</sup>

### Annual regeneration

The fourth theme in the calendrical celebrations of the late autumn and mid-winter is annual regeneration, that is, the notion that the old year is replaced by a new one. This theme is most explicit on Santa Lucia's Day, Christmas, New Year and Epiphany.

In the centuries prior to the Gregorian calendar reformation (1582), Santa Lucia was celebrated at or near the mid-winter solstice.<sup>70</sup> In traditional Sicily, this state of affairs was still recalled by a proverb saying that Santa Lucia's Day was the shortest day of the year.<sup>71</sup> The new year character of Santa Lucia's Day is indicated by the custom of making a forecast for the following year by observing the weather on this and the eleven following days, which were held to represent the following twelve months of the year.<sup>72</sup> If, for instance, it rained on December 14, then February would be a rainy month. Santa Lucia's

Day hence represents the beginning of a new year in this twelve-day representation of the year. It may also be noted that the name *Lucia* derives from the Latin word *lux, lucis* ('light', in modern Italian *luce*) and, in Latin, *Lùcia* is the feminine form of *Lùcius*, literally meaning the one who has been born in the morning (or during daylight). Hence saint Lucia, celebrated at mid-winter, by her name suggests the beginning of the end of the winter darkness and a promise of brighter days to come.<sup>73</sup>

Cosmic renewal and regeneration characterized Christmas. The birth of Christ was celebrated and was represented in the homes of many families by the Christmas crib. Christmas night was thought to be a night of wonders and cosmic fecundity: the animals could speak, the trees blossomed and gave fruit, the waters of rivers and streams were transformed into oil, springs filled with honey, and common objects changed into gold.<sup>74</sup> The conception of Christmas as the beginning of a new year was also expressed by the custom of making auguries for the coming year on this day.<sup>75</sup>

New Year is the beginning of another calendary year, and we also find more informal expressions of a notion of annual renewal on this day. The idea of an enchanted and fecund night, like Christmas night, was present in some communities of Abruzzo.<sup>76</sup> Some persons believed that the 'new water', fetched for domestic use in the morning of New Years Day, had beneficial properties and therefore washed themselves with it and drank from it.<sup>77</sup> The first twelve days of the new year were said to represent the twelve months of the coming year,<sup>78</sup> just as was said of the twelve days starting with Santa Lucia's Day. Other kinds of forecasts regarding the following year could also be made on New Years Eve or Day.<sup>79</sup>

In Calabria, the idea was documented that Epiphany night was a night of marvels and renewal – animals could speak, trees gave fruit, the water of the streams turned into gold.<sup>80</sup> Epiphany was also a time proper for making forecasts for the coming year or, more generally, for the future.<sup>81</sup> In some communities in Puglia (where the dead were thought to be present on this day), Epiphany was thought to be the shortest day of the year, thus to be mid-winter.<sup>82</sup> Epiphany was also given an appearance of the beginning of a new year, since the priest, during the service in church, enumerated the religious feasts that would be celebrated during the following year.

The celebration of All Souls Day, instituted in the monasteries of Cluny, France, in 998 and soon generally observed in the Catholic Church, was in its origins a Christianization of an old Celtic feast in honour of the dead, held at the Celtic New Year in the beginning of

November. However, in the celebrations of All Souls in Southern Italy no expressions of a notion of general annual regeneration can be found. Instead, vegetal regeneration was an important issue at this time of year.

As already mentioned, the agricultural year ended around the time of the celebration of *Maria Addolorata* (September 15). At this time, most crops had been harvested, and the work of preparing the earth for sowing usually began with the autumn rains. Wheat and other species of grain were normally sown in November, although the sowing in mountainous areas could take place as early as September and, in locations with a mild climate, as late as December. Broad beans and other legumes were also most often sown in November, although this could be done later in certain places, in December or January.<sup>83</sup> Most other crops – potatoes, maize, carrots, salad, tomatoes and other kinds of vegetables – were sown or planted during the late winter and spring (February to April), depending on the climate. Thus, the sowing of subsistence crops (grain and legumes) usually took place in late autumn, most often in November, so that the seeds could germinate and the plants become sufficiently developed before the arrival of the first frosts to survive the winter. December and January are winter months (the average winter temperature in the South is 5-10° C.) when the crops are in a comparatively inert state. In February, the plants start to grow again, and the rate of growth increases rapidly in March. In the yearly plant cycle, therefore, November is a time when the withered plants of the season that has come to its end have been removed and are replaced by their seeds. November is an agricultural New Year, at which the seed is the crucial link between the old and the new generation of plants.

### *Seeds and Regeneration*

The seed contains and perpetuates life from one generation of plants to the next. It therefore embodies notions of fertility and regeneration. A rather transparent example of how this significance could be transposed to the domain of human procreation is the custom of throwing seeds of grain or rice over the newly married couple at the wedding celebration. This was done as an expression of best wishes for their fertility and happiness or with a more direct intention to promote the bride's fertility.<sup>84</sup> Other kinds of seeds could be used for this purpose as well, such as chick-peas and other legumes, almonds (raw or in the form of *confetti*), nuts and figs.<sup>85</sup> The Sicilian saying<sup>86</sup> that the one who

works with fig trees will have many children also reflects the association between seeds and human procreation – the fig is a fruit that, in its womb-like interior, contains a multitude of seeds.

In the symbolism of seeds we find, however, not only significances of fertility, but also associations with the death from which newness of life will regenerate. The most evident examples of this significance in Italian cultural tradition are the ideas in antiquity concerning broad beans.<sup>87</sup> In Roman pre-Christian times, the broad bean was closely associated with death and the dead. Broad beans were said to house the souls of the dead or to contain their tears. Some ancient scholars claimed that the broad bean was death-bringing, that beans would kill a tree if sown among its roots, and that they made human beings and hens sterile. Broad beans were considered by many to be impure and thus unsuitable as food. The priests of the Jupiter cult, for instance, were subject to rigid restrictions concerning broad beans; they were forbidden not only to eat beans, but also to touch them, look at them and pronounce their name. At Roman funerals, broad beans were spread over the tombs to give peace to the departed. At the end of the feast of Lemuria, celebrated in May when the souls of the dead were thought to visit their former homes, the souls were sent away as the family head threw a handful of beans, favoured by the dead, behind his back outside the home while uttering the traditional formula: 'These I cast; with these beans I redeem both me and mine'.

The Pythagoreans<sup>88</sup> saw the broad bean as an epitome for a never ending cycle of death and life, and therefore associated the bean with both death and fertility.<sup>89</sup> In Pythagorean discourse, the bean was said to be a means for the dead to be reborn to this world. It was noted that the stem of the broad bean is unique among plants in that it is devoid of nodes; the bean was thus thought to 'serve as support and ladder for the souls [of men] when, full of vigour, they return to the light of the day from the dwellings of Hades'.<sup>90</sup> Alleged experiments with beans, in which they were said to transform into human flesh and blood, have been described within this tradition. It was assumed that if a bean was put into a box or a pot and interred or covered with manure, it would after a period have transformed into female genitals, blood, or the head of a baby or a man. The connection between the broad bean and procreation was also expressed by the opinion that it resembled sexual organs and had a smell similar to that of human sperm. The Pythagoreans abstained from eating beans, and did not pass through fields where they grew. They said that: 'To eat beans is a crime equal to eating the heads of one's parents'.<sup>91</sup> Hence, the Pythagoreans so closely associated the broad bean with a cycle of



human deaths and births that eating beans was equivalent to eating one's ancestors who returned to new life. Piero Camporesi (1993: 15) sums up the significance of broad beans in Italy:

'Broad beans ... represent the link with the underworld of the dead, in the duplex, multi-faceted and ambiguous valency of old and new, fear and hope. The broad bean holds uneasy, fearful connotations but also a potential ferment of unexpressed energies and hidden lives. ... Fathers and children, grandparents and grandchildren are joined in an infinite genealogical sequence: the eternal, repeated but ever new alternation of generation and extinction, presence and disappearance.'

The association between seeds and death derives from the fact that the seed must first 'die', that is, be detached from the plant and dry, before it can reproduce life. The seed is in a seemingly inert and dead state, but from it a new plant can sprout and grow. The seeds are a crucial phase in a never ending cycle of [plant → seed → plant] and can hence be associated with a human cycle comprising [life → death → life].<sup>92</sup> It shall be noted that, in Italian cultural tradition, only relatively large and hard seeds have been closely associated with death. This can be understood as being inspired by the resemblance between such seeds and the bones of the dead. In the Italian language, this resemblance is expressed by a metaphor; the stone of some fruits, such as peaches and plums, might be called *osso* ('bone'). The mature pod of the broad bean resembles a human limb or backbone, with the pod itself corresponding to skin and flesh, while the seeds correspond to jointed bones. The comparatively large and hard seeds recall the bones of the dead also when dried.<sup>93</sup> The chick-pea also shows these similarities.<sup>94</sup>

Another resemblance between a seed and a part of the human body is that between the walnut fruit and the human head. This rather large fruit consists of a thin green flesh that covers a hard shell, containing a huge, two-lobed, wrinkled seed. It is most suggestive of a human head with its skin, skull and brain.<sup>95</sup> This similarity has inspired certain beliefs concerning the walnut. It was held all over Southern Italy that the planting of a walnut tree could have fatal consequences for the planter. He would have a short life or he would die when the trunk of the tree had grown to the same circumference as his head (or his waist) or his head would pathologically grow in size as the trunk of the tree grew or he would die when the tree had given fruit for the first time.<sup>96</sup> Hence, through the act of planting the seed, planter and seed are associated, and the growth of the tree and its bearing of fruit is imagined to affect his head or vital powers. Presumably because of the resemblance between the walnut and the

human head, the walnut tree was generally considered inauspicious and cursed, and it was associated with malevolent forces and beings, such as witches.<sup>97</sup> The carob tree was viewed (at least in Sicily) with similar dread. Just like the broad bean pod, the long, flat pods of this tree resemble human limbs or a human backbone, and we may note that its seed in some communities was called *osso* (bone).<sup>98</sup>

What notions, then, inspire the ceremonial eating of seeds? At local celebrations of Christian festivals and saint's feasts at various times of the year, this consumption can be understood to involve a symbolic incorporation of fertile and regenerative qualities embodied by the seed.<sup>99</sup> Hence this would be another expression of the objective of participants on these occasions to receive revigorating blessings and of the merging of divine *grazia* with natural fertility. The seeds primarily in these contexts connote fertility and revitalization, as in their ceremonial use at weddings.

The ceremonial consumption of seeds in late autumn and at mid-winter connects to a pervasive notion of this period as a time of suffering and death. The weather becomes cold and unpleasant, with much rain and hard winds. The days become shorter and darker, vegetation withers and dies or loses the power to grow. Winter was also a season of death for human beings — ill-health was especially common at this time of the year, and the number of deaths among adults and the old increased significantly.<sup>100</sup> The peasant's diet became less varied since fresh fruits and vegetables were no longer available, and the poor had to ration the food from their scarce supplies so that they would hopefully last until spring. Hence a proverb from Puglia concludes: *Da San Martin a Natale, ogni povero sta male* ('From Saint Martin's day [November 10] to Christmas, every poor man is suffering').<sup>101</sup> More generally, the year itself, when mid-winter was approached, was conceived as becoming old and near its end, to be replaced by another 'fresh' and 'young' year at New Year. After mid-winter, the peasants and the poor still faced hardships, but they could begin to look forward to better times.

By eating seeds, human beings could symbolically incorporate the seed's natural fertility and regenerative capacity, and could — just as the seed conveys life from the autumn over mid-winter to the spring of the next year — be taken from a season in which the natural world is in a state of withering and dying to a season in which the world was reborn to a newness of fecundity and life, when the sun and the warmth returned and when the supplies of food were soon to be renewed. An expression of this notion of the incorporation of regenerative quality was the idea that the consumption of *cuccia*, and other

dishes consisting of whole grain and legumes, gave physical and spiritual benefits; as mentioned, the food could be considered to be 'blessed' and be consumed 'out of devotion'.

Not only the living consumed seeds in late autumn and at mid-winter. The dead were thought to be present at this time, and an imagery of them eating seeds was created by the customary food offerings to them and to their earthly representatives, the beggars and the poor. Then, when the dead had visited the living and received their offerings, they were thought to leave peacefully for the other world. This imagery can be taken as expressing a notion of a regeneration of the dead, which has several aspects.

The dead are offered food that corresponds to their own state – the seeds are 'dead' as well. The seed, however, has a capacity to regenerate life from death. In the offerings to the dead of seeds, there is a notion of making them equivalent to seeds. Such offerings are an ideal supplication for them, as well as an ideal solution to the concern of the living to give the process of death an appropriate direction, so that the dead will abandon their mundane form of existence in favour of another, transcendent form of life. The dead, who are like seeds, are carried forward beyond death, with the promise that their death will be turned into a new life.<sup>102</sup>

The offerings may thus be seen as a sophisticated exorcism. The threat posed by the discontent and dangerous dead, jealous of the living, is counteracted by the living offering them a prospect of a new life, not by coming back to the world of the living but by moving further away from them and returning to the mundane in a renewed form.<sup>103</sup> The verbalised rationale of the offerings, to help the dead through Purgatory, is in accord with this interpretation, since the cleansing in Purgatory implies that the soul of the dead is removed from the mundane and carnal domain. When the component of carnality has been terminated, the soul is assumed to be 'reborn' into Heaven. The corresponding transformation of the inhumed corpse is the decomposition of the flesh, which is complete when the hard bones remain buried in earth, just as seeds lie buried waiting for germination.

In the perspective of the metaphor between seed and bone, we may now for a moment return to the discussion of the Christian rejection of cremation as a proper form for disposal of the dead. It was mentioned that inhumation is connected to the faith in bodily resurrection and in the immortality of the soul, and that reference is made to certain passages in the Holy Scripture. More specifically, these texts speak of death as a state of rest or sleep (Dan. 12: 2; John

11: 11-39), the earth as a mother (Gen. 3: 19; Job 1: 21; Sirac 40: 1) and the corpse as a seed (1 Cor. 15: 35-44).<sup>104</sup> The latter text is of particular interest here. It reads as follows:

(35) But some one will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?' (36) You foolish man! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. (37) And what you sow is not the body which is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. (38) But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. (39) For not all flesh is alike, but there is one kind for men, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. (40) There are celestial bodies and there are terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. (41) There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. (42) So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. (43) It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. (44) It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body.

Similar ideas were current not only in the Judaic tradition, but also among the pre-Christian Romans. The notion of the dead as resting in *Terra Mater* was a recurrent theme in sepulchral art as well as in epitaphs, for example 's(it) t(ibi) t(erra) l(evis)'<sup>105</sup>. We also find the notion that the dead attained immortality in a union with 'mother earth', and imageries of their mortal remains giving birth to flowers.<sup>106</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 9, cremation was used among the Romans during early times in parallel with inhumation, until about the third century A. D. Cremation was not complete, however, since a finger of the fresh corpse was cut off (the *os resectum*, 'cut off bone') and buried in the earth.<sup>107</sup> Thus, even when cremation was employed, a kind of burial in earth was performed nevertheless, and it specifically concerned a bone of the dead. Since the Romans closely associated beans with the dead, it seems not too farfetched to assume that the *os resectum* was excepted from cremation in order to preserve a part of the dead — which after decomposition has a close resemblance to a chick-pea or a broad bean — in a state that suggests regeneration.<sup>108</sup>

The Jewish, and probably also Roman, analogy between bones and seeds can be assumed to have been a source of inspiration to the Early Church's millenarian visions of the resurrection of the dead on Judgement Day. The bones of the buried dead rested in 'mother earth' until the day when they again would be dressed in flesh and life would be regenerated as a plant is regenerated from its seed. In this imagery, the cremation of a corpse with its bones is a destruction of the vehicle for regeneration of new life from death, and therefore unacceptable. Such notions can be understood to contribute to the firm resistance in Southern Italy against cremation.

### *Rebirth of the Dead*

Then, what kind of rebirth was implied in traditional Southern Italy by beliefs and practices in which the dead and seeds were associated? One possibility is that it was somehow related to the promotion of agricultural fertility. Several Italian scholars have made suggestions in this direction, proposing that the concerns for the dead in late autumn and at midwinter, including food offerings of seeds, have the meaning of symbolically involving the dead in the agricultural enterprise; the dead in their subterranean realm are incited to protect the seeds so that the harvest will be secured.<sup>109</sup> Another speculation in this direction, inspired by theories of cosmologies in non-Western societies,<sup>110</sup> would be that the vital essence of the dead buried in earth is recycled in agriculture and re-used by the living through the consumption of the principal crop, in this case grain and legumes. In such a recycling, the dead are a source of agricultural fertility, and the seed could perhaps play a crucial symbolic role in a cycle of: [human vitality → agricultural fertility → food → human vitality].

However, substantial support for such interpretations of the South Italian ethnography is lacking. Instead, there are good reasons for arguing that in traditional Southern Italy, the dead were disconnected from agricultural fertility.

In societies in which there is such a connection, there is typically a close association, over several generations, between a kin group or a community subsisting on agriculture and a certain territory of land, where the cultivated fields as well as the graves of the dead are located. Such an association has long been absent in Southern Italy. The practice of burial in the church meant that the dead, rather than dissolving in earth that could be identified with arable land, were incorporated in a divine sphere removed from the terrestrial. When extra-urban municipal cemeteries were instituted, these quickly assumed the character of *necropoleis* – cities of the dead – with their multitude of *edicole* resembling the cities of the living. With respect to the clear-cut Mediterranean dichotomy between city and countryside, the dead are hence located in the former environment rather than in the latter. Furthermore, in most of the preferred burial practices, contact between the corpse and the earth was avoided. As a consequence of a long history of feudalism and urbanism, and of a more recent commercialisation of land, it was not only the dead who were alienated from earth and countryside but also the living.

Moreover, agricultural fertility was not connected with the dead, but instead comprehended primarily as a pure natural creative force

associated with the *grazia* of God, Christ and the saints. Innumerable practices speak of how divine force, and not the dead, was invoked in order to gain a good crops yield: processions with saints' statues to the fields, the rogation ceremonies, priests blessing the crops and so on.

Hence it can hardly be argued that the fate of the dead 'beyond death' is that a vital essence of theirs transforms into some force of agricultural fertility. Instead, the ethnography of the late autumn and mid-winter celebrations suggests that the regeneration of the dead takes place exclusively in the human domain. Crops and human beings are not tied into a single cycle; rather, there is an actual agricultural cycle of [plant → seed → plant] that is taken as a model for an implicit notion of a homologous human cycle of [life → death → life].

Dead and living interacted during this time of the year. When the family ate their meal and left food on the table, so that the dead family members could also eat during the night, they were united in commensality. When *cuccia* and similar dishes were eaten, both by the dead and the living, this was a communion in food. In the food, symbols of death, fertility and vitality merged, and *cuccia* was the principal culinary expression for this. It contained whole seeds from legumes, associating to bones of the dead as well as to regeneration of life from death, and seeds of grain, associating to fecundity. Seeds of the pomegranate could be added and, in Southern Italy, this fruit is (and has been in Southern Europe since antiquity) a forceful symbol of fertility and proliferation. The pomegranate also gives an intense blood-red colour to the dish, suggesting the vital force of blood. Red wine, which was often added, has similar connotations of blood and vitality, while milk associates to primordial nourishment. Honey and sweet-tasting ingredients convey to the dish a quality of enjoyment, luxury and plenty, as opposed to the everyday dishes consumed to appease hunger. Thus the *cuccia* could be elaborated so as to become a brew containing a multitude of ingredients referring to death, regeneration, fertility, vitality and plenty, a brew with an enormous potential for creation and revitalization, a decoction with the power to turn death into life.

For the dead, the consumption of such food implies that they are carried 'beyond death'. For the living, it is 'blessed' food that reinvigorates them. In this we can discern a notion of the living as taking over a regenerative potential for life from the dead. It is a symbolic consumption, not of their flesh, which is associated with putrefaction and destruction, but instead of the dead in a fleshless and purified

form. It is neither the vitality of a fresh body that is consumed, nor the decaying flesh of a corpse: it is the life potential of the bones-cum-seeds. This would then be the creation of the ideal 'good death', in which the dead are placated by the promise of regeneration and their vital principle is recycled and received by the living – it is good for the dead to be consumed, and it is good for the living to consume them.<sup>111</sup> Hence, while the Pythagoreans abstained from eating broad beans since it amounted to eating the dead, South Italians ceremoniously ate beans and *cuccia* for this reason.

This notion is also suggested by the type of traditional sweet that has been described above, sweets that resemble bones of the dead, skeletons, broad beans, Christian figures embodying notions of resurrection and revitalization, etc. When enjoying such sweets, the living symbolically consume the dead in form of a luxury food that signifies plenty, excess and an addition of nutriment over and above ordinary food, a culinary symbolism expressing an extraordinary incorporation of a vital principle. Bitter, sorrowful, nauseating and destructive death is momentarily forgotten; instead, death is made to appear as a sweet, joyful and palatable promise of regeneration.

Before we proceed to a discussion of the relation between the dead and children, it is first in place to consider practices of naming children. Although children could be named after a saint (of the day it was born or which had some other relation to the family or to the child) or be given a name from the personal preference of the parents, it was common to name a child after one of its grandparents or another close relative in the ascending generation – either living or deceased. The ideal system for such naming was the following.<sup>112</sup>

first boy	–	paternal grandfather
first girl	–	paternal grandmother
second boy	–	maternal grandfather
second girl	–	maternal grandmother
third and following boys	–	paternal uncles, then maternal uncles
third and following girls	–	paternal aunts, then maternal aunts

If this system is strictly followed, the individuals of every other generation of the bilateral family are named identically, and then those of every generation. The names are circulated, and a nominal image is created of a family that repeats itself again and again and that will therefore exist in eternity.<sup>113</sup>

A number of ideas and practices indicates that this form of name-giving was not a mere convention, but reflected intuitions concerning family continuity and a transference of a vital potential from older

generations to children. At least in Basilicata and Puglia,<sup>114</sup> it was the practice to name children after recently dead relatives, thus overruling the ideal system of the inheritance of names. By this practice, the breach of family continuity implied by death is given a direct response by nominally recreating the deceased. In Abruzzo, a child was sometimes *not* named after the living relative, from whom it should have inherited its name had the ideal system of name-giving been followed, since it was believed that such a baptism would shortly cause the death of that relative.<sup>115</sup> Thus, the implication that the child replaces the elderly relative from whom it inherits its name inspires an idea that the replacement causes the physical death of that relative.

In Craco (Puglia), the custom of naming a child after a dead relative was connected to the belief that, if the baptism was performed within 24 hours of the moment of birth, the soul of that kinsman was saved from purgatory.<sup>116</sup> More widespread was the belief that baptism within 24 hours released a soul (unspecified) from purgatory.<sup>117</sup> The outspoken rationale, if any, was probably that immediate baptism was a devout Christian deed, which God rewarded by liberating a human soul from its punishment in Purgatory. However, these beliefs can be construed as also having the notion of the cyclical family as their source of inspiration. Purgatory is a transitional state between life and death; to have passed through Purgatory is to have become 'finally' dead. Hence, just as in the belief mentioned above, the baptism of the child causes the 'death' of an elderly person – not the biological death, however, but rather the 'final' death implied by having passed through purgatory.<sup>118</sup>

A similar notion is suggested by a procedure employed in Randazzo (Sicily) on Epiphany by a family that wished to liberate one of its deceased members from the pains of Purgatory. Twenty-one young girls, called *virginelle* ('little virgins'), who should have fasted the preceding day, were invited to the home of the family and offered a meal. If this undertaking exceeded the economic possibilities of the family, seven girls could instead be invited for a meal on this day during the course of three years, but then the soul had to wait until the last year before it could enter Paradise.<sup>119</sup> An obvious meaning of this procedure is that God rewards a good deed of charity by liberating a soul from Purgatory, and there might also be a certain equivalence between the girls and saints, especially the Virgin Mary, approached as intermediaries to God. However, there is also an implicit meaning. Children eat food in the home of the deceased at a time of the year when the dead were symbolically consumed and,



according to a notion of transfer of vital potential, the deceased loses the last of his life and is freed from Purgatory.<sup>120</sup>

In the light of these notions, it can be discerned that a prominent symbolic theme in the late autumn and mid-winter celebrations is that vital potential is transferred from dead relatives to infants. The notion that children receive something of value from the dead is explicit in the imagery that the dead, or figures representing the dead, offer them gifts. Like the adults, children eat food associating with the dead and regeneration, and sweets, in the form of, for instance, skeletons, skulls and broad beans, were especially for the children to enjoy.

When children in the name of the dead collect gifts together with beggars, gifts that often consist of seeds, the children and the dead, who otherwise are the beginning and the end of the human life span, are momentarily tied together. Children behave like beggars-cum-dead asking for alms and beggars-cum-dead behave like children asking for presents. Mingling with each other, visiting one home after the other, they express the prominent theme of late autumn and mid-winter customs: death should be regenerated into new life.

In the imagery of children receiving and incorporating qualities from the dead, the children's feet were of special importance. It was suggested that the dead in various ways penetrated the soles of the children's feet, and the gifts were placed in socks and shoes, the inside of which are in direct contact with the sole of the feet. This connection between children, the dead and the sole of the feet, was perhaps inspired by the thinking that the dead rose from their subterranean realm in order to visit the living; the sole of the feet is the part of the body that is most often in contact with the surface of the earth. If this is true, the notion recalls the practice of incorporating chthonic forces at saints' sanctuaries by walking barefoot, sleeping on the ground, etc. Since the children's feet could be hurt by the dead (scratched with their nails or lacerated by a grater), the incorporation of qualities from the dead entails a measure of violence. Suggestively, the dead invade the children in order to be reborn. This notion can be compared to the idea, described in Chapter 9, that spirits could possess the living because they wished to again attain carnal existence. There is also a parallel with the imagery that the deceased, immediately after death, commenced upon a walk to the other world on a road covered with swords, knives, daggers, nails or spines, perforating the soles of the feet and causing immense pain.<sup>121</sup> Hence, when dying and entering into the subterranean realm of the dead, vital force leaves through the feet; when 're-born' and emerging from that realm, the dead 'enter' through the feet of children.

Hence, children symbolically receive and incorporate regenerative qualities from the dead, who have an indisputable domestic character, or merge with them.<sup>122</sup> This association between deceased relatives and their infant descendants, as well as the naming practices discussed earlier, can be construed as expressing a vision of guaranteed family continuity: a notion of the family as a cyclical entity.<sup>123</sup> The members of the family receive a vital potential from their ancestors at a young age; they in turn pass this to their young descendants when they die and so on. In real life, the family has indeed a repetitive character — its new born grow up and beget their own children before they die — but this cyclicity is 'open', in the sense that this may or may not happen. If the number of deaths exceeds the number of births, the family will die out after a period of time. If, however, death is followed by birth, the cycle is 'closed'. The future of the family will not branch out in a multitude of possibilities, of which some include its extinction. It is predictable and restricted to one in which the family is still present.

The vision of the cyclical family is inspired by the same concern with denying death — to create an image of ideal family continuity — which is expressed by family shrines and family graves that are built to stand for centuries. However, while such shrines and graves speak of permanence and the past, the vision of the cyclical family is more concerned with regeneration and the future — there is life after death.

An elaboration on the theme of cyclical human regeneration is that of the snake sucking human milk. It was a common belief that snakes had a great appetite for milk, in particular human milk. At night, a snake could steal mother's milk by crawling up in the bed where a mother and her baby were sleeping. It sucked at the mother's breasts while it inserted its tail into the mouth of the child, so that the child would have an impression that it was sucking at its mother's breast and would thus not cry. It was also believed that a snake could enter, through the mouth, into the stomach of a mother while she was sleeping, and there feed on her milk, or into the stomach of a child, where it fed on mother's milk that the child had drunk, or that it inserted its tail into the mouth of a baby so that it vomited mother's milk, which the snake then drank.<sup>124</sup>

In European cultural traditions, the snake is closely associated with cyclical regeneration of life from death.<sup>125</sup> One of the many manifestations of this in traditional Southern Italy was that snakes were thought to reincarnate dead human beings. Such reincarnations were viewed ambiguously. They could be thought of as benevolent and luck-bringing, sometimes a snake that appeared by the home could be

thought to be a reincarnated relative who searched for his kin, but they could also be associated with evilness and thought to be dangerous 'creatures of the demon' that incarnated restless souls of heathens, damned or murdered persons.<sup>126</sup> Hence, the snake sucking milk from a nursing mother can be understood as an incarnated dead human being, taking the place of a baby and seeking nourishment from a mother in a phase when it is just reborn and commencing upon a new cycle of life. This would be an abominable cyclical regeneration of human life, contrasting with the ideal form outlined above. The dead one is not 'reborn' in a young descendant, but in the body of a snake. The dead person does not give up life potential to the young of the family, but takes the place of nursing children and steals milk from any mother that can be found. The baby is thereby deprived of its milk and its life is endangered. Therefore the continuity of the family in human form is also ultimately threatened. This is an essentially wicked and asocial form of individual transcendence.<sup>127</sup>

### *A Correlation of Three Cycles*

By way of summing up, we have been concerned with notions in which significances from three cycles of recurring events are derived and correlated.<sup>128</sup> These cycles are the annual cycle, the plant cycle and an imaginary family cycle (Figure 6, overleaf). All three cycles entail regeneration, that is, the replacement of the old and dying with the new and youthful.

A notion of individual regeneration is present in the autumn and mid-winter celebrations. Human beings are threatened by being involved in the decline and 'death' permeating nature. There is a vision, however, that they can be reinvigorated, just as nature will be in the springtime; seeds, a symbol of the regeneration of life, are ceremoniously eaten.

As we know, the family was a basic unit of social organisation, and great ideological stress was put on its integrity and continuity. In real life, its perpetuation over time was achieved through marriages with other families and required an even or positive balance between nativity and mortality. We have found notions of another way for the family to maintain itself, a vision of cyclical regeneration. The dead are 'resurrected' in their infant descendants. This imaginary mode of family continuity is correlated with the seasonal and agrarian cycles.

In agriculture, the generations of legumes and grain succeed each other in a never ending cycle of [plant→seed→plant], and the crucial juncture between the generations is the sowing of the seeds, which

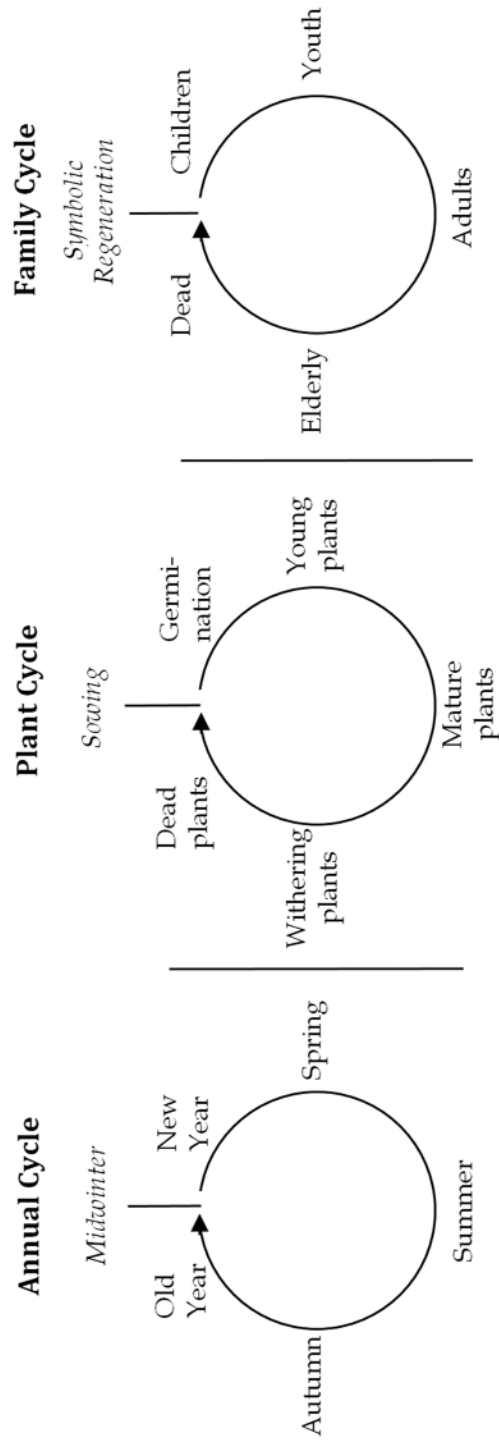


Figure 6. Three correlated cycles.

usually took place in November. In the yearly cycle, the seasons follow upon each other, with the 'new year' at midwinter, a 'rebirth' of vegetation in spring and its 'death' in late autumn. The imaginary family cycle is correlated with these two cycles, and the juncture between human generations is represented annually in the period when seeds are sown and the new year is celebrated. The family achieves continuity in analogy with the crops,<sup>129</sup> and thus the dead are 'sown' as seeds in the young, just as are seeds actually sown in the fields, an imagery which is at its most explicit when children are offered sweets resembling broad beans and human skeletons. The annual cycle and the plant cycle are manifest, regular and have an enormous power: they affect the whole world with their alternations between hot and cold, wet and dry, growth and decay, life and death. To synchronize the regenerative phase of the family cycle with the corresponding phases of these actual cycles is a conjuration that the family cycle will be just as predictable, that after the old and declining, the new and growing will follow in the family as certainly as it does in nature. Not only will the natural world be perpetuated over time – the family will also.

## ELEVEN

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### CONCLUDING SUMMARY

This study focuses on three related sets of notions. The first set centres on the idea that a person may lose vital force as a result of external agency. A presumption based on the facts of nature that people indeed become ill, weak and old, is that vitality is a scarce asset. For the individual, vitality is actually a limited good. When someone unexpectedly loses vigour, the thought is near at hand that someone else who is in need of vital force has seized it.

We do not need to consent to the debatable hypothesis that such a notion is generated by a peasant world view of 'limited good', in the sense of the theory developed by George Foster (1965). The idea of appropriation of vital force reflects modes for distributing more tangible valuable assets in an economy characterized by scarcity and weak formal social organisation. In the case of shortage, a person who has more than others should ideally share. Failure to do so implies that others desire that which they do not get, or at least that they are assumed to feel such desire. This desire to enjoy the abundance of others is not conceived to be immoral. Since it does not derive from malicious intent, it is neither morally good nor bad and appropriation, such as that through the *iettatura*, is seen as involuntary. However, the activation of *malocchio*, the blood-sucking attributed to witches as well as some other kinds of harmful appropriations of vital force, were regarded as wilfully committed out of evilness. These ideas connect to the ambiguous discourse concerning negative reciprocity, the witch is a personification of the maliciousness of greedily taking without giving in return.

The notion of appropriation was sustained not only by projections of ideologies and patterns of interaction from the social realm. It was also underpinned by assumptions about homologous processes in the physical dimension. Just as humidity is absorbed from that which is wet by that which is dry, vitality from an entity rich in vital force can be 'sucked up' by another that suffers scarcity. Basic to this assumption is the association between life and humidity, contrasting with the relation between death and dryness.

In contrast with the first set, the second set of notions concerns an image of *unlimited* good: visions of great abundance of 'good things' and force of life. It may be that the scarcity often experienced in ordi-

nary life inspires an image of its opposite: affluent sources from which one can obtain all that one wishes for.<sup>1</sup> The saints, 'full of *grazia*', a generic good that in many contexts can be construed as vital force, are a main representation of unlimited good. Saints – that is, in the context of popular devotion, their venerated statues, icons or relics – are construed as sources of *grazia* because they are associated with bodily vital force and with the productive forces of nature. The statue, icon or relic exudes blood, mother's milk, sweat or holy *manna*, blessed substances that bring health and vigour to those who drink or touch them. The legends and iconography of martyrs expound on their premature and violent deaths, suggestive of a release of unconsumed vital force bringing blessings to others. Through their legends and the location of sanctuaries, saints are associated with such features of the landscape as caves, springs and trees, connoting abundant and freely flowing fertility and creative force.

Several distinct but overlapping notions underlie the beliefs and practices concerned with how to obtain *grazie* from saints. Rather surprisingly, some are similar to those that sustain belief in the evil eye and other forms of involuntarily appropriation. Two entities meet – saint and believer – of which one has abundance and the other scarcity. *Grazia*/vitality flows from the former to the latter, and this transfer has both a social and a 'physical' dimension. The devotee, sacrificing the carnal body by means of mortifications, tries to better the prospects of receiving from the saint by lessening his own vitality, which is of an inferior type in comparison with that of the saint. These prospects are improved if the devotee is poor in an economic sense, if he appears as a humble beggar in front of the saint. The saint personifies altruism. Through his limitless abundance of *grazia*, he has a unique possibility to practice altruism without ever running out of resources. We have also noted the idea that human beings could enter into a relationship of exchange with saints, taking either the form of generalised reciprocity with the patron saint of the community or balanced reciprocity with wonder-working saints in countryside shrines. Such cults reflect the distribution of these types of reciprocities in mundane social space.

Spring is the time of the year when vegetation is reborn from a state of inertia and death, when nature is permeated by fertile and regenerative forces. At this time of year, the festivals of saints are particularly frequent, merging the image of abundant *grazia* with nature's profuse creative force. The contrast between a period of scarcity and suffering, as compared to one of affluence, is also essential to the celebration of Easter. During Lent, scarcity is represented as

a virtue, while the resurrection of Christ is amalgamated with the abundant fertility of springtime.

The third set of notions does not concern states of scarcity and abundance, but rather social continuity as a state of being; not so much vitality as life itself; not so much the individual as the family. When a person is dead, he no longer needs to worry about losses of vitality and prospects of keeping the 'flame of life' burning. However, the deceased's kin become worried by the death, which disrupts the family and threatens its continuity. In Southern Italy, a society with weak formal social organisation, the family was an institution of paramount importance. A sense of group immortality was symbolically achieved in two ways. The first was to create 'new', incorruptible bodies for the deceased, ideally to be placed in a family gravehouse. The second was to create representations of a transference of vital potential from dead family members to their infant descendants.

Hence, this essay offers a rather different picture of mortuary practices in a European setting than that which might emerge from a first look. For instance, Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry, in *Death and the Regeneration of Life*, argue that the 'good death' in many societies '...is a kind of handing over of vitality which can then be recycled' and that 'death is harnessed to the cycle of regeneration and converted into birth' (1982: 17, 26). Although they acknowledge that the death of Christ and Christian martyrs is such an instance (p. 17), Bloch (1982: 229) suggests that the funerary practices of Europe are dominated by a 'polluting and sad aspect', while the 'ideological creation of timelessness and fertility, is largely absent'. The reason, he proposes, is that the 'source of creativity and continuity' in European societies is attributed to 'God and/or capital'.

Indeed, if only practices immediately connected with funerals in traditional Southern Italy are considered, death generally appears to be associated with grief and pollution. However, considering in some detail the seasonal celebrations of late autumn and mid-winter, and the treatment of dead bodies and the forms of tombs, it appears that there is a much more positive side to death, implying both fertility and transcendence. In fact, my conclusions are much the same as those Bloch has drawn from his studies of the Merina of Madagascar. Contrasting vitality with descent and life potential (1989: 177f), he argues that, symbolically, the junior generations ideally consume the older generations so that the 'old live again in the young', and that burial in megalithic rock tombs, practised by the Merina, 'symbolically ensures that the group lives for ever, irrespective of the disruptive lives of individual members'.



Dualities relating to the Roman Catholic world view – such as good/evil, spiritual/carnal, God/Devil, grace/greed – illuminate the material presented in Chapters Four through Eight. A more implicit set of two contrasting clusters of associations, tying together the notions discussed in Chapters Eight to Ten, is the following:

[semen - seed - bone - principle of life - man - descent - transcendence] ::  
[matrix - earth - flesh - vitality - woman - affinity - transience]

It might be that these sets speak of two modes or systems for organising cultural representations, which exist in parallel. In the Roman Catholic mode, reflecting hierarchical social structure and dominance of the state, there is an emphasis on degrading physicality and transience, which are connected with evilness, while order, permanence and the blessings of God are associated with social institutions that transcend individuals. In the other, more egalitarian, mode – which might be construed as relating to informal peasant social organisation on the community level – this theme is less articulated. The world is not organised in terms of a dualistic moral system, there is nothing that is entirely evil nor entirely good. Entities relating to transience and permanence are contrasted, but in a complementary manner. One cannot exist without the other. A seed is of no value without earth, and earth is of no value without seeds; descent requires affinity and affinity creates descent. The fragility of human life poses a problem for the perpetuation of the family, but it is death, not carnal life as such, that is rejected and denied.

This study, aiming to contribute to the understanding of the world view in traditional Southern Italy, has hopefully provided arguments that also will be of value for scholars of other South European societies, both of the past and present. Most of the notions and symbolic clusters that have been discussed pertain to a tradition with no beginning – its origin disappears into the obscurity of prehistory – and which has changed little since pre-Christian Roman times. Also then there were, for instance, humoral pathology, ideas of a vital essence, beliefs in the evil eye and the harmful influence of menstruating women, a faith in a multitude of gods venerated at countryside sanctuaries, beliefs in the mutual advantage for the living and the dead of a cult of ancestors practised at family graves. Of course, the expressions of these ideas have varied over time, and there are also important discontinuities, but fundamental ideational structures have remained largely unaltered. One receives a similar impression when comparing the South Italian material with ethnographies from

Greece, Spain and Portugal. South European cultural traditions over the millennia have had a common ideational foundation and repository of symbols, on which has been built, in different times and in different areas, a great variation of theories, ideologies, dogmas, beliefs, practices and myths.

# NOTES

## *Chapter 1*

1. A brief discussion of the socio-cultural differences between Sardinia and Calabria is found in Alberoni 1961; a discussion of contrasting household formation systems between Sardinia and Sicily is found in Barbagli 1991.
2. Madonna dell'Arco (Sant'Anastasia, Campania), San Francesco (Paola, Calabria), and San Nicola (Bari).
3. See Banfield 1958: 44f; Friedmann 1953: 218; Lopreato 1961: 586; Moss & Cappannari 1960: 24f. Many women seldom left the vicinity of their community (Gower Chapman 1973: 19; Tentori 1976b: 282), and some women had never left it (Banfield 1958: 45). The men had greater opportunity to see something of the surrounding world, for instance when they were drafted into the army in their youth or when they sought work elsewhere. A radio set was a luxury item up to the 1950s, most peasants were not able to read newspapers, and letters were rarely written – in 1862 the average number of letters received per inhabitant in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies was 1.6 per year (Duggan 1994: 152, citing a work by V. Zamagni).
4. Cf. Brögger 1968.
5. Boissevain 1975: 11; Crump 1975; Douglass 1975, 1992; Freeman 1973; Llobera 1986.
6. Lévi-Strauss 1966.
7. Shils 1981.
8. There was also a tradition, both oral and literal, that aimed to integrate and systematize features of witchcraft, magic, folk medicine, astrology etcetera. It was carried on by individuals devoted to the study and practice of occult knowledge. Local 'magicians' typically claimed to possess advanced knowledge of this kind. However, this tradition will not be discussed in this study.
9. Cf. Connerton 1989.

## *Chapter 2*

1. The reader who wishes more detailed information on South Italian society is recommended the following sources. A concise history of Italy is found in Duggan (1994). On economic development, see Lutz (1962). Among the anthropological monographs, those by Brögger (1971), Davis (1973) and Gower Chapman (1973) offer particularly rich ethnographies.
2. The following account of land reforms and agricultural development is based primarily on Manlio Rossi-Doria's work *Dieci anni di politica agraria nel mezzogiorno* (1958a). For a summary in the English language, see Rossi-Doria 1958b. A detailed study of agricultural development in a particular community is Davis 1973.
3. Tarrow 1967: 49.
4. Duggan 1994: 135f.
5. Tarrow 1967: 42, citing statistics compiled by R. Dickinson.
6. Schneider & Schneider 1976: 115.

7. For an outline of the reasons for the weak industrial development, see Lutz 1962 and Tarrow 1967, ch. 2.
8. Rossi-Doria 1958b: 52.
9. Duggan 1994: 175.
10. Di Tota 1981: 320, citing official Italian statistics.
11. McDonald 1956: 455, citing official Italian statistics.
12. Di Tota 1981: 320.
13. This is a simplification. The quality of the soil, the topography, the average rainfall, the possibilities of artificial irrigation and the ease of communication varied greatly. This resulted in variations as to what crops were grown and the precise method of cultivation, as well as in the size and typical management of landholdings.
14. Silverman 1968: 13, citing official Italian statistics. A telling example of the fragmentation of land is the Fucino basin in Abruzzo. The Fucino lake was drained and opened for agriculture in 1876. Caroline White (1980: 13) writes: 'By 1951 the basin had become so divided and subdivided that there were 11248 tenants of whom 2415 were sub-tenants; 57 per cent of the holdings were less than two hectares in size and 27 per cent were less than one hectare. Plots were not only small but widely scattered, so that the average tenant's total holding consisted of three parcels of land situated in two or more *comuni*'.
15. On the connection between household development and land transactions, see Brögger 1971: 50-64; Davis 1973, esp. ch. 7.
16. Cf. Davis 1973: 73.
17. Tarrow 1967: 31.
18. In 1951, nearly 60% of all persons employed in industry in the South, exclusive of construction, were attached to units with ten or fewer persons (Lutz 1962: 93).
19. Davis 1973: 120.
20. Friedmann 1953: 219f.
21. E. g. Banfield 1958; Tentori 1971.
22. According to the population census of 1951, 53% of the population of the South lived in dwellings with more than two persons per room. This figure does not include the 877,000 persons in Italy living in makeshift shelters, such as caves, huts, cellars, caravans and arches of old walls or bridges. 40% of the dwellings in the South were without sanitary arrangements of any kind in house, yard or garden, and 51% had no drinking water from either wells or water mains (all figures from Lutz 1962: 7). In a typical village in Basilicata, 60% of the dwellings consisted of only one room; 35% of the schoolchildren shared a bed with another person, while 25% shared bed with two other persons (Cervellino 1962b: 6, citing statistics compiled by M. Frascione, probably in the 1950s). Detailed descriptions of Sicilian homes at the turn of the century is found in Pitriè 1913b: 76-93.
23. Duggan 1994: 152, citing V. Zamagni. The figure for the Italy as a whole was 75%.
24. Banfield 1958: 33.
25. Of the active population 53% were involved in agriculture in 1871, while the figure was 61% in 1911 (figures derived from statistics cited by Tarrow 1967: 28). On South Italian 'agro-towns', see Blok 1969.
26. In 1881, 10.9% of the population of Campania lived in isolated houses in the countryside. The corresponding figure for Puglia was 7.0%, for Basilicata 6.9%, for Calabria 13.7%, for Sicily 8.3% and for Abruzzi and Molise 23.1% (Barbagli 1984: 118, citing official Italian statistics).

27. Silverman 1968: 17. Bell (1979: 3) writes that the inhabitants of a Sicilian village describe five surrounding towns as, respectively, '(1) struck by evil spirits, (2) mentally backward, (3) filled with cuckolds, (4) perfumed, and (5) a haven for gangsters.'
28. Banfield 1958: 45 reports, however, that there was a good deal of intermarriage between towns in the area of his study in Basilicata
29. Gower Chapman 1973: 147; Moss & Cappannari 1960 and 1962: 290ff; Pitre 1889, vol. 2: 9-13.
30. See, for instance, Banfield 1958: 71; Davis 1973: 9ff.
31. Three-layer systems of social stratification are described by: Banfield 1958: ch. 4; Colclough 1971: 213; Gower Chapman 1973: 50-67; Lopreato 1961: 586; Miller & Miller 1978: 117. A four layer-system has been described by Moss & Cappannari 1962.
32. Rossi-Doria 1958b: 53. See also Davis 1973: 86-91.
33. Silverman 1968: 14.
34. Cf. Colclough 1971: 223.
35. See, for instance, Banfield 1958: 69; Boissevain 1966: 20; Colclough 1971: 223f; Davis 1973: 93ff; Tentori 1976b: 275. A notable exception is described by Galt 1991c: 40ff, in an Apulian community which, unlike Southern Italy at large, has a long history of rural settlement and stable relations between cultivators and land.
36. Tarrow 1967: 61f.
37. Barbagli 1984: 115; Id. 1991; Benigno 1989: 168ff; Berkowitz 1984: 83; Kertzner 1989: 4. For descriptions on complex households, and of co-residing nuclear and stem families related through siblingship, of which each may have a partially separate economy as well as separate dwelling space and kitchen, see Davis 1973: 44-47, 120-123; Douglass 1980, 1991.
38. Benigno 1989: 183; Berkowitz 1984.
39. Douglass 1980; Tentori 1971: 123. This economic advantage of complex households is generally seen as explaining the significantly greater percentage of such households in the sharecropping regions of Central Italy compared to the South; see for instance Silverman 1968.
40. Benigno 1989: 183ff.
41. Benigno 1989: 171-4.
42. Banfield 1958: 107.
43. Bell 1979: 44.
44. Moss & Thomson 1959: 38.
45. Berkowitz 1984; Schneider 1971: 10f; Tentori 1971: 113-8
46. See, for instance, Brögger 1971: 82-92; Cronin 1970: 43-66; Davis 1973, ch. 4 and p. 139-145; Gower Chapman 1973: ch. 4; Minicuci 1981: 43-53.
47. Davis 1973: 62-66.
48. 'Relatives are like shoes, the tighter/closer they are, the more they hurt' (Berkowitz 1984: 86; White 1980: 70). 'If you wish a happy life, stay away from your relatives' (Gower Chapman 1973: 69).
49. Gower Chapman 1973: 70f, 130-36.
50. Davis 1973: 67-72. Galt (1991b) describes the shift in an Apulian town during the 18th and early 19th centuries from the practice of providing houses to daughters to that of giving houses to sons. The earlier practice, which was related to urban settlement, probably produced neighbourhoods permeated by female kin solidarity, while the latter custom, brought about by a shift to rural settlement, produced rural hamlets composed of clusters of families related through men.

- Galt (ibid. p. 317) refers to a historical study of kinship and household formation in Southern Italy by Gérard Delille that shows that matrilocally related neighbourhoods were common in Puglia, while patrilocal neighbourhoods were common among small proprietors in Calabria.
51. Davis 1969.
  52. Cronin 1970: 52; Di Bella 1992: 154. This expression could also be used when speaking of a vendetta killing, see Pitrè 1889, vol. 2: 306f. If the offender was of a significantly higher social status, however, the loss of honour seems not to have been as grave as in the case of an offender of similar status. This relates to the circumstance that conflicts concerning honour generally were most acute in the case of persons of roughly equal social standing.
  53. Cf. Brögger 1971: 132f, and also S. Wilson 1988: 89f, discussing Corsican feuds.
  54. Brögger 1971: 132. The Italian word *vendetta* comes from the verb *vendicare*, 'to revenge', 'to avenge', and is commonly used to denote acts of vengeance in general.
  55. Pitrè 1889, vol. 2: 306ff. Hobsbawm (1965: 15) writes that the blood feud was common in the Aspromonte area of Calabria. On Calabrese feuds, see: L. Lombardi Satriani & Meligrana 1982: 345-48.
  56. Silverman's description concerns the 'Deep South' – that is, continental Southern Italy except a number of littoral areas where intense cultivation predominates and the parts of Puglia where commercially run estates are common.
  57. This with the exception of the areas where large estates predominated, that is, in most of Puglia and in central Sicily, where there was a significant degree of political organisation among the agricultural workers, see Tarrow 1967.
  58. See Banfield 1958: 23-31; Gower Chapman 1973: 123f; Tarrow 1967.
  59. Blok 1974: 150.
  60. Boissevain 1966: 22f.
  61. On the importance of 'friends', see: Blok 1974: 150f; Boissevain 1966; Gower Chapman 1973, ch. 6; Schneider & Schneider 1976: 102-9.
  62. '*Fattevi i cazzi vostri*', literally 'stick to your own penis' (Brögger 1971: 115)
  63. For descriptions of the character of *comparatico* in various communities, see: Boissevain 1966; Davis 1973: 60f; Gower Chapman 1973, ch. 6; Miller & Miller 1978; Moss & Cappannari 1960; Vincelli 1958: 213ff. However, Banfield (1958: 120) observed that '... in selecting godparents, peasants take pains to find someone with whom they are not likely to have business relations. To have a *compare* with whom one cannot in decency go to law [if being cheated by him] may put one ... at a disadvantage.'
  64. The terms *compare* (godfather) and *comare* (godmother) could also be used in an extended sense to denote a friend, a companion or a trusted neighbour, even if friendship had not been ceremoniously declared.
  65. Finamore 1894: 101; Toor 1953: 44.
  66. The notion of shared bodily substance as uniting persons by a kin-like relation can also be found in other contexts. Thus unrelated children who had been nursed by one and the same woman could be called *fratelli di latte* ('siblings of milk'). In old Calabria, the relation between two persons who had shared mother's milk could be called *comparaggio di latte* (Minicuci 1981: 50), and in Sicily a woman who adopted a foundling and nursed it by her breast could be called his or her *mamma di latte* ('milk-mother', Pitrè 1913b: 37).
  67. Boissevain 1966.
  68. See, for instance, Banfield 1958: 16. Schneider & Schneider (1976: 104-108)

- describe all male banquets fulfilling a similar function.
69. Friedmann 1953: 227. Banfield 1958 discusses this at length.
  70. Miller & Miller 1978: 117.
  71. 'La cummudita fa l'omu latru' (Sicilian dialect, Giovannini 1978: 327).
  72. Douglass 1980: 354.
  73. Rossi-Doria 1958a: 22f (see citation above, p. 18); Silverman 1968; Tarrow 1967, ch. 3.
  74. On *furberia*, see Colclough 1971: 224f; Davis 1973: 23f; Gower Chapman 1973: 227; Schneider & Schneider 1976: 82-86.
  75. See, for instance, Gower Chapman 1973: 146; Varone 1986; Vincelli 1958: 216.
  76. Gower Chapman 1973: 146.
  77. For some descriptions of relations between neighbours, see: Davis 1973: 66-72; Galt 1991c: 196-202; Gower Chapman 1973: 129-36; Tentori 1971: 125f.
  78. 'Prima che accorra il parente, il vicino è già da te' ('Before the relative has come to your help, the neighbour is already with you'; Altamura & Giuliani 1966: 78; Cervellino 1962b: 25). 'Amicu pruvatu è cchiu di lu parintatu' ('A proven friend is worth more than a relative'; Cronin 1970: 51). 'Your true kinsman is your neighbour'; 'Neighbors are half relatives' (Gower Chapman 1973: 132).
  79. Cervellino 1962b: 24f (free translation).
  80. Vincelli 1958: 215 (free translation).
  81. Cf. Sahlins 1965: 147 (see below for a definition of these concepts).
  82. E. g. Appel 1977: 76; Banfield 1958: 36; Brögger 1971: 126; Miller & Miller 1978: 124.
  83. See Brögger 1968: 21; Gower Chapman 1973: 67; Miller & Miller 1978: 124.
  84. Davis 1973: 53; Galt 1991b: 314.
  85. Cf. du Boulay & Williams 1987: 19ff, discussing hospitality in Greece.
  86. Pino Arlacchi (1983) distinguishes between three Calabrian areas, the Crotonese, the plane of Gioia Tauro and the Cosentino. He shows how the different economic conditions and agricultural organisation of these areas are related to distinctive features of social organisation and values, such as the strength of family cohesion, the varying emphasis on paternal family authority, the character of relations between kin from different households, the presence of blood feuding and the degree of competition between peasants in terms of negative reciprocity.
  87. The two extremes of reciprocities, that is, 'generalized' and 'negative', correspond to the two 'contradictory directions' outlined by Eric Wolf (1966b: 77-80), in which a peasantry can move in the face of 'differential and differentiating pressures'. It can 'reduce the strength of the selective pressure falling upon any one household by developing mechanisms for sharing resources in times of need', or it can 'let the selective pressures fall where they may, to maximize the success of the successful, and to eliminate those who cannot make the grade'. Wolf concludes that 'most peasantries, however, fall somewhere in between these two extremes, perhaps for obvious reasons, and must seek a compromise solution to their problem.'

### Chapter 3

1. For introductions to humoural medicine, see Ackerknecht 1982, Pouchelle 1990 and Siriasi 1990.
2. See, for instance, Blum & Blum (1965) on Greece, and Kemp (1935) on the Southern Slavs.

3. The literature on South Italian folk medicine is vast. Good sources are: Adriano 1932; De Nino 1891; Finamore 1894: 115-220; Gatto Trocchi 1983; Pazzini 1948; Pitrè 1896a.
4. On humoural pathology and blood-letting in traditional Southern Italy, see, Lombroso 1863: 425f; Pitrè 1896a: 184ff, 202-11. Blood-letting was still practised widely in Sicily in the 1950s (Dolci 1959: 172ff).
5. Finamore 1894: 141.
6. R. Lombardi Satriani 1969: 124; Pasquarelli 1896: 330; Pitrè 1896a: 205.
7. Pitrè 1896a: 403; Finamore 1894: 143.
8. Amalfi 1890: 58f; Borrelli 1936: 51; Finamore 1894: 136; Marzano 1912: 95; Pitrè 1896a: 440; Priori 1964: 232.
9. Pitrè 1896a: 102, 132-8. The connection between this finger and the heart inspired the practice of wearing the wedding ring on it.
10. Pitrè 1896a: 207.
11. Pitrè 1896a: 207, 412.
12. Pitrè 1896a: 209f. Not long before the time of the publication of Pitrè's work, blistering by practitioners had been prohibited and he informs (ibid.) that many people, who could no longer get a good blistering, saw this as responsible for their failing health.
13. Geraci 1957: 26.
14. De Giacomo 1899: 161; R. Lombardi Satriani 1969: 125f.
15. Pitrè 1896a: 186, 312f.
16. Pitrè 1896a: 287.
17. Pasquarelli 1896: 329, 429.
18. See Jacquart & Thomasset (1988) concerning this assumption in Medieval medicine and its origin in antiquity. Camporesi (1988b: 91) mentions that the idea was held among early modern European intellectuals.
19. Pitrè 1896a: 450.
20. Pitrè 1896a: 450.
21. Corso 1911: 155.
22. Pitrè 1896a: 153, 157.
23. Bell 1979: 105.
24. Pitrè (1896) put on record detailed information on beliefs connected with virtually all bodily organs and functions, but when he in his systematic investigation comes to the sexual organs, he writes that: '...the part of the body which has supplied most material to popular sayings and tradition is the part which modesty requires to be covered, and I will try to reveal as little about it as possible, choosing words that will not offend the interested reader' (1896: 127, free translation).
25. Concerning Andalusia, see Brandes 1981a: 224-7. In northwestern Portugal (Pina-Cabral 1986: 94), excessive intercourse as well as onanism are thought to make a man impotent and old before his time. Moderate sexual activity, however, is considered to be good for men, since semen, which is 'like a poison', is let out of the body.
26. Jacquart & Thomasset 1988: 54ff.
27. Adriano 1932: 84.
28. Pitrè 1896a: 275. The practice of wearing golden or silver earrings in order to preserve good eyesight was widespread, see De Giacomo 1899: 154f; Finamore 1894: 184; Dentoni-Litta 1982: 52; R. Lombardi Satriani 1969: 39; Pasquarelli 1896: 496.



29. Finamore 1894: 185.
30. Finamore 1894: 184; Pitrè 1896a: 275f.
31. Pitrè 1896a: 275. The idea, formerly held in many European countries, that onanism and sexual excesses caused blindness (see, for instance, Jacquart & Thomasset 1988: 56) built upon a similar assumption that sexual activity drained the eyes of humours, with the difference that it was not superfluous and harmful liquids but instead indispensable ones that were evacuated. This idea seems not to be on record in the ethnographic literature on Southern Italy.
32. In Sicily, the weaning of a child was considered to be dangerous to the mother. It could cause her many sufferings, and various methods were employed to stop the excretion of milk quickly, such as blood-letting and the repeated use of laxatives (Pitrè 1889, vol. 2: 190). In Abruzzo as well it was believed that the arrested milk caused discomfort, such as pains in the back and numbness in the arms (Finamore 1894: 169f). That blood-letting and the use of laxatives were thought to be a means of stopping lactation implies that such evacuations of bodily fluids were seen as so 'draining' the woman of fluids that her milk ceased to flow.
33. It was held in Palermo that the one who suffered from excessive sweating of the hands would not die of dropsy (Pitrè 1896a: 218). Another idea documented from Calabria concerned excessive perspiration of the feet. This was considered to be a good sign, a manifestation of health in a forceful and robust person. It should never be arrested, and if a person who had been sweating from the feet earlier had ceased to do so, he ought to open a *ruttorio* (De Giacomo 1899: 161). It was believed in Sicily that excessive perspiration of the feet could be cured by putting sulphur or bran in the afflicted person's shoes, so that the soles of the feet came into contact with these dry substances. One should think twice, however, before suppressing sweating of the feet as it could cause some malady of the head or chest (Pitrè 1896a: 217). Similar ideas were documented in Basilicata (Pasquarelli 1896: 329, 494).
34. See also Lloyd (1964: 101f) concerning this assumption in Greek antiquity.
35. The information on the theory of the *humidum radicale* is extracted from: Hall 1971; McVaugh 1974; Niebyl 1971.
36. Finamore 1894: 67f.
37. See, for instance, Barley 1983 and Dundes 1981.
38. For a comprehensive, although somewhat disorganised, account of South Italian practices connected with death, see: L. Lombardi Satriani & Meligrana 1982. The perhaps most detailed relation of such practices in a specific region (Basilicata) is found in Bronzini 1964 (379-444).
39. Pitrè 1896a: 285.
40. De Nino 1891: 57, 60f.
41. Priori 1964: 234.
42. Finamore 1894: 149; Priori 1964: 299.
43. Castelli 1878: 35; Giangregorio 1937: 48; Pignatari 1895: 81; Priori 1964: 299ff.
44. See, for example, Priori 1964: 296.
45. R. Lombardi Satriani 1969: 231f; Pitrè 1896a: 358; Renda 1894b: 292.
46. Finamore 1894: 150. Several comparable therapeutic procedures have been documented. They involved the drying of beans that had been soaked in the patient's urine and were employed in order to treat dropsy or enlargement of the spleen (Finamore 1894: 156; Priori 1964: 299; Pitrè 1896a: 327).
47. Agostino 1891: 82; F. Cirelli (ed.) 1853, vol. 22: 85.
48. Gatto Trocchi 1983: 120.

49. Pitrè 1913a: 290.
50. Pitrè 1896a: 218, 327.
51. Finamore 1894: 205.
52. De Blasio 1897: 254.
53. De Nino 1881: 238.
54. Pazzini 1948: 178, 273.
55. F. Cirelli (ed.) 1853, vol. 8: 40.
56. Di Mauro 1982: 197
57. Bronzini 1982: 174 (citing a work by M. G. Pasquarelli).
58. Priori 1964: 240.
59. Finamore 1894: 201f.
60. Di Mauro 1982: 119, 201f.
61. E. g.: Amalfi 1892: 59; G. Cirelli 1968: 85; Corrain 1962: 115; De Martino 1958: 108; Giancristofaro 1971: 111; Lumini 1889: 82; Nobilio 1962: 54; Pitrè 1889, vol. 2: 242; Priori 1964: 310.
62. Conte 1910: 66.
63. The idea of this walk was elaborated in the Sicilian imagery of the soul of the dead as having to walk barefoot on 'Saint James' road' (or 'staircase'), which was identified with the Milky Way and consisted of an immense number of swords, knives, nails or spines. The perspiration of a person at the moment of death could be interpreted as resulting from this strenuous walk, which had already commenced, and the last drops of tears could be said to be provoked by the tremendous pain in the soles of the feet (Pitrè 1889, vol. 2: 246ff, vol. 3: 11f). Similar beliefs have also been documented in other parts of Southern Italy. In Calabria, it was held that the soul of the deceased had to walk, on the tip of his toes, on a thin bridge over a deep pit called *il pozzo di San Giacomo* (Angarano 1973: 125f). In Montesantangelo (Puglia), the dead were said to walk through the *Valle di Giosafatte* on a road covered with sharp stones and spines (the rapid eye movements of a person in death agony was said to be due to the pain he felt from having already started this walk), while more commonly it was said in the Gargano headland that the Milky Way was the 'road of Purgatory' (Corrain 1962: 115, 121).
64. Rivera 1988: 77f.
65. Lumini 1889: 82; Pitrè 1889, vol. 2: 242.
66. On these practices, see: Bronzini 1964: 390; Corrain 1962: 115; Finamore 1894: 86; Grisanti 1896: 479; L. Lombardi Satriani (ed.) 1971: 102; Sorrento n. d.: 83.
67. Pardo 1989: 107.
68. Pardo 1989: 112.
69. The 'drying' properties of vinegar are evident from numerous beliefs and practices, for instance: consumption of vinegar was held to be a good remedy against obesity (Pasquarelli 1896: 328; Pitrè 1896a: 271); it was used in cures for excessive sweating of the feet (Pitrè 1896a: 217f); and it was inhaled in order to stop nose-bleeding (Pitrè 1896a: 407). That alcohol was not conceived as a 'wet' substance is clear from the Neapolitan material just referred to. Wine was, at least in some parts of Southern Italy, considered to be a 'hot' drink, and therefore in various cures employed to 'heat' the body when it suffered from too 'cold' a state or, conversely, avoided in cases of fever as it would 'burn' the sick person (R. Lombardi Satriani 1969: 126; Pitrè 1896a: 159, 321, 324, 330, 405). It was also attributed 'drying' properties, presumably because of its dry taste: in Sicily it was prescribed as a drink for 'drying sweat' (Pitrè 1896a: 159). If wine symbolically is

'hot' and 'dry', it is therefore a suitable liquid for washing a corpse that should not be wetted but instead should dry.

70. Finamore 1894: 89; L. Lombardi Satriani & Meligrana 1982: 123; Priori 1964: 323.
71. Bronzini 1953: 242f.
72. A similar drying significance can perhaps be attributed to the custom, documented in Strongoli (Calabria), of placing a towel under the arm of the deceased when he rested in the coffin. This was done in the belief that the deceased, having crossed the river Jordan on the way to the land of the dead, was wet and needed something to dry himself with so that he could appear with dignity before God (L. Lombardi Satriani [ed.] 1971: 308). Also in Abruzzo and Basilicata, a towel could be placed in the coffin (Nobilio 1962: 54; De Martino 1958: 81).
73. Bronzini 1964: 393.
74. La Sorsa 1930: 44.
75. Corrain 1962: 116.
76. F. Cirelli (ed.) 1853, vol. 10: 29.
77. Dorsa 1884: 92f; L. Lombardi Satriani & Meligrana 1982: 125f (citing unpublished works by F. Granieri and C. Lascalea); Lumini 1889: 83.
78. L. Lombardi Satriani (ed.) 1971: 308; Bronzini 1953: 242; De Martino 1958: 108; Di Mauro 1982: 122f; Dorsa 1884: 92; Guastella 1976: 180; L. Lombardi Satriani & Meligrana 1982: 128, 180 (citing unpublished works by F. Granieri and C. Lascalea); Padula 1977: 335.
79. Corrain 1962: 119; De Martino 1958: 108; L. Lombardi Satriani & Meligrana 1982: 79f.
80. Bellucci 1909: 219. See also: Finamore 1890: 181f; Giancristofaro 1971: 112f, 1978: 55.
81. Pardo 1989: 116.
82. Richard Onians (1951, esp. ch. 10) proposed an identical interpretation of antique Greek and Roman ideas and customs that connect with the imagined thirst of the dead (concerning these ideas and customs, see also Bellucci 1909 and Eliade 1976: 204ff).
83. Altamura & Giuliani 1966: 238; Conte 1910: 67; Di Mauro 1982: 123; Pardo 1981: 105.
84. Nobilio 1962: 55.
85. L. Lombardi Satriani (ed.) 1971: 385.
86. Dorsa 1884: 93; Marzano 1912: 8.
87. De Martino 1958: 108.
88. Finamore 1894: 88.
89. Priori 1964: 323; Finamore 1894: 93.
90. Priori 1964: 320.
91. E. g.: Finamore 1894: 88; Nobilio 1962: 55; Pardo 1982: 542; Pitre 1889, vol. 2: 211; Salomone-Marino 1897: 222.
92. Finamore 1894: 90.
93. See Boholm 1987; Dendy 1959.
94. Cf. Pardo 1982: 542.
95. La Sorsa 1930: 41.
96. Pitre 1889, vol. 2: 207.
97. Giancristofaro 1971: 149. Candles blessed on Candlemas were commonly thought to have an especially strong power to protect from evil forces and were used in several other contexts with this intention. For instance, they could be

- used to ward off storms, hail and lightning and to protect a woman during a difficult childbirth (Giancristofaro 1971: 149).
98. Finamore 1894: 88f.
  99. Angarano 1973: 125; Bronzini 1964: 428.
  100. L. M. Lombardi Satriani & Meligrana 1982: 127, 180 (citing unpublished works by A. Femia and S. Trimboli). In other communities of Calabria and Sicily, the lamp was said to be kept burning in order to illuminate the room for the soul of the dead, which was thought to return to the home at night (Grisanti 1986: 480; Lumini 1889: 83).
  101. Pitrè 1889, vol. 2: 230; Salomone-Marino 1886a: 47.
  102. Angarano 1973: 143f; Dentoni-Litta 1982: 20; Finamore 1890: 101.
  103. Altamura & Giuliani 1966: 238.
  104. Scalfari 1891: 95; Teti 1978: 230.
  105. Pitrè 1896a: 161.
  106. Teti 1978: 296. Perhaps the vital connotations of blood also inspired a cure against infantile marasmus practised in Vasto (Abruzzo) – the child was to take a footbath in cow's blood (Finamore 1894: 180).
  107. D'Aloi 1956: 54.
  108. R. Lombardi Satriani 1969: 130.
  109. Loria 1907: 41; Pitrè 1896a: 359.
  110. Cf. Lévi-Strauss (1966: 204-8), who thinks of dogs in France as 'metonymical human beings'. See also Muir (1993, esp. ch. 7), who discusses the identification of men with dogs in the contexts of vendetta between factions in Renaissance Friuli.
  111. De Nino 1881: 31.
  112. Minicuci 1981: 114; Priori 1964: 180.
  113. Finamore 1894: 122ff.
  114. Marzano 1912: 102.
  115. Geraci 1957: 43.
  116. Dorsa 1884: 55; Pitrè 1913a: 251f; Marzano 1912: 54, 95; R. Lombardi Satriani 1969: 47f; Pitrè 1881: 258; Salomone-Marino 1897: 135.
  117. Castelli 1902: 411; Pitrè 1881: 259f.
  118. F. Cirelli (ed.) 1853, vol. 8: 29; Finamore 1890: 142.
  119. Amalfi 1890: 60; Pitrè 1913a: 251; Finamore 1890:141f; Pitrè 1881: 261; Salomone-Marino 1897: 139.
  120. E. g.: Finamore 1890: 158ff; Pitrè 1881: 307; Priori 1964: 106f
  121. Pitrè 1881: 308
  122. Pitrè 1881: 258.
  123. Finamore 1890: 142, 156ff. Concerning Molise, see F. Cirelli (ed.) 1853, vol. 2: 25.
  124. Finamore 1890: 157f.
  125. Gower Chapman 1973: 115.
  126. A similar conception of grace as vital force, which perhaps is more explicit than in Southern Italy, has been documented among the Vaqueros of northern Spain (Cátedra 1984: 394-401, 887). *Gracia* is identified with physical force and with blood and is thought to be gradually lost during the course of life; illness is conceived of as an accelerated loss of *gracia*. An old person who cannot move has little or no *gracia* left. '*Gracia* is lost with the blood. As one gets older, the blood gets heavy, dries and stops up together with life itself' (ibid. p. 399).

## Chapter 4

1. Pasquarelli 1897: 55.
2. De Martino 1987: 53f.
3. De Giacomo 1899: 147-50.
4. R. Lombardi Satriani 1969: 201. For an account of a complex cure against jaundice that involves the collection and consumption of bread, see Finamore 1894: 158f.
5. D'Aloi 1956: 39.
6. Adriano 1932: 190.
7. De Nino 1881: 30; Finamore 1894: 164; Giancristofaro 1967: 62f, 66; Id. 1970: 387, Id. 1971: 96f; Id. 1978: 188; Giangregorio 1937: 48; Pitrè 1889, vol. 2: 174; Id. 1896: 451f; Id. 1913a: 287; Priori 1964: 246f, 250.
8. Piaggia 1853: 219.
9. Finamore 1894: 164.
10. Giancristofaro 1970: 386. Another variant of such practices has been documented from Penne (Abruzzo). The mother who wished to have milk in abundance should go to the priest and ask for a bit of bread, 'out of charity', and from the bread she cooked pap which she herself consumed (Nobilio 1962: 49).
11. Adriano 1932: 190. If there were no monks in the vicinity, the same request could be made to seven women named Maria.
12. Cf. William Whyte (1944: 74) who argues that the woman collecting food gains necessary strength from society. Not only food but also various items used in cures against specific ailments could be collected in a similar fashion. In one cure against dropsy, for instance, beans were collected, soaked in the patient urine and then left to dry in the expectation that the water in the patient's abdomen would dry up accordingly (Finamore 1894: 156). In this and some other cures, it can hardly be argued that the items confer vitality to the patient. The idea of people assisting a suffering neighbour is combined with cures that aim at particular manipulations of the human organism.
13. Finamore 1894: 164.
14. Finamore 1894: 165f; Giancristofaro 1970: 387.
15. Most of these springs and wells were associated with saints who were regarded as patrons of nursing women. In some springs, calcium gave the water a shade of milky white, and stalagmitic structures, vaguely resembling breasts, had been formed. See: Corrain & Rittatore & Zampini 1967; De Nino 1879: 95f; Finamore 1894: 164ff; Giancristofaro 1971: 92-6; Priori 1964: 249f.
16. Pasquarelli 1897: 54.
17. Finamore 1894: 163.
18. D'Amato 1933: 155.
19. De Martino 1987: 58. See also reports from Abruzzo: De Nino 1881: 29; Finamore 1894: 161; Giancristofaro 1970: 386, Id. 1971: 91; from Basilicata: Bronzini 1953: 211; Pasquarelli 1897: 54, and from Campania: D'Amato 1933: 155.
20. Finamore 1894: 161.
21. Finamore 1894: 167.
22. F. Cirelli (ed.) 1853, vol. 10: 2; Finamore 1894: 166.
23. G. Cirelli 1968: 82.
24. Pitrè 1889, vol. 2: 175.
25. A Sicilian saying was that when two or more persons eat or drink together at a restaurant or a bar, then the one who has finished the last swig of wine or liquor

- from a shared bottle, or who has eaten the last snail, olive, fruit, or the like, from a shared plate, ought to pay for everything that has been consumed by the party (Pitrè 1889, vol. 4: 345). In this case it seems as though the basic idea is again that drink or food has not been properly shared and that the one who ate or drank the last of it unjustly took from the others; therefore an apposite response to his 'greed' is to make him pay for all that which has been consumed. Verbally this reasoning would run something like: — Now, if this person is so greedy that he probably would have liked to drink and eat everything on the table without sharing, then he should also pay for everything.
26. Pazzini 1948: 86. De Blasio (1900: 202) mentions that sorcery with leftovers from food was practised in Benevento, but provides no details.
  27. Dentoni-Litta 1982: 14; Priori 1964: 567f.
  28. Some examples of such cures are the following. Obstruction of the lactiferous ducts of a nursing mother's breast (mastitis), causing a painful accumulation of milk, could be cured by applying to the breast a plaster made from bread-crumbs that had fallen from the mouth of a cat (Finamore 1894: 168) or by drinking water from which a cat previously had been drinking (Pitrè 1896a: 454; Salomone-Marino 1891: 460). A woman would be immune to this ailment if she for some time ate leftovers from a cat's food (Finamore 1894: 168f). Inflammation of the eyes could be cured by the application of water from a watering trough for horses or mules (F. Cirelli [ed.] 1853, vol. 10: 67; De Nino 1891: 143; Finamore 1894: 185; Pitrè 1896a: 273), but one should not use such water for washing the swaddling bands of a baby, since this would cause its skin to be red and dry from inflammation (Finamore 1894: 78). An obstinate cough was cured by drinking water from a bucket out of which a horse had just been watered (Pitrè 1896a: 415f) or water from which a cat had been drinking (D'Aloi 1956: 53), or by giving a dog bread in bouillon to eat and collecting and drinking the liquid that dripped from its mouth (Pitrè 1896a: 418). Some of the cures mentioned here build upon a notion that the water from which an animal has been drinking, or continues to drink, is still subject to consumption. The act of drinking affects not only that which is actually drunk, but all water that has been contained in the receptacle. Hence the water has the capacity to draw milk out of an inflamed breast, to decrease the superfluity of phlegm of inflamed eyes and bronchi, and to make a baby's skin red and dry.
  29. De Nino 1881: 30.
  30. E. g.: Bellucci 1910; De Martino 1987: 55; Giancristofaro 1971: 213; Moss & Cappannari 1960: 97. This particular idea is one of a great variety of beliefs that the handling of the placenta affected the woman's ability to lactate.
  31. Exceptions were made in the case of small children, who were fed. Another exception could be made when a child had died. In that case, the persons attending the wake sometimes ate festive food and amused themselves (La Sorsa 1930: 43); this will be discussed in Chapter 9.
  32. Pitrè 1889, vol. 2: 228.
  33. See, for instance, Amalfi 1892: 69; Bronzini 1964: 431f; Faeta 1979: 74; Nobilio 1962: 56; Pitrè 1889, vol. 2: 228.
  34. Bronzini 1964: 431; La Sorsa 1939: 33; Nobilio 1962: 56.
  35. F. Cirelli (ed.) 1853, vol. 17: 29; De Nino 1879: 130.
  36. Faeta 1979: 74.
  37. Finamore 1894: 95; Giancristofaro 1978: 229; Marzano 1912: 128.
  38. Bronzini 1964: 432.

39. G. Cirelli 1968: 85; L. Lombardi Satriani & Meligrana 1982: 182 (citing an unpublished thesis by I. Meleca); Priori 1964: 325.
40. L. Lombardi Satriani (ed.) 1971: 121; De Nino 1879: 130.
41. Such reasoning also sustained the ideas that one should not sleep in a room with the feet towards the door, this being the position proper for a corpse; that one should not place flowers on a bed, this otherwise being done only when a deceased person remained in the home prior to his funeral; that one should not take measures for a child's clothes, this suggesting the measuring of a corpse by the coffin-maker.
42. Amalfi 1890: 167; Castelli 1878: 46; De Nino 1881: 239; Finamore 1894: 99; Pitre 1913a: 290.
43. Finamore 1894: 99.
44. See Davis 1973: 57. Concerning the benefits for priests during the *chiese ricettizie* system of the three centuries from ca. 1550 to ca. 1850, Carroll 1992, ch. 5.
45. In Northern Italy, as well as in other countries of Europe, the funeral meal may be referred to using an expression signifying 'eating the dead' (Di Nola 1995: 162; Rivera 1988: 106). The food symbolism of Greek death rituals clearly indicates that certain foodstuffs are associated with the flesh of the dead (see Danforth 1982: 104ff).
46. An interesting variation has been documented in seventeenth century Herefordshire and elsewhere in England. Poor people were invited to act as 'sin-eaters', consuming bread and beer over a corpse and thereby taking upon themselves the sins of the deceased (N. Davis 1977: 95). In this practice, it is not family members that recover vital force from a relative, but instead un-related people who take over an undesirable quality of the deceased.
47. De Nino 1879: 129f.
48. Nobilio 1962: 56. A customary dish offered as *consuolo* was chicken broth, and the Italian ethnographer Roberto De Simone (1977: 184-9) suggests that the eating of this dish can be seen as a symbolic consumption of the deceased, that '... transmitted to the relatives the good qualities of the deceased or of death'. The evidence for this interpretation, which is based on a supposed association between the hen and the souls of the dead, appears weak. A more plausible interpretation of why this particular dish was customary should take into consideration the circumstance that, in South Italian symbolism, the hen and the hen's egg are closely associated with the regeneration of life from death. Thus, it could be argued that the offer of chicken broth to a bereaved family symbolically serves the same purpose as the *consuolo*, namely to end the bereaved family's intense involvement with death through an input of vital force from other families. The chicken broth is a very suitable symbolic tool for this since it is a kind of nourishment that associates with the regeneration of life from death.
49. L. Lombardi Satriani & Meligrana 1982: 419 (citing an unpublished thesis by P. Garofalo).
50. La Sorsa 1930: 50.
51. Moss & Cappannari 1960: 97.
52. Pardo 1989: 111. On the ban on consuming meat in the period following a death, see also: Conte 1910: 66f; Corrain 1962: 115; Di Mauro 1982: 116.

## Chapter 5

1. De Martino 1987: 56.

2. De Martino 1987: 56.
3. Pasquarelli 1897: 54.
4. Adriano 1932: 188.
5. Finamore 1894: 163.
6. Adriano 1932: 188f; Finamore 1894: 163.
7. De Martino 1987: 56.
8. De Martino 1987: 57f (free translation).
9. Intentional thefts of milk were also thought possible. Some methods for achieving this, practised in Calabria, involved the reading of certain spells while being close to a lactating ewe or goat (R. Lombardi Satriani 1969: 250f). In Valsinni (Basilicata), it was thought possible to purloin mother's milk by a form of magic, which essentially consisted of the consumption of salt that had secretly been brought into the proximity of a nursing mother (De Martino 1987: 57).
10. See for instance the volumes edited by Maloney (1976) and by Dundes (1981).
11. Coss 1981.
12. Appel 1977; Garrison & Arensberger 1976.
13. Appel 1977; M. Douglas 1970.
14. Schoeck 1969.
15. Foster 1967, ch. 7.
16. Dundes 1981.
17. Cf. Galt 1982.
18. In some communities, only the unintentional form of the evil eye was recognised (Brögger 1968: 14; Galt 1991a: 740f).
19. L. Lombardi Satriani (ed.) 1971: 150f; Bonomo 1978: 20; Pitre 1913b: 193f. There are some notable exceptions to this. For instance, Galt (1991a: 740f) reports that people in a community in contemporary Puglia tend to conflate two types of the evil eye under the term *malocchio* – a lesser form called *affascene* ('fascination') and a graver form called *mmoidie* ('envy'), neither of which were thought to be activated wilfully.
20. In a Calabrese community, the evil eye could be thought to emanate from persons when they stare at something and to be caused by an 'abundance of heart', which was understood as 'a strong emotion provoked by the sight of something desirable or exceptionally beautiful'. Some persons claimed that joy was one such cause, others emphasised desire (Brögger 1968: 14).
21. Bronzini 1982: 154.
22. The term 'witchcraft', which in anthropological usage, following Evans-Pritchard's (1937) definition, denotes involuntarily activated supernatural and harmful influence as opposed to consciously performed and evil-minded 'sorcery', is not used here. The term is confusing in the Italian (as well as in the European) context, since witches were thought to perform intentional and malevolent magic, and the 'craft' of witches thus falls into the category of sorcery rather than 'witchcraft' (cf. M. Douglas 1970: xxviii-xxix).
23. Acocella 1936: 129; Bonomo 1978: 20, 56-61; Brögger 1968: 15; De Martino 1987: 43; Finamore 1894: 174; Giancristofaro 1971: 206; Moss & Cappannari 1960: 98; Pazzini 1948: 244; Pitre 1889 vol. 4: 237f; Renda 1894b: 289.
24. De Martino 1987: 46; Finamore 1894: 174; L. Lombardi Satriani (ed.): 101; Moss & Cappannari 1960: 98.
25. Amalfi 1890: 92.
26. L. Lombardi Satriani (ed.) 1971: 143; Moss & Cappannari 1960: 98.
27. Brögger 1968: 15; Marzano 1912: 41f.



28. Cavalcanti 1984: 103; Finamore 1894: 174.
29. Cf. Dundes 1981.
30. Finamore 1894: 174.
31. Bronzini 1951: 47.
32. Amalfi 1890: 92.
33. Pardo 1992: 262.
34. Amalfi 1890: 176; Brögger 1968: 15; F. Cirelli (ed.) 1853, vol. 9: 25; Elworthy 1958: 18f; Pitrè 1889 vol. 4: 237.
35. Dentoni-Litta 1982: 12; R. Lombardi Satriani 1969: 61; Riviello 1893: 216; Tancredi 1940: 96; Vincelli 1958: 127.
36. Angarano 1973: 133; Finamore 1894: 237; Gigli 1893: 27.
37. Castelli 1878: 63; Finamore 1894: 223. This capacity was also attributed to a snake with a double tail (Pitrè 1913a: 306).
38. Pitrè 1889, vol. 4: 327.
39. Dentoni-Litta 1982: 88; Tancredi 1940: 96.
40. Some other examples of such symbolism are the ideas that a nut or almond with an extra seed was a good augury (Dentoni-Litta 1982: 87; Galt 1991a: 749) and that a girl who at harvest found a straw with a double ear was considered fortunate and was given a sheaf of corn as a premium (Dorsa 1884: 110). In Ortona (Abruzzo), some snakes and large, old lizards were said to have a kind of hard protuberance on their heads, of the size of a human tooth. This outgrowth was held to bring great luck. It protected its bearer, his home and his fields from all misfortune. A similar protuberance is also said to be found on the back of some very large slugs. It was attributed much the same luck-bringing capacities and was also used as an amulet against the evil eye and other supernatural threats (Finamore 1894: 236f).
41. Priori 1964: 225f.
42. See, for instance, Dentoni-Litta 1982: 23; Pitrè 1913b: 203f.
43. R. Lombardi Satriani 1969: 12. In this game, fruitstones were thrown at a target by two or more players.
44. In the case of women, a rich growth of bodily and facial hair was viewed with ambiguity; some sources make clear that unusually hairy women could be considered to have good fortune and unusual strength, but this feature most commonly seems to have been considered an indication of misplaced masculinity that made a woman *cattiva* ('bad'; all this information on conceptions of hair is from: Amalfi 1890: 101; Castelli 1878: 42; Grisanti 1898: 323; R. Lombardi Satriani 1969: 10; Marzano 1912: 110f; Pitrè 1896a: 51-4). Thus hairiness indicated not only vitality and strength, but also manliness. However, there are beliefs that indicate a connection between vital force and hair, irrespective of gender. For instance, in a Calabrian village, it was held that one should not cut the hair on the arms, because this would cause them to lose strength (R. Lombardi Satriani 1969: 15). We may also note that, in Basilicata and Sicily, it was held that a child's life was in danger if its hair was cut while it was yet below one year of age – that is, at an age when the child was considered to be especially fragile and vulnerable (Bronzini 1953: 38; Pitrè 1889, vol. 2: 181). The cutting of the hair seems in this case to have suggested a loss of vital force, ultimately leading to death. A weaker version of this belief has been documented in Abruzzo: that such an early cutting of hair would hinder the child from growing rich and long hair (Finamore 1894: 125). In this case it is thus only the force of the growth of hair that is imagined to be affected, not the vital force of the organism as a whole. On

- the association of hair with vitality more generally, see Hallpike 1969.
45. Amalfi 1892: 13f; Angarano 1973: 56; Bronzini 1964: 38; D'Aloi 1956: 40; Dentoni-Litta 1982: 27; Finamore 1894: 70; Pasquarelli 1897: 54; Priori 1964: 186.
  46. Amalfi 1892: 13f; D'Aloi 1956: 40; Finamore 1894: 70.
  47. Pitrè 1889, vol. 4: 327.
  48. Finamore 1894: 234.
  49. Finamore 1894: 234.
  50. Marzano 1912: 43f.
  51. In folk medicine, saliva was above all employed against ailments of the skin and was attributed a healing influence; this was especially so when it originated from persons who for various reasons were associated with abundance and unusual powers (Adriano 1932: 87ff; Castelli 1878: 33; Dorsa 1884: 121; Finamore 1894: 172, 203f; R. Lombardi Satriani 1969: 106; Marzano 1912: 94; Pitrè 1896a: 225ff; Priori 1964: 284f; Renda 1894b: 291). In Calabria and Sicily, verses of folk poetry have been recorded that express the idea that saliva could cure ailments of the kidneys or malign fevers or 'a hundred sicknesses' (Adriano 1932: 53; Bonomo 1978: 83f). The concept of saliva as embodying vital force was also expressed in some ideas concerning spitting. Thus, a workman spat in the palms of his hands when he was getting ready to work and when he picked up a tool. Similarly, a man who was about to engage in a fist-fight spat in his hands (Pitrè 1896a: 92). The idea that saliva has healing and benevolent qualities is found in the Holy Scripture and in the ritual practice of the Church, and the laity was hence given an appearance of the idea as an accepted truth. Christ used his saliva when he restored vision to the blind and speech to the dumb (Mark 7: 32-5; 8: 23). In the Church, the priest uses his saliva in the baptismal ceremony to anoint the child's nostrils and ears. Hence, saliva was connected with vital force, and this association may be seen as being based on the fact that saliva is an excretion that is intimately related to the emotions, since it flows in abundance in anger and in some other intense feelings, while it dries up when fear is experienced. Saliva is connected with the pulse of life and we may therefore assume, with vitality itself (cf. Tillhagen 1989: 295).
  52. De Martino 1987: 94f; Galt 1991a: 740f; Pazzini 1948: 100; Riviello 1893: 214.
  53. R. Lombardi Satriani 1969: 182; Moss & Cappannari 1960: 98; Pitrè 1889, vol. 4: 236.
  54. In two Sicilian spells used to heal sufferings believed to be caused by the evil eye, it is expressly stated that the one who has cast the evil eye has 'removed the blood' or 'sucked the blood' from his victim (Bonomo 1978: 56f; 60f, citing unpublished work by V. Marchese and referring to an unedited collection of folk songs belonging to the University Library of Messina).
  55. Cf. Brögger 1968: 14.
  56. E.g. Amalfi 1890: 166.
  57. De Martino 1987: 15-26.
  58. Bronzini 1982: 169.
  59. Brögger (1968: 22) writes, concerning a Calabrese community in the 1960s: 'People are scared of displaying things which can arouse other people's envy and desire, because they know it involves criticism and possibly supernatural destruction.'
  60. Bronzini 1982: 154, referring to ethnography collected by M. G. Pasquarelli.
  61. Brögger 1968: 22.
  62. Dorsa 1884: 124.

63. E. g. Galt 1991a: 741; Moss & Cappannari 1960: 98. Brögger (1968: 22) informs us that when a neighbour's child was complemented, it might be done with the phrase 'Go away evil eye, what a child'.
64. Seligmann (1910, vol. 1: 238) gives an example of such a phrase – '*Restate servito, prendete, accio non me la jettate!*' More as a curiosity it may be mentioned that this tactic could be employed against what appears to be the evil eye of a dog. In San Costantino Briatico, Calabria, it was believed that if a person ate while a dog was present near the table, he should give the dog some bread to eat, otherwise he would himself not be satiated and would have to leave the table still hungry (R. Lombardi Satriani 1969: 19). Most probably, this belief refers to the scene of a person eating a meal while a dog, whimpering and dribbling from hunger, roams around the table begging for a share of the food. The dog desires the food, and the idea seems to be that, if not fed, it casts an 'evil eye' onto the food and so deprives it of its nutritional value. Therefore, the person who eats will not be satiated – unless he shares his food with the dog and thereby avoids its 'evil eye'. Another belief was that a man who refused to feed a hungry dog would not find a spouse (ibid. p. 33). Perhaps this idea was inspired by a thinking that a selfish and stingy man, a character trait indicated by the refusal to share food with the hungry dog, is not the kind of man a woman wishes for husband.
65. C. f. Appel 1977: 76f; Brögger 1968: 21f; Galt 1991a: 747.
66. M. Douglas 1970: xxvii.
67. Bronzini 1964: 383; Giancristofaro 1971: 214.
68. Adriano 1932: 167f; Dorsa 1884: 142.
69. Another manifestation of the mistletoe's association with immortality, fertility and regeneration was the belief, documented in Lanciano (Abruzzo), that if such wood was burnt in the hearth, then the hens would cease to lay eggs (Finamore 1894: 15).
70. E. g.: Angarano 1973: 133; Berry 1968: 252; Dorsa 1884: 127; Elworthy 1958: 258-62; R. Lombardi Satriani 1969: 276; Pitre 1889, vol. 4. 239f, Id. 1913b: 203.
71. MacCulloch 1913; Onians 1951: 236-46.
72. Berry 1968: 251; Seligmann 1910, vol. 2: 202.
73. In Salerno, a female apotropaic gesture with an analogous significance has been documented: one of the buttocks was scratched (Dentoni-Litta 1982: 56).
74. Cf. Dundes (1981: 276), who argues that the 'fica' and phallic amulets signify the production of semen, which 'provides proof that the victim's supply of life force is undiminished'.
75. Adriano 1932: 57; Berry 1968.
76. Adriano 1932: 57; Berry 1968; Bronzini 1953: 219; Dorsa 1884: 125; R. Lombardi Satriani 1969: 277.
77. Tancredi 1940: 96.
78. R. Lombardi Satriani 1969: 275.
79. Angarano 1973: 133; Berry 1968; R. Lombardi Satriani 1969: 278.
80. Tancredi 1940: 96.
81. Cocchiara 1938: 107.
82. The most comprehensive comparative documentation on the symbolic complex of the moon, the frog, the serpent, the lizard and the crab is found in Briffault 1927, vol. 2, ch. xx-xxii, see also Frazer 1913-24, vol. 1, lecture III. The perhaps most evident manifestation of these meanings in Southern Italy is the beliefs that snakes, lizards and toads were reincarnated dead human beings (Adriano 1932: 129; Angarano 1973: 140; Basile 1958: 96f; Bronzini 1953: 243; Castelli 1878: 9; De

- Giacomo 1899: 206; Dorsa 1884: 27f, 95; R. Lombardi Satriani 1969: 60; Loria 1907: 42; Pagano da Diamante 1902, vol. 2: 312f; Pasquarelli 1894: 637; Pitrè 1889, vol. 3: 365f); see also p. 224f, Chapter 10. On the symbolism of the egg, see Chapter 8, footnote 89.
83. Cf. Guggino 1978: 134; Turner 1967: 88-91.
  84. This significance may also have inspired the idea, documented in Lavello (Basilicata), that children could be made immune against the evil eye by letting them swallow some milligrams of gold (Bronzini 1951: 46).
  85. Briffault 1927, vol. 3: 278f; Seligmann 1910, vol. 2: 32f. An Italian term for this coral is *corallo sanguigno* ('sanguine coral'). Briffault (vol. 3: 278, referring to a work by G. Bellucci) reports that Italian women regarded red coral as 'possessing the specific power of regulating the menstrual flow'.
  86. Castelli 1878: 64.
  87. Pitrè 1896a: 130f.
  88. Castelli 1878: 58, 63f; Pitrè 1889, vol. 2: 154f, 181; Id. 1896: 131, 224.
  89. Corso 1911: 137f; L. Lombardi Satriani & Meligrana 1982: 297; R. Lombardi Satriani 1969: 33, 37.
  90. Finamore 1894: 180f.
  91. Concerning Molise, see G. Cirelli 1968: 82; Vincelli 1958: 99. Campania: D'Amato 1933: 142; Dentoni-Litta 1982: 76f. Puglia: Corrain 1962: 126. Basilicata: F. Cirelli (ed.) 1853, vol. 6: 116; Pasquarelli 1896: 327; Perotti de' Miani 1894: 381f.
  92. Milky scabs is an eczema on the face and head of a nursing child, producing yellow crusts and suppurating boils. As described in Chapter 3, eczema and boils that emitted pus were commonly seen as outlets for corrupted fluids. In Sicily, milky scabs were seen as a way for the infantile organism to rid itself of some internal malady and thus great care was taken to prevent it from disappearing. If this happened, it was thought to provoke the development of serious internal ailments of the chest, the intestines and especially of the brain (Pitrè 1896a: 223f). Similar beliefs concerning this illness have also been recorded in other parts of Southern Italy (De Nino 1891: 74; Finamore 1894: 76; Giancristofaro 1971: 87f; Marzano 1912: 97; Pasquarelli 1896: 494; Priori 1964: 200). Milk thrush is a fungous infection of the oral cavity and the lips, causing the development of greyish-white spots and cysts on the mucous membrane. The ethnographic sources do not say explicitly that this sickness was seen as an elimination of corrupted humours, but its character is suggestive of this.
  93. Camporesi 1988b: 77f; Jacquart & Thomasset 1988, esp. p. 71-8.
  94. Brandes 1981b: 225.
  95. Pitrè 1896a: 129.
  96. De Giacomo 1899: 154; Finamore 1894: 182; Pitrè 1896a: 449. In Sicily, it was held that pimples of girls who had not yet reached puberty should not be cured, since they were assumed to disappear at the onset of menstruation (Pitrè 1896a: 224f). This belief thus connects menstruation with an elimination of corrupted fluids (identified with the pus of the pimples) from the body.
  97. Another indication is the Sicilian belief that a child was likely to suffer from milky scabs, not only if it was kissed by a menstruating woman but also if it had been conceived when the menses of its mother were approaching (Pitrè 1896a: 223). If the menstruation clears a woman's body from corrupted humours, then her organism ought to be maximally filled with them just before the menses.
  98. Finamore 1894: 126.
  99. L. Lombardi Satriani & Meligrana 1982: 298, referring to an unpublished work by

- M. G. Totino.
100. Allan Dundes (1981: 285) makes the same point when discussing the Zoroastrian belief that menstruating women possess the evil eye: 'Clearly, a woman who was losing blood, a life fluid, would represent a threat to the life fluids of others'. The belief that a menstruating woman is especially prone to cast the evil eye has been documented in antiquity and in other South European counties (Cutileiro 1971: 274; Lawrence 1988: 131; Pina-Cabral 1986: 96; Pitt-Rivers 1954: 197f; Seligmann 1910, vol. 1: 93f; Stewart 1991: 233), but not, it seems, in modern Italy.
  101. It can be noted that, in Spain, menstruation is associated with *calio* (heat), and hence a wound inflicted by a menstruating woman on the back of the mule that she rides could be explained by saying that the rider was 'burning' (Pitt-Rivers 1954: 197f).
  102. Adriano 1932: 189; Corso 1911: 147f; De Nino 1881: 30; Minicuci 1981: 121. In Torricella Peligna (Abruzzo), it was thought that pieces of cloth which had been wetted by milk vomited by a baby should not be dried by the fire, since this would cause agalactia (Finamore 1894: 163).
  103. Vincelli 1958: 99.
  104. It was a widespread belief that a girl could make a man fall in love with her, or a married woman make her husband unable to leave her, if she secretly, mixed in drink or food, gave the man a love potion based on a few drops of her own blood, most commonly menstrual blood (e. g.: Angarano 1973: 91; De Martino 1987: 21f; Dentoni-Litta 1982: 22; Faeta 1979: 77; Giancristofaro 1971: 185; Gower Chapman 1973: 203; Loria 1907: 41; Moss & Cappannari 1960: 100; R. Lombardi Satriani 1969: 249; Pasquarelli 1896: 326f; Pitre 1889, vol. 4: 118f, Id. 1910: 406f). Hair from the head, armpits or pubis, as well as nail clippings, could also be used, sometimes together with blood (e. g.: De Martino 1987: 21f; Dentoni-Litta 1982: 22; Faeta 1979: 77; Giancristofaro 1971: 184f; Nobilio 1962: 132). All these procedures can be understood as elaborations on a symbolism of union through shared bodily substance and corresponding to the notion of the family as having 'shared blood' and the practice of mingling blood when entering blood pacts. The sexual character of the wished-for union motivates the use of blood or hair originating from the genitals.
  105. Societies in which females and menstruation are typically *not* regarded as polluting are those with an informal social organisation, in which permanent social positions transcending the existence of the biological individuals who occupy them are absent or comparatively insignificant and those in which there is an ideological stress on gender parallelism and complementarity (cf. Appell 1988).
  106. Pitre 1913a: 293f.
  107. G. Cirelli 1968: 82. Vincelli (1958: 99) informs us that in older times a pregnant woman was thought to be a dangerous person, for whom one should watch out.
  108. Vincelli 1958: 155.
  109. Finamore 1894: 59f; Pitre 1889, vol. 2: 115-20; Salomone-Marino 1886b: 535.
  110. Finamore 1894: 163.
  111. Priori 1964: 201f
  112. Documented in Gessopalena by Finamore (1894: 174f).
  113. Castelli 1878: 58; Pitre 1889, vol. 2: 181.
  114. Pitre 1889, vol. 4: 467.
  115. D'Aloi 1956: 45; R. Lombardi Satriani 1969: 36.
  116. Finamore 1894: 78.
  117. Finamore 1894: 72; Pitre 1889, vol. 4, 467.

118. Moss & Cappannari 1960: 97.
119. See Bell (1979, ch. 4) for statistics and a discussion of causes of infant death.
120. Angarano 1973: 117; Bronzini 1964: 390; De Nino 1881: 239; La Sorsa 1930: 40; Marzano 1912: 126; Pasquarelli 1896: 329; Padula 1977: 288. A variation of this belief has been documented in Venafro, Molise: if a moribund person's eyes were wide open at the moment of death, he would soon be followed into death by a relative (G. Cirelli 1968: 85).
121. Di Mauro 1982: 258; Pitrè 1889, vol. 2: 224f.
122. E. g. Dentoni-Litta 1982: 89; Galt 1991a: 743; Gigli 1893: 22, 106; R. Lombardi Satriani 1969: 195; Pitrè 1896a: 89f; Rivera 1988: 284; Salomone-Marino 1882: 132; Seligmann 1910, vol. 1: 87f, 91.
123. On this association, see: Boholm 1990: 67f; Di Nola 1995: 273f; Finucane 1981: 44f.
124. Caracciolo di Forino 1865: 98f.
125. Conte 1910: 140; De Martino 1987: 65ff; Finamore 1890: 13f; Pasquarelli 1894: 635; Perotti de' Miani 1894: 380; Riviello 1893: 204ff.
126. Finamore 1890: 3-15.
127. Bellizzi 1894: 458; F. Cirelli (ed.) 1853, vol. 2: 25; Dorsa 1884: 96f; R. Lombardi Satriani 1969: 36; Marzano 1912: 134; Maone & Maone 1966: 71; Pitrè 1889, vol. 2: 243.
128. *O monaco tène nu vraccio curto e 'n'ato luóngo* ('the monk has one short and one long arm'; said about a greedy person, and referring to the habit of begging monks to keep the left arm busy in a bag where they keep alms of food, while extending the right arm begging for money); *tre so' li languagge de li muonece: damme, vamme, famme* ('three are the words of the monks: give me, go there for me, do that for me', Altamura & Giuliani 1966: 321).
129. Grisanti 1898: 317f; Montalbano 1884; Pitrè 1889, vol. 4: 30f.

## Chapter 6

1. M. Douglas 1970.
2. Giovannini 1981: 418; Pitrè 1889, vol. 4: 107f.
3. Castelli 1878: 15ff; Finamore 1884.
4. Giovannini 1981: 418.
5. Cf. Stewart 1991: 14f.
6. The literature on European witch beliefs is vast. A summary of the image of the witch is found in Cohn 1975: 99-102. An extensive work, with particular reference to Italy, is Bonomo 1959.
7. The term *strega* could also be used to denote a 'wise woman', having a reputation for being skilled in 'magic' and the curing of illness.
8. Detailed descriptions of the South Italian belief in witches are found in: Bonomo 1959, ch. 30; Finamore 1884; Giancristofaro 1971: 177-91; Pitrè 1889, vol. 4: 101-53; Tancredi 1940: 90ff.
9. F. Cirelli (ed.) 1853, vol. 4: 28; G. Cirelli 1968: 89; De Nino 1879: 143ff; Moss & Cappannari 1960: 99; Nobilio 1962: 108f, 123, 128; Priori 1964: 198, 466f; Vincelli 1958: 105, 122.
10. Pitrè 1889, vol. 4: 101f.
11. Giovannini 1981: 419.
12. Pitrè 1889, vol. 4: 101.
13. Simiani 1890: 240ff.
14. Pitrè 1889, vol. 2: 154f. This belief may have been held more generally. Without

specifying a particular part of Sicily, Pitre (1896: 89f) writes that it was the custom to spit behind a woman of 'bad reputation' if she had kissed a newborn baby. To spit was a common gesture employed to ward off evil forces.

15. De Nino 1883: 20.
16. Finamore 1884: 222.
17. Finamore 1884: 228; Giancristofaro 1971: 205. The protective measures were, like those employed against the evil eye, of a great variety and therefore cannot be discussed in detail here. However, most of them derive from the three general strategies outlined by Anthony Galt (1982) as those used against the evil eye (cf. Ch. 5). Thus they aim (1) to divert the attention of the witch, (2) make an appeal to stronger powers and (3) injure the witch or destroy her magical tools.
18. In Palena (Abruzzo), a house could be protected by placing a human skull outside the entrance, and it was thought that this would exercise an 'irresistible attraction' for a witch already accustomed to entering the house (Finamore 1884: 228); she would not enter again, but would remain outside the house. Since the belief in necrophagous witches has been documented in this area of Abruzzo (in Gessopalena), the skull was presumably assumed to stimulate her appetite for corpses and thereby divert her attack from the living members of the home. In Celano, the bones of the dead could be used as a protection against witches (Finamore 1894: 69), but we are not informed how this protection was thought to work.
19. Conte 1910: 115, citing from an article by Filippina Rossi.
20. D'Amato 1933: 150; L. Lombardi Satriani (ed.) 1971: 187.
21. Moss & Cappannari 1960: 99.
22. D'Amato 1933: 154f.
23. Finamore 1884: 227; Vincelli 1958: 220.
24. Moss & Cappannari 1960: 97.
25. Pazzini 1948: 137.
26. G. Cirelli 1968: 90; Finamore 1884: 221, 226; Giancristofaro 1971: 179ff; Nobilio 1962: 128.
27. Accella 1936: 127; Braccili 1973: 35; Bronzini 1964: 345f; Castelli 1878: 16; F. Cirelli (ed.) 1853, vol. 4: 48; G. Cirelli 1968: 89; Giancristofaro 1971: 178; Pasquarelli 1894: 636.
28. Castelli 1878: 15f.
29. Braccili 1973: 35.
30. F. Cirelli (ed.) 1853, vol. 4: 48; G. Cirelli 1968: 89; L. Lombardi Satriani (ed.) 1971: 119; Padula 1967: 316.
31. Giancristofaro 1971: 180.
32. Conte 1910: 117; Corrain 1962: 126; L. Lombardi Satriani (ed.) 1971: 102.
33. L. Lombardi Satriani & Meligrana 1982: 13.
34. Caro Baroja 1964, 1990; Ginzburg 1983, 1990; Henningsen 1990; Kärffve 1992; Schneider 1990.
35. Henningsen 1990. On these fairies, see: Pitre 1889, vol. 4: 153-77; Id. 1896a: 182f. Castelli (1878: 11-14) and Grisanti (1898: 315f) describe beliefs in Sicilian 'fairies' that to some extent seem to concern the *donne di fuori*. For descriptions of the belief in *donne di fuori* in older times, see Henningsen 1990.
36. Cf. Stewart 1991: 190f, who presents a summary list of the characteristics of Greek *exotiká* (supernatural phenomena and beings relating to the demonic and non-Christian) in the form of binary pairs.
37. The notion of original sin is not explicitly found in the Holy Scripture and is not

- present in the Eastern Church. The Roman Catholic doctrine of original sin was formulated by Augustine, later to be refined by Thomas of Aquino, and it is inferred from certain verses of the Bible (e. g. Gen. 2: 17, 3: 1-24; Rom. 5: 12).
38. 'Celibato', in *Enciclopedia Cattolica*.
  39. For some descriptions and variations, see: Bronzini 1964: 83f; Finamore 1894: 81; Nobilio 1962: 49; Vincelli 1958: 102.
  40. Cf. William Christian (1972: 154) who discusses conceptions of churching among the rural population of Northern Spain.
  41. Bronzini 1964: 82ff; Dentoni-Litta 1982: 166; Finamore 1894: 81; Pitre 1889, vol. 2: 170f.
  42. Finamore 1894: 81.
  43. Finamore 1894: 81. This idea recalls the Mosaic tradition related in Leviticus (12: 2-4), that a mother was impure and not allowed to enter the temple during the 40 days after the birth of a son and 80 days after the birth of a daughter. When these days had passed, she was allowed into the temple after a ceremonial purification.
  44. Bronzini 1964: 83.
  45. Finamore 1894: 81
  46. Bronzini 1964: 83.
  47. Vincelli 1958: 102.
  48. The two former terms were common; the latter term was documented in *Somma Vesuviana, Campania* (Di Mauro 1982: 166).
  49. E. g.: Angarano 1973: 53f; Corso 1950: 1007; Finamore 1894: 68, 72f; Giancristofaro 1971: 81; Pitre 1889, vol. 2: 154.
  50. The association of the death and resurrection of Christ with baptism is also expressed by the liturgy for the consecration of a baptismal font. The priest breathes — in the form of the Greek letter Y (ypsilon), a symbol of the Cross, the 'Tree of life' fertilizing the waters — over the water in the font and immerses a lit candle in it, symbolizing the crucified Christ descending into the water, bringing to it the bright light of the Spirit and of life.
  51. 'Battesimo', in *Enciclopedia Cattolica* (vol. II, p. 1010f). This meaning of baptism is explicitly stated in the Scripture (Colossians 2: 12).
  52. Bronzini 1964: 72-5; Minicuci 1981: 158; Pitre 1889, vol. 2: 160; Priori 1964: 193.
  53. Another supposed consequence of such an unsuccessful baptism was that the child would have the ability to see spirits (Bronzini 1964: 74; Dentoni-Litta 1982: 29; R. Lombardi Satriani 1969: 13; Pitre 1889, vol. 2: 161f). In Zaccanopoli, Calabria, this ability was also attributed to a woman, who had born her first child, during the period between birth and churching (Minicuci 1981: 118). These ideas reflect the association of unbaptized children, as well as mothers prior to churching, with malignity and demonic forces.
  54. Cf. Bloch & Guggenheim 1981 and Gudeman 1972.
  55. Bronzini 1964: 89; Davis 1973: 61; Marzano 1912: 131; Vincelli 1958: 213.
  56. Finamore 1894: 79; Giancristofaro 1970: 388; Pitre 1896a: 103.
  57. De Giacomo 1899: 183; De Nino 1887: 39f; Pitre 1896a: 103.
  58. Bellizzi 1894: 458.
  59. G. Cirelli 1968: 83; Pasquarelli 1897: 55; Pitre 1889, vol. 2: 151.
  60. Cf. Bloch 1992: 89-98.
  61. Colossians 2: 11-13.
  62. Pazzini 1948: 58, referring to an unspecified text by R. Corso.
  63. Henningsen 1990: 208. The animal form that was most commonly thought to be taken on by witches was that of the cat. Probably this idea connects to the cat's



nocturnal habits and its capacity to move about soundlessly in darkness, which suggests the lurking witch on her way to carry out some misdeed, and to the notion of both cat and witch as possessing an unusually intense and enduring vitality. One expression of this is that, as in many other parts of Europe, in Italy cats were said to have multiple (seven) lives.

64. Blok 1981.
65. Cf. Stewart 1991: 153.
66. Pitt-Rivers 1992.
67. Cf. Barth 1966: 4, who views altruism as a 'fundamental negation of the transactional relationship'.
68. 'Grazia', in *Enciclopedia Cattolica* (vol. VI, p. 1020).
69. Genesis 3: 17ff.
70. Revelation 21: 1-4.
71. Webb 1993.
72. 'You shall not covet your neighbour's house. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour'.
73. *Fortuna* was imagined in Sicily as an old, bald and ugly woman with a hunchback. She was prayed to by persons who believed that she would reveal to them the winning numbers on the game of *lotto* (Pitrè 1913a: 306f).
74. This conception recalls the rules that God, according to Leviticus 21: 16-24, imposed concerning offerings to Him. No one with a defect was allowed to make an offering: 'no man who is blind or lame, disfigured or deformed; no man with a crippled foot or hand, or who is hunchbacked or dwarfed, or who has any eye defect, or who has festering or running sores or damaged testicles.'
75. Ariès 1983, esp. pp. 110-123; Camporesi 1988a.
76. D'Amato 1933: 154f.
77. Bonomo 1959: 456ff; Pitrè 1889, vol. 4: 110.
78. Castelli 1878: 16; De Nino 1879: 143f, Finamore 1894: 69; Giancristofaro 1971: 268; Moss & Cappannari 1960: 99; Padula 1967: 316f.
79. 'Sale', in *Enciclopedia Cattolica*.
80. Salt was also commonly used against the evil eye. This was presumably because salt served as an emblem of baptism, which was a sacrament thought to be a powerful protection against the evil eye. Baptism puts a person under the protection of God, it sanctifies him, and it bestows upon him divine grace that strengthens his body and soul.
81. Bynum (1987, esp. p. 261-9) points out that this view does not necessarily imply a total devaluation of the female. In the cosmic dichotomy divine/human, the female could, because of her emphasised physicality, symbolise humanity – a humanity which is sinful and suffering but also longing for its promised salvation. A train of thought following from this is that carnality is a prerequisite of salvation and that the emphasised physicality of women thus allows them an experience of salvation that is richer than that of men. The female was also, in an idealised form, a forceful symbol for love, compassion and fertility. On Bynum's argument, see also Chapter 7, footnote 68.
82. Barnes 1973; Ortner 1974. See also de Beauvoir 1953: book 1, part 1, ch. 1.
83. As examples of persons having fame for being a sorcerer of this kind can be mentioned Pietro Berliario (see Amalfi 1890: 169ff) and Rutilio Benincasa (see Di Francia 1935: 265ff, 272ff; Pagano da Diamante 1902, vol. 2: 301f; Renda 1894a). The Roman poet Ovid had a reputation for having been a *stregone*, especially in

Abruzzo and in the area of his native town Sulmona (De Nino 1886).

### *Chapter 7*

1. An extensive bibliography is found in S. Wilson (ed.) 1983.
2. Cf. Banfield 1958: 130ff; Di Tota 1981: 321f; Gower Chapman 1973: 163; Moss & Cappannari 1982: 67; Pitrè 1899: xxix; Rivera 1988: 278.
3. Salomone-Marino 1897: 173 (free translation). See also: Banfield 1958: 130ff; Pitrè 1899: xxix.
4. For example, the Madonna dei Martiri, patron of Molfetta (Puglia), is said to have: '... resuscitated several dead people, liberated convicted prisoners from their shackles, instantly healed wounds and injuries, straightened out limbs of monstrous cripples and lames, healed persons suffering from consumptive and incurable diseases, restored vision to the blind, hearing to the deaf and speech to the dumb, saved the life of women in childbed, protected seamen from dangers and from the misfortunes inherent in their maritime life, and to have given miraculous assistance in thousands of other cases of illness and calamities' (Ricagni 1961: 48, free translation).
5. Galasso 1982: 84.
6. With the term 'local Catholicism' is here intended Roman Catholicism as actually practised in the local communities. The relation between 'official' religion and 'local' (or 'popular', or 'folk') religion has been debated during the past decades, and the distinction made earlier, between a 'pure' and 'official' religion as opposed to a 'popular' religion characterized by deviations from the official religion, has been criticised (see Carroll 1992: 6ff). Michael Carroll (*ibid.*) points out that the Roman Catholic Church is rather broadminded when it comes to what practices and beliefs are acceptable; 'local Catholicism', therefore, can be understood as 'religion that develops within these allowable limits'. This development, as Edward Shils (1981: 94ff) observes, is of a different nature than that which takes place within the Church. There, the religious knowledge is continuously subject to a '... process of rationalization – clarifying, refining, and making logically consistent', whereas 'the traditions of religious knowledge are received and affirmed in much vaguer, in less differentiated and more patchy forms among ordinary believers than they are among the learned. In both cases, however, the maintenance of the constant element in the tradition is supported by religious practice' (p. 95).
7. L. Lombardi Satriani (ed.) 1971: 112. See also the statistics compiled by Galasso 1982: 113 for information on the relative popularity of patron saints in different regions. A few of the locally venerated images did not portray saints in the proper sense of the term, but figures who were nevertheless patrons of communities and the object of a cult impossible to distinguish from cults of saints proper. These images depicted the crucified Christ, the Archangels Gabriel and Michael, the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit or the Holy Sacrament. In the following discussion, the cults of such images will be treated as instances of saints' cults.
8. In Sicily, for instance, among the 150 communities on the island at the turn of the century, the Blessed Virgin Mary was the patron of 45 (30%), while 88 were devoted to one of 50 other saints (among these San Giuseppe was the most common, being the patron of 13 communities, 7%) and 17 to a patron other than a proper saint, such as the Crucifix (Pitrè 1899: xxx-xxxi). Also in continental Southern Italy the Blessed Virgin is the most popular patron saint, patron of 17%

- of the communities, while San Nicola is the second most popular, patron of 8% (Galasso 1982: 83).
9. William Christian (1972: 44-8) distinguishes between two types of cult of saints in northern Spain. One is 'generalised devotion', in which there is little concern with images; individuals meditate upon the saint's life and pray to him foremost in spiritual matters, such as for redemption and salvation. The other is the collective cults of 'shrine images', which are focused upon wonder-working images and relics that are typically approached in mundane matters, such as protection from misfortune, healing from illness, finding lost livestock and so on. In Christian's terminology, we are thus here concerned with cults of 'shrine images'.
  10. Finamore 1890: 20f.
  11. Concerning typical components of these legends, see: Pitrè 1899: xvii-xxvii; Profeta 1970.
  12. For details, see the information and statistics compiled by Carroll (1992: 61-64).
  13. Angarano 1973: 130, Marzano 1912: 51; Friedmann 1953: 228. Gower Chapman (1973: 182) relates that in Milocca (Sicily) San Calogero was 'said to have been a hermit, or possibly seven hermits, all of them brothers and bearing the same name. His multiplicity is due to the fact that there are well-known shrines to him at Naro and at Girgenti [nowadays renamed as Agrigento], and others have been heard of.'
  14. Giancristofaro 1971: 121f (free translation). See also *ibid.*, p. 139, 309 and Vincelli 1958: 188, concerning similar songs and prayers expressing devotion to San Donato, San Nicola and San Michele.
  15. Bynum 1987, esp. p. 211, 273; Camporesi 1988a, especially ch. 1.
  16. Allegri 1986: 66, 76. For a discussion of the psycho-physiological dimension of stigmatisation, see I. Wilson 1991.
  17. The information on Padre Pio is extracted from Allegri 1986. Concerning comparable miraculous bleedings in Southern Italy in modern times, see L. Lombardi Satriani 1979: 84ff; Rossi 1969: 67ff; I. Wilson 1991: 61, 145.
  18. For instance, according to the legend, the painting of the Madonna dell'Arco, venerated in Sant'Anastasia (Campania), started to bleed on Easter Monday 1450 as a result of being hit by a ball hurled by an infuriated ballplayer (Sorrentino 1950: 111). The painting of the Madonna di Costantinopoli, venerated in Barile, bled from a knife cut inflicted by an enraged loser of a card game (Cervellino 1962a: 10f); the painting of the Madonna di Ripalta, revered in Cerignola (Puglia), bled from an accidental knife cut (La Sorsa 1958: 96).
  19. The painting of the Maria dei Miracoli in Collesano (Sicily) sweat profusely when an uprising among the peasants was imminent in 1643 (Pitrè 1899: 486f), and the painting of the Madonna dell'Arco (see previous note) bled in 1643 in anticipation of 20 troublesome years for the people of Naples (Sorrentino 1950: 108-111). Secretion of sweat, blood or tears is also mentioned in the legends of the following statues, paintings and crucifixes: the statue of the Madonna del Pianto in Diso (La Sorsa 1958: 97); images of the Madonna in the churches of Piedigrotta and Sant'Agata in Palermo (Pitrè 1881: 325f; *Id.* 1894: 66); the image of the Madonna del Balzo in Bisacquino (Pitrè 1898: 162); the painting of the Madonna delle Neve in Francofonte (Sorrento n. d.: 266); crucifixes of Colonna (Trani), Molfetta and Torre Santa Susanna (La Sorsa 1958: 79-84); an image of Christ in Borgetto (Pitrè 1884: 595) and another in Palermo (Pitrè 1899: 472f); a bust of San Gennaro in Pozzuoli (Pozzolini Siciliano 1882: 144f); the image of S. Maria delle Grazie, Galatone (Mazzei 1988: 218); the image of Maria di Fonti, Tricarico (*Ibid.*

- p. 227); the statue of Santissima Annunziata, Ficarra (Ibid. p. 223); the statue of the Madonna delle grotte in Fossa (Pansa 1924: 184); the statue of Vergine di S. Maria, Loreto Aprutino (Ibid.); the image of the Madonna del Sudore, Ripa Teatina (Ibid.); a crucifix in Ortona a Mare (Ibid.); the statue of San Cesidio in Trasacco (Ibid.).
20. Scognamiglio 1925.
  21. Rossi 1969: 148ff (citing a work by D. Damiano); Scognamiglio 1925: 17. In addition to the two examples given above, miraculous liquids were thought also to emanate from the following images or relics: from the sarcophagi of the martyrs S. Nicandro, S. Marciano and S. Daria in Venafro, Molise (G. Cirelli 1968: 75, 88); from the bones of the apostle S. Andrea in Amalfi, Campania (Collin de Plancy 1982: 28f; Scognamiglio 1925: 17), from the statue of S. Egidio in Latronico, Basilicata (F. Cirelli [ed.] 1853, vol. 6: 29; Scognamiglio 1925: 17); from S. Felice in Nola, Campania (Manganelli 1975); from the bones of S. Matteo in Salerno, Campania (Scognamiglio 1925: 17); and from the statue of S. Michele Arcangelo in Sala Consilina, Campania (Scognamiglio 1925: 17). On the feast day of the Madonna dell'Arco in Sant'Anastasia, Campania, the first pilgrims who arrive to the church have the favour of collecting her 'sweat' or 'tears' which trickle over the wall behind the painting (Tentori 1976a: 123). Concerning exudation of blessed substances from the relics of saints in older times, see Jones 1978: 66-73, 144-152. In more recent times, when extra-liturgical cults have increased in importance, we also find examples of how images kept in the homes of lay persons are thought to have sweat, bled and shed tears. The best known of these cases is that of a small gypsum statue, kept in the home of a day labourer in Siracusa, that began to excrete tears in 1953 and soon became famous in Italy and abroad. The tears were attributed miraculous capacities, such as healing the sick. This miracle was followed by similar ones in Sicily and elsewhere (Cipriani 1979: 48-54; Rivera 1988: 340). Concerning two pictures of the Virgin Mary, kept in the home of lay persons in Calabria, that are supposed to shed tears and to bleed, see L. Lombardi Satriani 1979: 86f.
  22. Pitrè 1899: 357, 375, 382, 384, 544. Similar exudations are also held to take place in other regions of Southern Italy.
  23. For some examples, see: Pitrè 1899: 86, 100f; Id. 1913a: 266; Gower Chapman 1973: 174; Toor 1953: 155.
  24. Rossi 1969: 93.
  25. Alfano & Amitrano 1950; Pozzolini Siciliano 1882: 131-73. The celebrations of San Gennaro are held over three periods each year, for a total of 18 days.
  26. Alfano & Amitrano 1950: 231-42.
  27. Alfano & Amitrano 1950: 247-51.
  28. L. Lombardi Satriani (ed.) 1971: 205.
  29. Alfano & Amitrano 1950: 249.
  30. Alfano & Amitrano 1950: 249.
  31. N. Douglas 1955: 261. Michael Carroll (1989, chapter 4) discusses in detail blood miracles of the past and present in the area of Naples. From a number of Italian literary works on blood relics, he compiles a list of 17 such relics that were supposed to liquefy regularly and predictably.
  32. Riviello 1893: 130-4.
  33. Alfano & Amitrano 1950: 248.
  34. Rocca 1934: 57-63.
  35. Cf. Geary 1978: 33.

36. Pulci 1894: 495f, see also Pitrè 1896b: 64. In modern times, the water has been found to be bitter and disgusting, but it was believed that it turned sweet and blessed at the moment when the Holy Host was elevated during Mass at the annual celebration of the saint. Many believers hurried to obtain the water, and those who had the opportunity to taste it were 'blessed' (Ibid.).
37. Some other Sicilian examples of wells and springs associated with the death of a saint are given by Pitrè (1896b): the well of Santa Oliva in Palermo, the well of San Placido in Messina, the spring at the place in Mineo where Santa Lucia and San Gemignano are supposed to have been martyred, and the spring of San Alfio in Lentini.
38. Collin de Plancy 1982: 186.
39. Bynum 1987: 273.
40. Rivera 1988: 310.
41. Cited from N. Douglas 1955: 274.
42. The Sicilian ethnography is, if not otherwise stated, from: Varvessis 1890; Hartland 1910; Pitrè 1889, vol. 4: 4-25, Id. 1904, vol. 2: 304-331; Id. 1913a: 185-90.
43. An example is *Birritta russa* ('red beret'), who was believed to haunt the area of Monte Erice and to be the spectre of a Spanish soldier who had died unrepentant at the gallows (Pitrè 1889, vol. 4: 36ff).
44. Pitrè 1889, vol. 4: 9; Id. 1904, vol. 2: 316f.
45. The cult of *anime purganti* ('souls in purgatory') in Naples is another instance of how the cult of souls in Purgatory could merge with a cult of wonder-working dead, of which some were venerated as though they had been saints. This cult focused on human skulls found in old subterranean burial grounds in Naples. These remains of dead people were believed to pertain to souls that were eternally in Purgatory because they had been abandoned by relatives and friends. Descriptions of the cult as it appeared in the 1970s are found in Ciambelli 1980; De Simone 1978; Mariniello 1982: 45-52; Pardo 1989: 115ff; Id. 1982: 563-69.
46. Vincelli 1958: 155f.
47. Dorsa 1884: 138; Padula 1967: 247. On the idea in other European societies that objects related to executions are imbued with healing and unusual powers, see Peacock 1896.
48. Amalfi 1890: 177f; Bellizzi 1894: 458f; Chiapparò 1958; Di Mauro 1982: 39; L. Lombardi Satriani & Meligrana 1982: 220f (citing an unpublished thesis by M. G. Iuliano). Prayers containing such an evocation have also been documented in Sicily, see: L. Lombardi Satriani & Meligrana 1982: 219f (citing unpublished works by V. G. Gugliando and M. C. Raffone); Pitrè 1889, vol. 4: 18-22; Id. 1910: 416ff.
49. Dorsa 1884: 74f. In some Calabrian towns, a living lamb or kid, tied with a rope, was the target of shooting games (Dorsa 1884: 74). A common game was to bury a cock alive so that only its head was above the earth. Men then took turns trying to hit its head with stones hurled from a distance or by blindfolded trying to hit it with a stick; if successful, they won the bird as a prize (Castelli 1878: 92; De Nino 1879: 15f; Dorsa 1884: 145f; L. Lombardi Satriani [ed.] 1971: 383). Ducklings could be suspended from a rope and won as a prize by those who managed to climb along the rope and tear them loose (Castelli 1878: 92f). A goose with a soaped neck could be hung from its legs on a rope and won by the one who managed to grab hold of its neck and tear it loose (Pitrè 1899: 546ff). The violent killing of birds at saints' feasts could, at least in Sicily, take other forms than games. According to the legend, the patroness of Siracusa, Santa Lucia, answered

the prayers of the citizens during a famine by producing a 'rain' of an immense number of exhausted migrating quails, allowing the starving people to satiate their hunger with the birds which were so fatigued that they could easily be picked up from the ground. This legendary event was celebrated in May by a feast which reached its climax when nuns, standing on a balcony of their convent, threw down hundreds of quails, doves, turtle doves and other kinds of birds, of which almost all had their wings clipped, to a great crowd that had assembled in the square below. Some birds managed to flee on their pinioned wings, but most of them become the prey of the crowd as they were caught, killed and fought over so that they were brutally torn apart (Pitrè 1899: 278f). Also at the feast of San Giovanni in Ragusa, and at the feast of San Silvestro in Troina, living birds were distributed to an excited crowd, massacred and torn into pieces in fights over them (Pitrè 1899: 268f, 329f). In these cases, the violence is produced by a discrepancy between the idea behind the distribution of the birds – that they were given away gratuitously in great numbers to all who wished for them – and the actual circumstance that the birds were not great enough in number to suffice for all.

50. The competition over valuable relics, sometimes leading to thefts and assaults, is a common theme in the history of Christianity, see Geary 1978.
51. Dorsa 1884: 145.
52. See, for instance, Rocca 1934.
53. These devotions, as well as the feast, developed in the early 1800s and were officially discontinued after the Second Vatican Council.
54. Pitrè (1899: 101), for instance, writes concerning the Crucifix in Monreale, Sicily, on the third day of its feast (May 3): 'The wounds on the sacred chest are continuously touched by delicate fingers and furrowed hands, by brand new handkerchiefs and worn-out cloths'. On the intense devotion to Christ's wounds in the Middle Ages, see Rubin 1991: 302-6.
55. See Carroll 1989: 138f.
56. Concerning fasting, food asceticism and the Eucharistic devotion of female saints in the Middle Ages, see Bynum 1987. In contemporary northwestern Portugal (Pina-Cabral 1980; Id. 1986, ch. 19), there is a cult of women who are supposed neither to eat nor drink, and therefore not to have normal bodily functions. These women are considered to be virgins and sexually 'pure' and are attributed saintliness.
57. Gower Chapman 1973: 185.
58. Santa Lucia is said to have torn out her eyes to avoid getting married. Sant'Agatha rejected the love of a Roman consul, and was therefore tortured, had her breasts cut off and died in prison.
59. See Carroll 1986: 5ff.
60. Pitrè 1899: 297.
61. Ciambelli 1980: 50; Musco 1965. Other similar examples are the 'Sposa Bianca' ('White Bride') in Torre Annunziata (Rossi 1969: 56f), 'Vincenzo Camuso' in Bonito (Rossi 1969: 49-54), 'Beato Giulio' in Monte Vergine (Rossi 1969: 55) and a young girl in Villa San Leonardo (Finamore 1894: 173, her name is not mentioned by the ethnographer). Some of these persons were said by believers to be souls in Purgatory, but the cults were essentially similar to the cult of saints. In a work concerned with beliefs and customs in Somma Vesuviana (Campania), Angelo Di Mauro (1982: 125) mentions that the corpses of 'il monaco del Casamale' and 'Don Pasquale Coppola' had not decomposed but instead shrivelled up and that

- these persons had been attributed saintliness for that reason.
62. Pitrè 1899: 310ff. Other examples are the patron saint of Melilli (Sicily), San Sebastiano, who is depicted in the village church as a graceful and lively child (Pitrè 1899: 286). The statue of San Donato in Montesano (Puglia) portrays the saint as a youth (Rossi 1969: 27), as do the images of Santa Filomena in Mugnano del Cardinale (Campania, *Ibid.* p. 38f) and of Santa Restituta in Palermo (Pitrè 1913a: 250f). These two saints are both supposed to have been martyred at the age of thirteen. Calabrian images of San Michele have been described as 'ultra-youthful, almost infantile' (N. Douglas 1955: 20), and a certain kind of image of saints in the churches of Naples portrays them as youthful (Toor 1958: 108).
  63. This was very common. In Sicily, children seem to have been present near the image at most saints' feasts (see Pitrè 1899).
  64. Pitrè 1899: 302, and pictures on page 24f and 35.
  65. For a brief discussion of *putti* in Western art, see Ariès 1962: 43-46.
  66. Mark 10: 15.
  67. Gower Chapman 1973: 34, 75.
  68. Caroline Bynum (1987) explores yet another sense in which carnality may be ambiguous in Catholicism. If the carnal aspect of man is to be rejected so that the spiritual aspect can gain priority, then the flesh becomes a principal instrument for attaining spiritual perfection. Because it can be mortified, the carnal attains a *positive value* and mortification itself may become a meaningful and enjoyable concern with that which is bodily. In her work on the religious significance of food to medieval women, Bynum shows how the body as both a problem and an opportunity gave rise to an imagery in which pleasure and pain blended, in which self-discipline became a profound experiencing of the bodily that had erotic and sensual overtones. The author concludes, while referring to metaphors of sufferings used in religious literature at that time: 'In a religiosity where wounds are the source of a mother's milk, fatal disease is a bridal chamber, pain or insanity clings to the breast like perfume, physicality is hardly rejected or transcended. Rather it is explored and embraced' (Bynum 1987: 249f). In the ethnographic sources on traditional Southern Italy, however, we find little information as to what extent such imagery was present among those who practised mortification of their flesh as a devotion to saints or Christ.
  69. Pitrè 1899: 135.
  70. For instance, the feast of San Calogero in Sciacca, Sicily (Pitrè 1899: 383).
  71. Pitrè 1899: 238, citing a narration by A. Gangemi.
  72. For instance, see Rengo 1988: 390.
  73. E. g. Gower Chapman 1973: 180f.
  74. On Italian cults, see Di Tota 1981; Rivera 1988: 278; Rossi 1969: 145. On cults elsewhere, see Boissevain 1977; Campbell 1964: 342-6; Christian 1972: 118-128; Cutileiro 1971: 270ff; Foster 1963; Id. 1967: 233-243; Pina-Cabral 1986, ch. 14; Riegelhaupt 1973: 847f.
  75. Cf. Stewart 1991: 80-83.
  76. For an extensive list of different kinds of votive offerings, see Rossi 1969: 167-72.
  77. Pitrè 1913b: 173.
  78. In Sicily, two principal types of penitential instruments were used: the secret *cilici* and the public disciplines (Pitrè 1913b: 182). The *cilice* was a belt worn next to the skin, under the clothes. It was made of knitted iron- or copper-thread, of which sharp points had been bent so as to point towards the skin. It was preferably worn around the trunk or a thigh, causing pain at the slightest movement. The

disciplines were of many kinds: a rope with knots, a chain with flattened rings, a little chain with sharp points at its end, a little chain with spiked leaden balls attached, a scourge made of rope with small spiked disks, and a scourge with a disc in which very sharp fragments of glass, capable of penetrating the skin to a depth of one centimetre, had been inserted.

79. Pitrè 1881: 173-7; Id. 1899: 283-92. Similar mortifications were also performed in connection with the feast of Sant'Alfio in Trecastagne, Sicily (Ibid.: 234-40). Since Sant'Alfio is supposed to have been martyred by, among other torments, having received lashes on his naked body, it seems probable that the nakedness of the men in this case also is an imitation of the saint.
80. Cf. Pina-Cabral (1986: 171), discussing Portuguese cults of saints.
81. Angarano 1973: 180f; Corso 1959; De Giacomo 1899: 124; Di Tota 1981: 327f; Dorsa 1884: 71; N. Douglas 1955: 258; Falbo 1899: 5; Finamore 1890: 28f; Frazer 1907-36, part 1, vol. 1: 299f; Pitrè 1889, vol. 3: 143f; Id. 1913a: 267.
82. See Carroll 1992: 72ff.
83. E. g. Pitrè 1899: xvi-xvii.
84. Pitrè 1899: xlvii.
85. L. Lombardi Satriani (ed.) 1971: 235, 277, 289, 317.
86. Pitrè 1899: xlviii. See also Pitrè 1889, vol. 2: 249 for details on this practice in Sicily, and Rossi 1969: 92f concerning its importance in Southern Italy at large.
87. Acocella 1936: 63; Rossi 1969: 92.
88. De Blasio 1903.
89. L. Lombardi Satriani (ed.) 1971: 261f. See also Pitrè (1889, vol. 3: 142f), who describes similar mortifications in Nicosia and in the area of Siracusa, when crucifixes were carried in processions formed to ask for rain.
90. Riviello 1893: 134-40.
91. Cf. Turner & Turner (1978), construing Christian pilgrimage as a 'liminoid phenomenon' involving the temporary formation of 'communitas', an 'ordered antistructure' to profane social structure. Eade & Sallnow (1991) review the anthropological approaches to Christian pilgrimage and include the Turners' model in their view of pilgrimage as a 'realm of competing discourses'. See also Tripaldi 1998
92. Bloch 1992.

## *Chapter 8*

1. Carroll 1992: 25, who derives his information from a work by D. Marcucci.
2. Brelich 1953-54.
3. Brelich 1953-54: 40.
4. Rossi 1969 is a good source on pilgrimages to sanctuaries in Southern Italy in the 1960s.
5. On local legends of saints in Calabria and Abruzzo, see Basile 1956 and Profeta 1970.
6. Carroll 1992: 53 (citing G. Medica) informs that in a sample of 697 Marian sanctuaries in Italy, 112 (16%) had been erected on the site of an apparition.
7. E. g.: Pitrè 1896b: 59, 62; Id. 1899: 359.
8. Madonna del Lauro, Castellammare (Amalfi 1890: 181f); Madonna delle Mortelle, Villafranca (Pitrè 1899: 406); Madonna della Neve, Francofonte (Ibid: 407); Madonna dei Miracoli, Alcamo (Ibid: 478f); Madonna di Castellana, Castellana (Verlengia 1958: 47); S. Maria in Basilica, Monteferrante (Ibid: 55);



- Madonna della Mazza, Pretoro (Ibid: 63); Santa Reparata, Casoli (Ibid: 85); Madonna dell'Incoronata, Foggia (La Sorsa 1958: 97); S. Maria del Monte, Castiglione Messer Marino (Mazzei 1988: 213); Madonna dei Sette Dolori, Pescara Colli (Ibid: 215); S. Maria Vergine, Anzano di Puglia (Ibid: 217); S. Maria del Lauro, Meta di Sorrento (Ibid: 221); S. Maria di Avignano, Campagna; Madonna di Costantinopoli, Felitto (Ibid: 222); Santissimo Crocifisso, Terranova Sappo Minulio (L. Lombardi Satriani [ed.] 1971: 297); Madonna del Bosco, Spinazzola (Medica 1965: 598); Maria della Catena, Laurignano (Ibid: 609); Madonna delle Grazie, Modica (Ibid: 648); S. Maria dei Miracoli, Acireale (Raccuglia 1903: 237); Madonna delle Grazie, Carpanzano (Padula 1977: 27).
9. Santa Maria del Toro, Vico Equense (Amalfi 1890: 185); Madonna di Piedigrotta, Naples (Toor 1953: 98); Madonna del Belvedere, Carovigno (L. Lombardi Satriani [ed.] 1971: 225f); Maria della Grotta, Praia a Mare (Ibid.: 316); S. Giovanni, Ragusa (Pitrè 1899: 325); Santissimo Crocifisso, S. Margherita (Ibid.: 386f); Maria del Monte, Racalmuto (Ibid.: 422); Madonna del Mazzaro, Mazzarino (Ibid: 531f); Maria della Grotta, Carpignano Salentino (La Sorsa 1958: 92); Madonna di Butirrito, Ceglie (Ibid.: 95f); Madonna di Ripalta, Cerignola (Ibid.: 96f); Madonna di Melendugno, Melendugno (Ibid.: 104f); Maria di Sovereto, Terlizzi (Ibid.: 113f); Sant'Oronzo, Turi (Ibid.: 172f); Sant'Elisabetta, Crecchio (Verlengia 1958: 95); Madonna del Pollino, San Severino Lucano (Rossi 1969: 85); Maria della Grottella, Copertino (Mazzei 1988: 218); Santa Venera, Grotte (Gower Chapman 1973: 162); Maria del Taburno, Bucciano (Medica 1965: 526); Maria dei Lattani, Roccamonfia (Ibid.: 537); Maria della Vigna, Pietravairano (Ibid.: 539); Maria degli Angeli, Cassano delle Murge (Ibid.: 565); Santa Maria Celimanna, Supersano (Ibid.: 581); Madonna di Costantinopoli, Barile (Cervellino 1962a: 10f); Santa Lia, Cassano Irpino (Falbo 1899: 4); Il Crocifisso di Bilici, Petralia Sottana (Pulci 1894: 502).
  10. S. Rosalia, Palermo (Pitrè 1899: 5f); S. Silvestro, Troina (Ibid: 264f); S. Colagero, Naro (Ibid.: 379).
  11. For instance: the caves of Frate Alfio and of San Guglielmo in Noto (Pulci 1894: 490-3), the cave of Sant'Angelo in Sant'Angelo Muxaro (Pitrè 1899: 420).
  12. Madonna dei Sette Veli, Foggia (Vitale 1894); Madonna della Lavina, Cerami (Pitrè 1899: 241f); Maria del Bosco, Niscemi (Ibid.: 527f); Madonna del Ponte, Lanciano (Giancristofaro 1971: 121); Maria di Pozzano, Castellammare di Stabia (Medica 1965: 542); Maria del Pozzo, Capurso (Ibid.: 564); Santa Filomena, Santa Severina (De Giacomo 1899: 113-9); San Martino, Fara San Martino (Finamore 1890: 186f); Madonna di Altomare, Andria (La Sorsa 1958: 88f); Santa Maria dei Graci, Taormina (Raccuglia 1900: 119f).
  13. Madonna delle Galline, Pagani (Amalfi 1890: 188f), Madonna dell'Agricoltura, Parabita (Rivera 1988: 344); S. Maria dei Miracoli, Acireale (Raccuglia 1903: 237); Spirito Santo, Gangi (Pitrè 1899: 120ff); Madonna dell'Udienza, Sambuca di Sicilia (Ibid.: 432f); Maria dell'Alemanna, Gela (Ibid.: 534f); Santissimo Crocifisso, Palo del Colle (La Sorsa 1958: 80f); Madonna del Pianto, Diso (Ibid.: 97); Santissimo Crocifisso, Taranta Peligna (Verlengia 1958: 83); Madonna della Consolazione, Reggio Calabria (Basile 1956: 9); S. Maria della Baia, Barrea (Mazzei 1988: 214); Maria Mater Domini, Nocera; (Ibid.: 222); Madonna della Luce, Mistretta (Cattabiani 1988: 285); Madonna della Libera, Cercemaggiore (Medica 1965: 514); Maria del Carpinello, Visciano (Ibid.: 558); Madonna della Rocca, Alessandria della Rocca (Ibid.: 630); Madonna di Picciano, Matera (Tentori: 1971: 135); Vergine dell'Assunta, Guardia Sanframondi (De Blasio 1903: 364).

14. Vergine dei Martiri, Molfetta (La Sorsa 1958: 105f); Madonna della Serra di Tricase, Tricase (Ibid.: 114f); Madonna del Polsi, San Luca (Basile 1956: 15); Madonna della Madia, Monopoli (L. Lombardi Satriani [ed.] 1971: 216); Madonna Bulumed, Pagliara (Raccuglia 1900: 120f); Madonna della Neve, Torre Annunziata (Mazzei 1988: 221); S. Maria a Mare, Maiori (Ibid.: 222; Maria d'Itri, Cirò Marina (Ibid.: 223); Madonna Greca, Isola Capo Rizzuto (Ibid.: 224); Madonna di Loreto, Altavilla Milicia (L. Lombardi Satriani [ed.] 1971: 348); Santissimo Crocifisso, Menfi (Pitrè 1899: 119); San Rocco, Butera (Ibid.: 541f). An alleged relic of one of S. Agata's breasts, venerated in Gallipoli, is said to have once fallen of a ship and later been found on the seashore (La Sorsa 1958: 144).
15. Eliade 1978 is a fundamental work on the symbolism of the chthonic realm.
16. An example of such beings is the *ovvitini* in Sicilian popular belief (Pitrè 1889, vol. 4: 192f).
17. Cocchiara 1980, chapter 4.
18. L. Lombardi Satriani & Meligrana 1982: 72ff.
19. Gigli 1893: 94f; Pitrè 1889, vol. 4: 194-9; Simiani 1889b: 484-8.
20. A personification of the forces of the well, found in certain parts of Sicily, was the *Monacella della fontana* (the 'little nun of the fountain'), see Pitrè 1889, vol. 4: 187-191.
21. Concerning symbolisation of the sea as a source of mercantile wealth in the Renaissance, see Boholm 1990, ch. 14; Muir 1981: 131.
22. Frazer 1907-36, part I, vol. II, ch. ix-x.
23. The *albero della cuccagna* is an element in the imagery of the *paese di cuccagna*, a land of plenty with lakes of fat, mountains of cheese, rivers of wine or milk and so on. See Bronzini 1979; Cocchiara 1980; 'Cuccagna', in *Enciclopedia Italiana*.
24. On the sanctity of groves in Italian antiquity, see Edlund 1987: 51-4.
25. Armstrong 1973.
26. Grégorie 1990.
27. The older literature on these subjects is extensive. The most comprehensive sources are Frazer 1907-36, part V, and Mannhardt 1904-05.
28. Pitrè 1889, vol. 3: 157. De Martino (1958: 250) writes that, in Puglia, funeral lamentations could occasionally be intoned during the harvest.
29. De Nino 1881: 158f.
30. Tancredi 1940: 100.
31. Cf. Acocella 1936; Rivera 1988: 351ff.
32. Brelich 1953-54. See also: La Sorsa 1930: 107; Riviello 1893: 137f; Rossi 1969: 94f.
33. Numerous examples of such behaviour in caves at sanctuaries are related by Rossi 1969, see also Acocella 1936: 66 and Brelich 1953-54.
34. Rossi 1969: 28ff.
35. Pansa 1924: 129.
36. For some examples, see Rossi 1969: 175f.
37. Examples are related by: G. Cirelli 1968: 95; Corrain & Rittatore & Zampini 1967; Giancristofaro 1978: 187; Pitrè 1896b.
38. Hamilton 1906.
39. Giancristofaro 1965: 127; Id. 1971: 116; Pansa 1924: 112-5.
40. Rivera 1988: 308.
41. Dorsa 1884: 71. For more information concerning the practice of incubation in South Italian churches and sanctuaries, see Hamilton 1906: 182-8 and Rossi 1969: 36f, 98f.
42. Cf. Pansa 1924: 113.

43. For a comprehensive account of the discourse about dreams in Southern Italy, see L. Lombardi Satriani & Meligrana 1982, ch. IV.
44. Amelung 1907 is a central work on this symbolism. See also: Ginzburg 1990, ch. 2; Mayer 1936: 30f; Tillhagen 1989: 246ff, 263.
45. Amelung 1907: 128; Cohn 1975: 251f; Lewy 1933; Mayer 1936: 55-61. Another expression of the chthonic association of the witch, found in South Italian ethnography, is the idea that an attacking witch could be immobilised if a knife (or a piece of iron) was thrust into the ground (Amalfi 1890: 164; Finamore 1884: 226).
46. See Edlund 1987.
47. For a discussion of Italian 'Black Madonnas' in this historical perspective, see Moss & Cappannari 1982.
48. Moss & Cappannari 1982: 61f.
49. See, for instance, Amalfi 1890: 74; Angarano 1973: 142; De Martino 1958: 104f; Dorsa 1884: 80; Pitre 1889, vol. 4: 33.
50. De Martino 1958: 107; Pitre 1889, vol. 4: 39.
51. L. Lombardi Satriani & Meligrana 1982: 64.
52. Finamore 1890: 9; Pitre 1889, vol. 4: 33.
53. Cf. Bynum 1987: 246-51. As mentioned in Chapter 5, the initiation of a nun could involve a symbolic marriage with Christ.
54. Cf. Boholm 1993: 95-101. For descriptions of South Italian Carnival figures, see: De Simone & Rossi (eds.) 1977; Toschi 1955, ch. 5 and 6.
55. Examples of such practices are found in: Angarano 1973: 308; Amalfi 1890: 40; De Nino 1881: 199f; Toschi 1955, ch. 9.
56. For a brief ethnographic description of these practices, see: De Giacomo 1899, vol. 2: 79f.
57. On the Church's regulations concerning this type of fast, see 'Diguno', in Enciclopedia Cattolica.
58. 'Diguno', in Enciclopedia Cattolica (vol. IV, p. 1590).
59. Ibid. p. 1595.
60. In Naples it is said that: *carne fa àuta carne* (meat/flesh makes other meat/flesh) and *carne fa carne e vino fa sango* (meat makes flesh and wine makes blood; Altamura & Giuliani 1966: 134).
61. Finamore 1890: 120f; Pitre 1881: 216.
62. L. Lombardi Satriani (ed.) 1971: 392; Perrotta 1986: 16f.
63. L. Lombardi Satriani & Meligrana 1982: 398, citing an unpublished thesis by F. Laganà.
64. E. g.: Bronzini 1953: 222; Cervellino 1962a: 14; Perrotta 1986: 23.
65. Cervellino 1962a: 14; Galt 1991c: 201f; Perrotta 1986: 14.
66. Toschi 1963: 301.
67. Toschi 1963: 301f.
68. Here the descriptions relating to the liturgy of the Church concern the missal of Pius V, introduced in the 16th century and in use until the 'Restored Order of the Holy Week' of the missal of Pius XII became obligatory in 1955. In this latter order, the liturgy of Easter was revised to better conform to the sequence of events described in the Scripture. One important change is that the resurrection of Christ is celebrated, not at Saturday noon as in the old order, but instead immediately after midnight on Easter Sunday.
69. For descriptions of *sepolcri*, see: Acocella 1936: 32f; De Fabrizio 1907: 392f; Gower Chapman 1973: 167; Pitre 1881: 210ff; Tancredi 1940: 29.

70. Cf. Buttitta 1978: 29.
71. For descriptions of such enactments, see: Acquaviva 1981; Buttitta 1978; Cervellino 1962a: 15-24; De Fabrizio 1907; Gower Chapman 1973: 168; Perrotta 1986: 24-44; Sciascia 1965.
72. In Ciminna (Sicily), only children were allowed to participate in the procession (Sciascia 1965).
73. Venturi 1901: 359f, the name of the village is not mentioned.
74. De Fabrizio 1907: 393f. Other descriptions of severe self-mortification at Easter are found in: Borrello 1899; L. Lombardi Satriani (ed.) 1971: 217, 321; Padula 1977: 24; Pellizzari 1889; Pitrè 1913b: 182; Toschi 1955: 707 (citing works by S. Guastella and A. Lumini).
75. This association is also expressed by the religious songs and verses of Easter, popular especially among women, many of which relate the Passion from the point of view of the Madonna (see Gower Chapman 1973: 175).
76. Finamore 1890: 122; L. Lombardi Satriani & Meligrana 1982: 398, citing an unpublished thesis by F. Laganà.
77. Finamore 1890: 123f; Dorsa 1884: 48; Pitrè 1881: 220.
78. See: Cervellino 1962a: 42; De Nino 1881: 215; Finamore 1890: 124f; R. Lombardi Satriani 1969: 15, 17, 45; Dorsa 1884: 48.
79. Pitrè 1889, vol. 3: 145.
80. Salerno 1988: 126.
81. Buttitta 1978: 25; L. Lombardi Satriani (ed.) 1971: 260, 375.
82. E.g. Acts 8: 32-35.
83. L. Lombardi Satriani & Meligrana 1982: 368, citing an unpublished thesis by S. Trimboli.
84. For descriptions of these breads, see: Angarano 1973: 319; Buttitta 1978: 19f; Cirese 1971: 49-52; De Fabrizio 1907: 396; Dorsa 1884: 49; Finamore 1890: 126f; Perrotta 1986: 22; Pitrè 1881: 224ff; Uccello 1976: 82-93.
85. See, for instance: Finamore 1890: 128; Sordi 1986: 63f. Pitrè 1881: 128-32, 222f; Venturi 1901: 363f.
86. Concerning such picnics, see Finamore 1890: 130-4; Pitrè 1881: 227ff; Tancredi 1940: 26.
87. Pitrè 1881: 227.
88. Cf. Campbell 1964: 349, who discussed the everyday cult of saints and the annual celebration of Easter in a Greek village. He concludes that both concern the reconciliation between man and God and differ merely as to scale.
89. On the symbolism of the egg in Europe, see: Eliade 1976: 427-31; Newall 1984. Easter breads containing whole eggs were, at least in Calabria, traditionally offered to the families that mourned a deceased relative (Dorsa 1884: 49). This custom can be understood as another expression of the notion that food offerings to a bereaved family confer to it vital and generative force (cf. the discussion of the *consuolo*, Chapter 4 above).
90. Venturi 1901: 363, we are not informed of the name of the community.
91. Cf. Bloch 1992, ch. 3.
92. Cf. Boholm 1992. The moon calendar is also made to converge with Christ's Passion, since Easter is celebrated the first Sunday after the first full moon following the spring equinox. This means that the *triduo sacro* is celebrated at a full moon or so shortly afterwards that the moon tends to appear to the eye as full although it in fact has begun to wane. A belief has been documented among the Sicilians that Easter Eve always was celebrated at a full moon (Pitrè 1881: 222).

93. Cf. Bynum 1987, ch. 2.
94. 'Eucaristia', in *Enciclopedia Cattolica* (vol. 5, p. 739).
95. Cf. Rubin 1991.
96. According to the Lutheran notion of God's ubiquity, Christ is present everywhere, hence also in the bread and wine of the Mass; there is no transubstantiation but instead a 'consubstantion', which is revealed and accentuated by the words of the officiating priest at the moment of the Eucharistic sacrifice in Mass. Apart from when being used in Mass, consecrated bread and wine are not considered to relate differently to Christ than ordinary foodstuffs and entities in the world. There can thus be no cult of the consecrated Host.
97. On the Roman Catholic cult of the Eucharist, see King 1965 and Rubin 1991.
98. See Browe 1938; Rubin 1991: 108-29.
99. In Trani (Puglia), for example, it was told that a nun, who once lived in that town, had doubts about the dogma of transubstantiation and did not consume the Holy Host when she participated in Communion but instead collected it in secrecy. When she had collected a number of Hosts, she put them in a frying pan and started to fry them. Suddenly the Hosts transformed into blood, so copious that it poured out of the pan and flooded the room. The terrified nun begged God for pardon, and by His grace she was saved. The people of Trani were so impressed by this miracle that they built the church of San Salvatore at the place where it had occurred and where one today can see a wall painting depicting the miracle of the Host (La Sorsa 1958, legend no. 230).
100. Concerning diet in traditional Southern Italy, see: Cavalcanti 1984: 27-57; Teti 1978.
101. Acocella 1936: 130.
102. Cavalcanti 1984: 105.
103. The Sicilian ethnography is extracted from: Castelli 1902: 405; Pitrè 1889, vol. 4: 339f.
104. Cavalcanti 1984: 105f; Dentoni-Litta 1982: 85f; Finamore 1894: 18f; R. Lombardi Satriani 1969: 18f.
105. The Sicilian ethnography is extracted from: Gower Chapman 1973: 186f; Pitrè 1889, vol. 3: 158-66, 174-8; Pulci 1895: 16-30; Salomone-Marino 1897: 50-62.
106. Cavalcanti 1984: 105f.
107. Pitrè 1889, vol. 3: 182.
108. Jurlaro 1983: 28.
109. Pitrè 1889, vol. 4: 331.
110. De Nino 1881: 209.
111. Cf. Bossy 1983, who makes a distinction between the sacrificial and the sacramental aspect of the medieval Mass. The former aspect is expressed in the Canon, while the latter is expressed in Communion. Bossy argues that '...the distinction between sacrifice and sacrament in the mass of the waning middle ages ... [is] ... equivalent to a distinction between the Christian community considered as an assembly of distinct parts and that community considered as a transcendent whole' (p. 35). Bossy concludes that the celebration of the Mass had socially integrative powers.
112. Uccello 1976: 23.
113. L. Lombardi Satriani 1971 (ed.): 115; Moss & Cappannari 1982: 61ff; Uccello 1976: 23.
114. Cocchiara 1980: 14; Pitrè 1881: 452f.
115. Gower Chapman 1973: 165.

116. Cattabiani 1988: 84.  
 117. James 1959; Frazer 1907-36, part IV.

### Chapter 9

1. A law stating that no burials were to take place in churches and were to be no closer than one mile (1852 m.) from urban settings was legislated in the kingdom of Naples and Sicily as early as 1710. (Farella 1982: 84f). It was, however, ineffective. In Naples, where the growing population caused increasing problems with burial in church, this type of burial was abolished in 1836 (Lancellotti 1951, vol. 2: 221).
2. N. Douglas 1955: 314.
3. Cf. Ariès 1983, esp. ch. 11; Etlin 1984, ch. 1; Pina-Cabral & Feijó 1983: 20ff.
4. F. Cirelli (ed.) 1853, vol. 21: 71; Gargano 1981: 69f; Padula 1967: 78f; Riviello 1893: 46.
5. De Rosa 1978: 36.
6. This was the practice in Verbicaro, Calabria, see: Corso 1911: 147; Padula 1977: 282.
7. Cavalcanti 1984: 66; Pitre 1889, vol. 4: 471.
8. For some descriptions, see: Finamore 1894: 89; Bronzini 1964: 428f (citing a work by F. Giannone); Riviello 1893: 46.
9. Cf. Bloch 1971 (esp. p. 114, 166), discussing the Merina of Madagascar.
10. The information on Capuchin burial is extracted from: Farella 1982; Fincati 1881: 153; Pitre 1904, vol. 1: 382f; Saccà 1894a: 946f.
11. Padula 1967: 77f.
12. Bronzini 1964: 428f (citing a work by F. Giannone).
13. Mariniello 1982: 23ff.
14. Marguerite Gardiner: *The Idler in Italy* (1939, written 1839-40), cited in André 1970: 107ff.
15. Fucini 1976: 77-83; Lancellotti 1951, vol. 2: 220f.
16. F. Cirelli (ed.) 1853, vol. 6: 50; N. Douglas 1955: 314; Gissing 1921: 87; Riviello 1893: 45, 47.
17. Bronzini 1964: 408; L. Lombardi Satriani & Meligrana 1982: 171.
18. Minicuci 1981: 37.
19. Cf. Goody & Poppi 1994.
20. Walsh (1914 : 31) cites a newspaper from 1888 where it is said that the Neapolitans: '...exhume a corpse a year or two after it has been buried ... [and] have the skeleton taken to pieces and the bones carefully cleaned...'.  
 21. The description of burial customs in Naples is based on Mariniello (1982: 38-42) and Pardo (1989: 106-113), who both refer to the situation in the 1970s and 1980s.
22. Pardo 1989: 110.
23. Mariniello 1982: 41.
24. Ciambelli 1980: 53; Rossi 1977: 52. Italo Pardo (1982: 556) documented a case of a woman who claimed that her deceased husband frequently appeared in her dreams and complained to be suffering from wetness in his burial niche. His pains could be relieved, she thought, if his wrapping was changed.
25. On Roman burial customs, see Toynbee 1971 (on cremation versus inhumation, esp. p. 39ff).
26. Permission to perform cremation could, however, be granted in individual cases and generally in exceptional circumstances, such as epidemics and war.

27. Mariniello 1982: 52.
28. James 1933: 190.
29. 'Cremazione', in *Enciclopedia Cattolica*.
30. For an example of anti-cremation sentiments in Italy at the turn of the century, exposing an array of moralistic, theological, historical, economical, political, sociological, juridical, biological, ecological and hygienic arguments, see Rotella 1895.
31. Pardo 1989: 107; Id. 1982: 559f.
32. Guastella 1976: 178; Pitrè 1889, vol. 2: 242.
33. L. Lombardi Satriani & Meligrana 1982: 14; Pardo 1989: 110.
34. Pitrè 1889, vol. 4: 27.
35. Cf. Pardo 1983: 117.
36. See, for instance, Bronzini 1953: 245; R. Lombardi Satriani 1969: 26f; Pansa 1924: 61ff; Pitrè 1913a: 289; Romano 1884; Tancredi 1940: 98.
37. L. Lombardi Satriani & Meligrana 1982: 180.
38. Basile 1958: 104; Castelli 1878: 18, 70; Marzano 1912: 48; McDaniel 1925: 196; Pitrè 1889, vol. 4: 26f, 40-58; Romano 1884.
39. Angarano 1973: 123; Dorsa 1884: 93f. According to L. Lombardi Satriani & Meligrana (1982: 26), the practising of domestic mourning ceremonies despite the absence of the corpse was quite a wide-spread custom in the 1970s, but we are not informed whether some sort of representation of the deceased was prepared for these occasions.
40. Salomone-Marino 1886a: 37f.
41. Pardo 1982: 537.
42. Marzano 1912: 55f.
43. Dorsa 1884: 92.
44. Grisanti 1898: 323.
45. Finamore 1894: 91; Nobilio 1962: 55; Priori 1964: 326.
46. It may be noted that a folktale from Abruzzo ('The Resuscitated King') has as a core event that a dead king is brought back to life by a girl who, crying by his grave, fills a pot with her tears (De Nino 1883, tale no. 73). In this tale, a copious shedding of tears thus not only hinders a departed person from finding peace after death, but brings him back to life.
47. Castelli 1878: 70; D'Amato 1933: 158; Finamore 1894: 103f; Gower Chapman 1973: 197; L. Lombardi Satriani & Meligrana 1982: 64; R. Lombardi Satriani 1969: 27; McDaniel 1925: 196; Nobilio 1962: 55; Pitrè 1889, vol. 4: 26f. The belief has also been reported in Calabria that the soul of a murdered person would wander on earth until the day of the offender's death and that it tormented him mercilessly (R. Lombardi Satriani 1969: 27). This belief reflects the ideology of the *vendetta*. The victim himself takes revenge on his slayer, and the soul's woeful and restless condition calls for a swift retaliation from its living relatives so that it shall be released from this world.
48. See, for instance, Bronzini 1953: 245; Finamore 1894: 103-10; Pitrè 1889, vol. 2: 243.
49. Pardo 1989: 114.
50. This belief was documented in Abruzzo (where the child spirit was called *mazzamaurello*), Campania, Puglia and Basilicata (Bronzini 1953: 246ff; Priori 1964: 502-5; Rivera 1988: 102). The belief in the *monachello* was, however, spread over vast areas of Southern Italy, but it was not held everywhere that this being was the spirit of an unbaptized child. It could be thought to be a 'rebellious

- angel' or 'spirit' from the time when Satan was expelled from the heavens (De Giacomo 1899: 201-6; Dorsa 1884: 113ff; Simiani 1889a), or a capricious and restless spirit created by the 'bad' death of an adult (Pardo 1989: 114).
51. On the origin and development of the doctrine of Purgatory, see Le Goff 1984. The doctrine of the Church is that only persons who die in a state of grace, i. e. with all mortal sins confessed and absolved, enter Purgatory. There the soul is purged from all stains of forgiven mortal sins, unabsolved venial sins and imperfections. Among the laity, the view appears simply to have been that in Purgatory the soul atoned for its sins.
  52. Conte 1910: 67.
  53. Bronzini 1964: 432; Priori 1964: 325. Chapter 4 discussed the sinister consequences of taking back foodstuffs offered as *consuolo*. Beggars, however, were evidently not thought to suffer any harm by consuming leftovers from *consuolo* food, nor was their taking away of food thought to bring another death in the bereaved family. These facts are in line with the arguments presented earlier. The poor have not offered the family food-cum-vitality through *consuolo* gifts, and hence are not suggestive of nullifying an input of vital force to the bereaved family. As presently will be argued, they themselves are already associated with death and are therefore 'immune' to the ominous influence of the leftover funerary food. Furthermore, beggars, and their eventual families, are too far from being on a par with the bereaved family with respect to human resources to be involved in a symbolic balancing of lives.
  54. Pitrè 1895: 123.
  55. This thinking could be expressed by preparing the dead person's favourite dish and offering it to a beggar (Dorsa 1884: 96).
  56. De Martino 1958: 82.
  57. Nobilio 1962: 58; L. Lombardi Satriani & Meligrana 1982: 176 (referring to an unpublished thesis by A. Romeo); Vincelli 1958: 197.
  58. Cf. L. Lombardi Satriani & Meligrana 1982: 100.
  59. Oexle 1983: 52f.
  60. It may be noted that a theme found in a number of popular legends recorded in the Southern regions is that favours made towards a dead person are subsequently richly rewarded. In the collection of Calvino (1971), for instance, this motive is present in legends n. 32, 45 and 108.
  61. The Roman Catholic Church neither recommends prayers addressed to souls in Purgatory nor prohibits them. Authoritative theologians in the Church have different opinions: while some disavow such prayers, others admit them.
  62. See, for instance, Dorsa 1884: 96, Di Mauro 1982: 123.
  63. Concerning the first theme, see, for instance, Dorsa 1884: 96; Faeta 1979: 79; Pitrè 1889, vol. 4: 40. Concerning the second theme, see Bellizzi 1894: 459; Ciambelli 1980: 159; Di Mauro 1982: 123; Finamore 1894: 86; Fucini 1976: 80f; Lancellotti 1951, vol. 2: 222; Migliaccio 1891: 34.
  64. There is a conflict between the practice of bestowing the dead with spiritual merits and the Scriptural text that every man is judged by God according to his own works. Bossy (1983: 43) briefly comments on how the conflict has been theologically solved.
  65. Pitrè 1889, vol. 2: 243.
  66. There is a similar ambiguity of incorrupt bodies in northwestern Portugal (Pina-Cabral 1980; Id. 1986: 230-233). The laity viewed such a body as that of a saint. The priests, however, assuming that it belonged to a great sinner, per-



formed a ritual of 'lifting excommunication', consisting of prayers and flagellation of the corpse. Thereby the deceased was supposed to be unified with the Church and the soul allowed to go to Heaven. As Pina-Cabral notes, the Roman Catholic Church has since long held conflicting views of incorrupt bodies as those of either saints or great sinners.

67. A secular representation of family continuity by means of personal portraits has for a long time been the custom of Italian noble families, which at a prominent location of the home displayed a collection of paintings of dead family members.
68. Cf. Lang 1985.
69. The abstention from cooking is not a consequence of the extinguished hearth. The introduction of gas and electricity in modern times has not changed this custom, and people still refrain from cooking for some days if a family member has died.
70. Concerning these lamentations, see De Martino 1958.
71. A notable exception was the *prefiche*, professional female weepers, who were commonly engaged at funerals in some regions in older times. They displayed signs of grief in exchange for payment. For a comprehensive account of Sicilian *prefiche*, see Salomone-Marino 1886a.
72. Concerning such self-mutilations, see: Amalfi 1892: 67; Basile 1959; Bronzini 1964: 394-7; De Martino 1958: 84, 94f, 362f; Dorsa 1884: 90f; Marzano 1912: 8; Pitre 1889, vol. 2: 214ff, 232; Riviello 1893: 37; Sorrento n. d.: 85.
73. Corso 1950: 1008.
74. Lumini 1889: 83. This practice has also been documented in Sicilian communities with inhabitants of Albanian origin (Pitre 1889, vol. 2: 231; Salomone-Marino 1886a: 41).
75. For some descriptions of codes for mourning, see: Bronzini 1964: 439ff; Corrain 1968: 118; Gower Chapman 1973: 86; Pitre 1889, vol. 2: 238; Vincelli 1968: 195.
76. Amalfi 1892: 75f; Bronzini 1964: 438 (citing works by L. Martuscelli, N. Caputi, P. De Grazia, and C. Centola); Dorsa 1884: 88f; L. Lombardi Satriani & Meligrana 1982: 174 (citing unpublished works by A. Femia and C. Lascala); Marzano 1912: 11; Prato 1939: 190; Riviello 1893: 46f.
77. Amalfi 1892: 69; Bronzini 1964: 439f; Corrain 1962: 118; Dolci 1960: 72; Nobilio 1962: 56; Pitre 1889, vol. 2: 238; Prato 1939: 190.
78. Bronzini 1964: 437; Dolci 1960: 71f; Finamore 1894: 92; Pardo 1983: 114f.
79. Dolci 1960: 71f.
80. Cf. L. Lombardi Satriani & Meligrana 1982: 174.
81. E. g. Grisanti 1896: 479; L. Lombardi Satriani & Meligrana 1982: 29, 194ff.
82. It might for instance be recalled from Chapter 3 that all the water of vessels kept in the home had to be poured out when a death had occurred.
83. Concerning wakes and funerals for children, see: Altomare 1894; Amalfi 1892: 64; Gigli 1893: 40; La Sorsa 1930: 43; Mariniello 1982: 36; Pitre 1889, vol. 2: 240ff; Priori 1964: 313; Salomone-Marino 1897: 224f; Tancredi 1940: 170. Gower Chapman (1973: 34) informs that in Milocca, Sicily, funerals of children under 14 years of age were occasions for rejoicing.
84. The corpse of an unmarried daughter was often dressed in white, not seldom in clothes that would have been proper as wedding clothes, or in a wedding dress that had already been procured (Bronzini 1964: 391; La Sorsa 1930: 39; Mariniello 1982: 36; Finamore 1894: 87). In funeral lamentations, her death was sometimes described as a matrimony with death (De Martino 1958: 92). The wedding-like aspect of her funeral could be further expressed by the incorporation of other

elements of marriage ceremonialism, such as placing a part of the already prepared trousseau in the coffin; throwing *confetti* and coins to spectators during the funeral procession, just as was done at weddings; the participation of *damigelle d'onore* (bridesmaids) at the funeral; and the consumption of foods typical of weddings (Bronzini 1964: 408; Corrain 1962: 116; Finamore 1894: 93; Mariniello 1982: 36; Salomone-Marino 1897: 223f). For comparative European ethnography regarding funerals of unmarried youths celebrated as weddings, see, concerning Greece, Danforth 1982, ch. 4, and, concerning Transylvania, Kligman 1988, ch. 4.

85. Pardo 1983: 116.
86. Bronzini 1964: 57; Giancristofaro 1971: 180; L. Lombardi Satriani (ed.) 1971: 373; Pitre 1881: 458.
87. Di Martino 1891: 560; Pitre 1889, vol. 2: 244f.
88. Gower Chapman 1973: 187ff.

### Chapter 10

1. Ciambelli 1980: 51; Bronzini 1953: 243; Finamore 1890: 183; Riviello 1893: 200; Vincelli 1958: 195.
2. Acocella 1936: 115ff; De Nino 1879: 98, 141.
3. De Nino 1879: 97f; Graziano 1935: 27.
4. De Nino 1879: 141.
5. Cf. Lombroso 1884: 191.
6. L. Lombardi Satriani (ed.) 1971: 235.
7. Dorsa 1884: 32f; Finamore 1890: 65; Gigli 1893: 85; Pitre 1881: 458.
8. G. Cirelli 1968: 85f; Corrain 1962: 119; Di Mauro 1982: 125f; Maone 1979: 52.
9. Volpe 1979: 132f.
10. Moss 1963: 134; Moss & Cappannari 1960: 98.
11. Finamore 1890: 181f, 184; Conte 1910: 38f.
12. Cf. Priori 1964: 333. Moss & Cappannari (1960: 98) report, from a village in the Molise-Abruzzo highlands, that the visit to the family graves on All Souls Day was made to placate the 'spirits' of the dead.
13. La Sorsa 1958: 192.
14. Concerning the imagery of gifts from the dead to children on All Souls Day, see: Bellucci & La Salandra 1937: 60f; Castelli 1878: 58; Corrain 1962: 119; Gower Chapman 1973: 191; La Sorsa 1930: 55; Piaggia 1853: 217; Pitre 1881: 394-403; Saccà 1894a: 942f; Tancredi 1940: 63f.
15. Bellucci & La Salandra 1937: 61.
16. Giancristofaro 1978: 55 (this information concerns Ururi in eastern Molise, a village near the border of Puglia); Tancredi 1940: 63.
17. For descriptions of these sweets, see: Ciambelli 1980: 51; D'Agostino 1988; Rivera 1988: 122; Saccà 1894b; Uccello 1976: 53-63.
18. Marzano 1912: 132.
19. Cattabiani 1988: 59; La Sorsa 1917: 475.
20. Butera 1907; Grisanti 1895: 78f; Patiri 1884; Pitre 1881: 403-6. This mythological old woman could also be called *La vecchia strenna*, that is, 'the old strenna' or *La Vecchia di Natale* ('The Old Christmas Woman'). We are informed by La Sorsa (1930: 55) that, in certain parts of Puglia, children received gifts in socks at New Year, but it is not mentioned what imagery was connected to these gifts.
21. The name *Strenna* is in turn derived from the Latin *strena* (signifying gifts exchanged at mid-winter time), which is related to the Latin *strenuus*, signifying

- 'strong,' 'lively,' and thus connecting with the good wishes of health and well-being which were addressed to relatives and friends at that time of the year.
22. See, for instance: Amalfi 1890: 158; De Giacomo 1899: 56f; Fasulo 1906: 390; Maone 1979: 53; Priori 1964: 53f. In some areas of Puglia, however, children were made to believe that their deceased relatives brought them gifts during the night preceding Epiphany (Corrain 1962: 119).
  23. These two figures are a continuation of an ancient tradition of representing the old year, which should be replaced by a new year when vegetation will be reborn and flourish (for a brief survey of the literature on the 'old hag', see Boholm 1993: 127-30). Their female gender can be understood as reflecting the conception of the fecund forces of nature as female; the 'old hag' was hence an image of 'Mother Nature', who had passed her productive season. As presently will be argued, life cycles and annual cycles symbolically merge, and the 'old hag' in this context represents both the old year and the old generation. The association between 'old hags' and the dead has been expressed in central European cultures by the belief that Percht or Holda led the spirits of the dead in the 'wild hunt', particularly on the nights between Christmas and Epiphany.
  24. On the domestic fire as a centre of family life, see, for instance: Marzano 1912: 126; Pometti 1894; Prato 1940: 44-51.
  25. Finamore 1894: 11.
  26. Finamore 1894: 13f.
  27. Finamore 1894: 12.
  28. Finamore 1894: 67f. This was done, it was said, to harden the bones of the child.
  29. Pirillo 1988: 363.
  30. Finamore 1894: 232.
  31. De Nino 1879: 141; Finamore 1890: 31, 183; Id. 1894: 14; Priori 1964: 329; Vincelli 1958: 197. In Abruzzo, it was a common to try to ward off an approaching storm by removing the fireplace chain and bringing it outdoors or to confront the frightening clouds with other iron utensils from the hearth (such as fire-place tongs) which were placed to form a cross (De Nino 1879: 20f; Finamore 1890: 24f, 31; Giancristofaro 1971: 265f). Presumably this custom relates to the idea that storms were caused by spirits of the dead. To confront these spirits with the chain from the hearth may be seen as a symbolic 'domestication' and enchaining of them, making them less harmful, and the cross formed of irons from the hearth fuses meanings of domestication with the protective power of the Christian cross.
  32. Bellizzi 1894: 459.
  33. Finamore 1894: 15.
  34. D'Amato 1933: 155.
  35. Finamore 1894: 11.
  36. Pitre 1889, vol. 4: 458.
  37. Finamore 1890: 64.
  38. Dorsa 1884: 20; Maone & Maone 1966: 16.
  39. Angarano 1973: 125.
  40. Finamore 1894: 15.
  41. De Martino 1987: 46.
  42. Amalfi 1892: 12.
  43. On such collections of gifts, documented in Abruzzo, Calabria, Campania and Puglia, see: Conte 1910: 40; Corrain 1962: 119; Giancristofaro 1978: 226; Lancellotti 1951, vol. 2: 223; L. Lombardi Satriani & Meligrana 1982: 112f; L.

- Lombardi Satriani (ed.) 1971: 297; Tancredi 1940: 64.
44. Saccà 1894a: 943.
  45. Pitrè 1881: 396.
  46. Piaggia 1853: 217.
  47. Butera 1907.
  48. Acocella 1936: 117; F. Cirelli (ed.) 1853, vol. 2: 24; Dorsa 1884: 98; Giancristofaro 1978: 55, 226; Graziano 1935: 27; Lombroso 1863: 406f; Pitrè 1881: 407, 428; Riviello 1893: 201f.
  49. La Sorsa 1930: 67.
  50. Tancredi 1940: 63.
  51. Vincenzo Dorsa (1884: 67) suggests that this term derives from the Greek word *cuamos*, signifying 'broad bean'.
  52. See, for instance, Acocella 1936: 117; Giancristofaro 1978: 55; Pitrè 1881: 407; Uccello 1976: 60.
  53. In Pollutri (Abruzzo), huge amounts of broad beans were publicly cooked and distributed to the poor while, in some other villages of Abruzzo, whole and cooked grain or corn kernels were customary alms to the poor (De Nino 1879: 118; Giancristofaro 1978: 226, 228). In parts of Sicily and Calabria *cuccia* was eaten and given to the poor (L. Lombardi Satriani [ed.] 1971: 297; Pitrè 1881: 428).
  54. Rossi 1977: 57.
  55. According to Cavalcanti (1984: 84), *cuccia* was eaten 'nearly all over Southern Italy' on this day.
  56. Gower Chapman 1973: 180; Pitrè 1881: 427-30; Id. 1899: 282.
  57. Cavalcanti 1984: 83-6; Dorsa 1884: 67.
  58. Tancredi 1940: 65
  59. Finamore 1890: 86f; Giancristofaro 1978: 226. Dishes based on lentils were eaten by the family on this day in the hope that this consumption would forebode a good and prosperous year to come (L. Lombardi Satriani [ed.] 1971: 384; Salemi 1988: 541).
  60. Giancristofaro 1978: 226; L. Lombardi Satriani (ed.) 1971: 127. In one Sicilian community, broad beans, as well as salt and bread, were taken to the church and blessed by the priest (Gower Chapman 1973: 180). The bread was eaten by the family or given to neighbours, while the salt and beans were fed to the beasts of burden. These blessed foodstuffs were supposed to be good for all who ate them.
  61. Pitrè 1881: 171.
  62. Vincelli 1958: 196.
  63. Marzano 1912: 34.
  64. Pitrè 1881: 407. These fields had been rented to the poor on the condition that legumes were cultivated, so that the owner the following year could sow grain in the enriched earth.
  65. F. Cirelli (ed.) 1853, vol. 14: 24; Marzano 1912: 34; Vincelli 1958: 195f.
  66. F. Cirelli (ed.) 1853, vol. 14: 24; Marzano 1912: 34.
  67. For some examples, see: Cavalcanti 1984: 79-86; Pitrè 1881: 428f.
  68. L. Lombardi Satriani (ed.) 1971: 177.
  69. The *cuccia* corresponds to the Russian *kut'ja*, a dish made from whole grain and ceremoniously eaten at mid-winter which, as in Italy, was a time when the dead were believed to be present on earth (Propp 1978: 46ff). It also corresponds to the Greek *koliva*, made from boiled whole grain (often mixed with cinnamon, almonds, raisins or pomegranate). This dish is eaten after a funeral and is the food proper of the commemorative meals eaten on certain days after a death has

taken place, as well as of the annual services for the souls of the dead in the Church calendar; *koliva* in the form of boiled wheat may also be offered to the dead at Easter (see Campbell 1964: 348; Danforth 1982: 21, 56; Kenna 1991: 104ff; Lawson 1910: 534f).

70. The Gregorian calendar replaced the Julian calendar, which had been used from the time of Julius Caesar. Due to a discrepancy between the Julian year and the solar year of one day in 128 years, the Julian calendar slowly drifted forward in the solar year.
71. Pitrè 1881: 430.
72. Bellizzi 1894: 458; Castelli 1878: 59; Finamore 1890: 189.
73. Cattabiani 1988: 68. Presumably because of her association with light, Santa Lucia has long been regarded as the patroness of those suffering from illness of the eyes. As Cattabiani (*ibid.*) argues, this patronage probably inspired the legendary account that she once tore out her own eyes in order to avoid marrying and thereafter had her vision miraculously restored by God. The idea of a particular saint being the patron of those suffering from a certain ailment is usually inspired by events in the legend of the saint's life but, in this case, the patronage probably inspires the creation of the legend.
74. Dorsa 1884: 31; Finamore 1890: 80f; R. Lombardi Satriani 1969: 21; Pitrè 1881: 456f. According to a report from Grimaldi (Calabria), some women collected water from the well at midnight, believing that it had the capacity to cure infirmities (Dorsa 1884: 31). In Sicily, it was said that an 'enchanted fair', held by the dwarfish *mercanti* beings, took place on Christmas night. The one who was fortunate enough to happen to come upon this fair could, according to numerous local legends, for a small coin buy precious jewels, domestic animals or fruits, which were later found to consist of solid gold (Pitrè 1881: 457; *Id.* 1889, vol. 4: 192, 374ff).
75. For some examples, see: Finamore 1890: 71-4; Priori 1964: 39f.
76. Finamore 1890: 86.
77. Finamore 1890: 85.
78. Finamore 1890: 189f.
79. Finamore 1890: 83f; Toschi 1963: 237-40.
80. De Giacomo 1899: 57; Dorsa 1884: 31, 35; R. Lombardi Satriani 1969: 21f.
81. De Nino 1881: 24; Finamore 1890: 90f; L. Lombardi Satriani & Meligrana 1982: 232f.
82. Corrain 1962: 119.
83. Legumes, as well as certain species of wheat, could also be sown in the spring (during February and March), but this was less common in traditional agriculture.
84. This custom is mentioned by, among others: Basile 1957: 202; Brögger 1972: 226; Castelli 1878: 53f; Corrain 1962: 108; Dorsa 1884: 86; Pitrè 1889, vol. 2: 73f.
85. Corrain 1962: 108; Dorsa 1884: 86; Pitrè 1889, vol. 2: 72ff.
86. Pitrè 1913a: 208.
87. See, for instance: Lancellotti 1951, vol. 2: 207f; Mallinger 1971, ch. 1.
88. Followers of the Greek philosopher Pythagoras (ca. 570-497 B. C.), at first forming small and closed communities, but constituting in the first centuries A. D. an influential philosophical and religious movement in the Roman Empire.
89. On the Pythagorean view of beans, see: Detienne 1994, ch. 2; Mallinger 1971, ch. 1.
90. From the *Sacred Speeches* of the Pythagoreans, cited in Detienne 1994: 50.

91. Cited from Detienne 1994: 51.
92. Cf. Propp 1978: 47f.
93. Cf. Priori 1964: 498
94. An ethnographic account from Basilicata states that the chick-pea was considered to be 'cursed' (Cervellino 1962a: 15). This may indicate that it was attributed ominous significances connecting with death.
95. Augustine used the walnut as an image for the human being: its flesh corresponds to the skin, the shell to the skeleton and the seed to the soul.
96. Finamore 1894: 221; R. Lombardi Satriani 1969: 29; Pitrè 1889, vol. 3: 280; Priori 1964: 396f.
97. See, for instance: Bonomo 1959: 456-62; D'Amato 1933: 157; De Giacomo 1899: 208; Pitrè 1889, vol. 3: 280f, vol. 4: 111ff.
98. Pitrè 1889, vol. 3: 295f. In one particular village, a carob tree was thought to be haunted by spirits of the dead (Gower Chapman 1973: 197). A set of beliefs and practices, documented already in antiquity and of interest in the context of the symbolism of seeds, is the use of beans as oracles. Two reasons can be proposed for this use. First, the seed carries the potential for a plant to germinate and grow; in a mysterious way, it thus contains the future. Second, at least in antiquity, when beans were intimately and explicitly linked with the dead, we may assume that bean oracles were a means to access the otherworldly knowledge of the dead. In traditional Southern Italy, beans were commonly used in procedures for revealing the future. The most widespread use of beans as oracles was intended to unveil to a girl the character of her future husband. In Abruzzo, for instance, a girl could place three broad beans under her pillow on the Eve of Epiphany, one unshelled, one half-shelled and one entirely shelled. When she woke in the morning, she reached under the pillow and by chance seized one of the beans. If she happened to pick the unshelled bean, her future husband would be rich, if she picked the shelled one, he would be poor. Should she pick the half-shelled one, then he would be neither rich nor poor (Finamore 1890: 91, numerous versions of this procedure have been documented, see: Amalfi 1892: 24; Castelli 1878: 80; G. Cirelli 1968: 87; Loria 1907: 43; Nobilio 1962: 50; Pitrè 1889, vol. 2: 5f).
99. Cf. Toschi 1963: 217f.
100. Bell 1979, ch. 4; Padula 1967: 77.
101. La Sorsa 1950: 134.
102. Cf. Eliade 1976: 363-6, and also Propp's (1978: 59) interpretation of gifts of food consisting of seeds and eggs to the dead in Russia.
103. Eliade (1976: 204ff) argues that offerings of water to the dead, which are quite common in Indo-European societies, connect to notions of dissolution, germination and rebirth. If this is true, then the offering of water has a double significance: to quench the imagined thirst of the deceased suffering from the 'dryness' of death, while at the same time moving them towards a regenerative state beyond death.
104. Cremazione, in *Enciclopedia Cattolica* (vol. IV, p. 838).
105. 'Light lie the earth upon thee.'
106. Toynbee 1971: 37.
107. Onians 1951: 267; Toynbee 1971: 49.
108. Cf. Onians 1951: 267.
109. Cavalcanti 1984: 126; Ciambelli 1980: 51; Rossi 1977: 59f.
110. Bloch 1989; De Coppet 1981; Huntington & Metcalf 1979: 89-92.

111. There was a prohibition in the area of Gargano (Puglia) not only to eat meat but also to eat legumes in the house where a corpse was present (Corrain 1962: 115). From the material related in Chapter 4 on food prohibitions after a death, it was clear that meat was identified with the flesh of the deceased, and the reason for also prohibiting the consumption of legumes ought to be a similar identification. Immediately after death, and with the corpse present in the home, the legumes associate to the dead in a state of putrefaction rather than regeneration, and are hence not good for eating.
112. See, for instance, Bronzini 1964: 52; Dentoni-Litta 1982: 27; Pitrè 1889 vol. 2: 162.
113. Cf. Bell 1979: 44f. Kenna (1976, 1991) and du Boulay & Williams 1987 describe similar naming systems in Greece. On the island studied by Kenna, grandchildren are said to 'resurrect' the names of their grandparents and to 'ensure their physical continuity after death' (1976: 24).
114. Bronzini 1964: 53; La Sorsa 1930: 50.
115. Priori 1964: 190.
116. Bronzini 1964: 57.
117. Bronzini 1964: 75; G. Cirelli 1968: 83; Corrain 1962: 114; Dentoni-Litta 1982: 29; Finamore 1894: 73; Pitrè 1889, vol. 2: 158.
118. A Sicilian belief was that the person who helped a pregnant woman to pick up an object she had dropped on the ground so that she did not have to bend down for it herself saved a soul from Purgatory (Pitrè 1889, vol. 2: 129). Since the help extended to the woman implies that she is safeguarded from the risk of abortion caused by bending down in what typically ought to have been an advanced stage of pregnancy, it means aiding in the coming into existence of a healthy child. This in turn implies that the child inherits life potential from a deceased person, who therefore becomes 'finally dead' and is released from Purgatory.
119. L. Lombardi Satriani (ed.) 1971: 373.
120. This ceremony is quite similar to a Greek practice described by Margaret Kenna (1991: 106). Mourners wish children to eat the *koliva* (see footnote 69) that has been prepared after a death, and the rationale for this is that the children's prayers for the soul of the deceased are answered immediately by the angels, who will help it ascend, from its position of being suspended between Hell and Heaven, towards the latter location.
121. See note 63, Ch. 3.
122. For further observations on the association between children and death, see L. Lombardi Satriani & Meligrana 1982: 107-116.
123. Cf. Bell 1979: 66 (concerning the Italian family) and N. Davis 1977 (concerning the French family in Early Modern times).
124. Documented from Abruzzo: Finamore 1894: 237 and Profeta 1964: 21ff; Basilicata: Pasquarelli 1897: 54; Calabria: Adriano 1932: 132ff, Dorsa 1884: 145, Minicuci 1981: 121; Campania: Di Mauro 1982: 161ff and Dentoni-Litta 1982: 28; Molise: Rivera 1988: 210; and Sicily: Pitrè 1889, vol. 3: 357.
125. It suffices to recall the ouroboros image – the snake eating its own tail in a never ending cycle of simultaneous dying and re-creation.
126. Reports from Sicily, Calabria and Basilicata (Adriano 1932: 129ff; Angarano 1973: 140; Basile 1958: 96f; Bronzini 1953: 243; Castelli 1878: 9; De Giacomo 1899: 206; Dorsa 1884: 27f; R. Lombardi Satriani 1969: 60f; Pasquarelli 1894: 637). This ambiguity was often projected upon a distinction between 'white' and 'black' snakes. Other manifestations of the connection between snakes and the regeneration of life from death are the following. Snakes were thought to be very difficult

to kill and, if killed, to have the power to re-animate (Adriano 1932: 130; Pitrè 1889, vol. 3: 358) and they were used as healing remedies in folk medicine (Adriano 1932: 135-9; Cocchiara 1938: 91; Dorsa 1884: 141; R. Lombardi Satriani 1969: 46). Snakes were spectacularly displayed in some celebrations of local cults of saints, such as that of San Domenico in Cocullo and Villalago in Abruzzo, where snakes were hung on the saint's statue (F. Cirelli [ed.] 1853, vol. 4: 130; Giancristofaro 1978: 68-76; Rivera 1988: 232-9, for other examples of such feasts, see Giancristofaro 1978: 70; Rivera 1988: 239ff; Pitrè 1899: 349-61). The reason for this connection between snake and saint is presumably that the snake, just as the saint, embodies notions of regeneration and abundant vitality. In folktales it was told how transformations from snake to human being could take place when a snake sheds its skin and that snakes were in possession of the *erba di salute* ('the grass of health'), having the power to cure every illness and resurrect the dead (see Calvino 1971, tales 144 and 179; De Nino 1883, tale 44).

127. A similar constellation of notions is found in a folk tale recorded in Abruzzo. It narrates that a little girl is devoured by an evil man, a habitual eater of small girls, who at night enters into her bed-chamber through the keyhole of the door. In the morning, her mother finds what is left of her among the bedsheets, a few small bones and, crying, she throws the bones out the window. The bones fall to the earth below, which happens to be the garden of the King, and from them grows an orange tree. The tree bears fruit, and one day the son of the King picks one of these. When he peels the orange, the little girl emerges from within the fruit, even more beautiful and charming than before, and the Prince decides to marry her (De Nino 1881: 42f). In this tale, the evil man, who, like a witch, enters the room through the keyhole, represents a wicked form of individual preservation: he eats young girls. This behaviour contrasts with what could otherwise be expected to take place between a man and a girl in her bedchamber at night: sexual intercourse, which implicates human procreation through marriage. The wicked act of anthropophagy is counteracted by a mode of regeneration that also denies human sexuality. The girl's bones germinate as though they were seeds, and from them grows a tree that bears delicate fruit – it may be noted that this part of the tale expresses the previously discussed association between human bones and seeds. From one of these, the girl is 'reborn'. When thus wicked anthropophagy has been counterbalanced by natural regeneration, ordinary human procreation can be commenced: the Prince marries the girl.
128. Cf. Boholm 1992.
129. It may be noted that a denial of human procreation through sexuality inspired an imagery derived from the natural and vegetal domain in another context. When a child asked an adult where babies came from, the answer, intended to preserve the innocence of the child, could be that babies were found at the bank of a river, in a bush or a thicket, under a tree or a grape plant, in a bunch of grapes, inside a pumpkin, a cucumber or a cauliflower, or that they were born out of a stand of parsley (Amalfi 1890: 7; Cocchiara 1980: 13f; Conte 1910: 45; Finamore 1894: 56; Pitrè 1889, vol. 2: 141). For surveys on this imagery in Europe, see Nyberg 1931: 25-79; Tillhagen 1983: 264-7.

## Chapter 11

1. Cf. du Boulay & Williams 1987.



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### Abbreviations:

ASTP: *Archivio per lo studio delle tradizioni popolari*

RTPI: *Rivista delle tradizioni popolari italiane*

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