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Jenny Ponzio and Francesco Galofaro

# Religion and the semiotization of space: The case of the *Madonna del Rocciamelone*

## 1 Introduction

The Marian sanctuary on the top of the mount Rocciamelone (Italy) is the highest in Europe.<sup>1</sup> Its presence in the space is a key feature in the semiosphere (Lotman 1984) of the local community living at the foot of the mountain. The analysis of the cultural and religious meanings attributed to the Rocciamelone constitutes, therefore, a good case study to show how a semiotic methodology can be applied to look into the semiotization of space and into the relationship between this spatial semiotization and the identity of a group.

Indeed, semiotics offers a set of conceptual instruments useful to gain a better understanding of the way in which a community attributes meaning to its land and, more specifically, how a religious cult deeply rooted on the territory can shape the interpretation of the natural milieu as well as the sense of belonging of the individuals of the group. This enquiry explores different layers of meaning in a corpus of texts:<sup>2</sup> on the one hand, it singles out a set of homologating structures working as semi-symbolic systems, on the other it takes inspiration from Greimas' idea of the semiotics of the natural world and from his distinction, on the plastic level, between the topological, eidetic and chromatic areas, which coincide with the semiotic articulation of—respectively—space, forms and colors (Greimas 1984). Even though these plastic categories are often used to analyze visual texts, in this case we will apply them to study the way in which a community makes sense of its natural and cultural environment.

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**1** This paper is part of the research project NeMoSanctI (New Models of Sanctity in Italy (1960s–2000s)—A Semiotic Analysis of Norms, Causes of Saints, Hagiography, and Narratives), which has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No 757314). Even though the work results from a close cooperation between the authors, for formal attribution, please consider sections 1, 4 and 5 as authored by Jenny Ponzio and sections 2 and 3 as authored by Francesco Galofaro. The translations of the stanzas in section 5 are also by Jenny Ponzio.

**2** Taking inspiration from Peircean and anthropological perspectives, we adopt here a wide notion of text, including not only verbal texts, but also, for instance, works of architecture and ritual practices, such as pilgrimage.

The Rocciamelone is a 3,538 meters high mountain in the western Alps, between the Italian Valle di Susa (Valley of Susa), in the region of Piedmont, 50 km west of Turin, and the French province of Maurienne (figure 1)<sup>3</sup>. On the top of the Rocciamelone, there is a sanctuary devoted to the Virgin, venerated with the appellation of “Madonna del Rocciamelone.”



**Figure 1:** The Rocciamelone, winter.

The origins of the cult on the Rocciamelone date back to the pre-Christian era: archaeological evidences seem to indicate that the Romans had consecrated the Rocciamelone to the god Jupiter (Minola 2016, 9–10). A number of legends surround the mountain, involving devils, hidden treasures, nobles, prelates and kings: especially in the Middle Ages, high mountains were generally considered mysterious places, dominated by supernatural forces, either divine or diabolic (Minola 2016, 25–34). However, a first turning point locating this mountain out of the vague time of legend and rooting it into history took place in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, when the marquis Boniface Rotarius placed a bronze triptych representing the Virgin on the top. According to the tradition, Rotarius was a crusader who fell prisoner of the Turks. In this circumstance, he made a vow to the Virgin promising her that, if she helped him to survive and to return home, he would make a triptych for her and place it into a chapel located on

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<sup>3</sup> License: CC. [https://it.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Rocciamelone\\_inverno.JPG](https://it.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Rocciamelone_inverno.JPG) (accessed on April 8, 2020).

the highest top of the Piedmontese Alps (Piardi 1999, 19–23). The first Marian chapel, probably simply a little cavern, was thus built on the top. An inscription on the triptych indicates that Boniface located it in its shrine on September 1, 1358. In 1673, the triptych was stolen from the shrine by a nobleman and offered to the Savoy king Carlo Emanuele II, who gave it back to the local community. The triptych was first placed in the cathedral of Susa, but since it is a fine and precious artwork (figure 2)<sup>4</sup>, it is now kept in the Museo Diocesano di Arte Sacra (diocesan museum of sacred art) in Susa, the main town at the foot of the mount Rocciamelone.<sup>5</sup> According to the tradition, Rotarius tried to reach the top twice. The first time, he was stopped by difficult meteorological conditions at midway, where he built a first hut, Ca' d'Asti, which was widened in the course of time. It is significant to note that the pilgrimage of Rotarius took place about twenty years after Petrarch's ascent to Mont Ventoux (1336): the poet Petrarch (1999) describes the ascent as both a physical and spiritual journey which had a capital importance for his religious conversion, thus providing an excellent testimony of the widespread (or we could dare say universal) symbolism associating the ascent to high mountains to a spiritual ascent (Minola 2016, 20; Ponzio 2021).

In the course of time, the pilgrimage to the Virgin of the Rocciamelone became an increasingly consolidated tradition among the people of the Valley of Susa and of the region. After a phase of regression in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the local Church authorities discouraged the cult on the top and promoted the veneration in a chapel built at Ca' d'Asti, the pilgrimage to the top knew an important development during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which represents a second turning point in the history of the Rocciamelone: on June 15, 1899, a colossal bronze statue of the Virgin (about 3 m high and 650 Kg weight) was placed on the top of the mountain (figure 3).<sup>6</sup>

The main promoter of this initiative was the bishop of Susa, Edoardo Rosaz (1830–1903), who is the subject of an open cause for canonization and was proclaimed blessed in 1991 by Pope John Paul II.<sup>7</sup> The Rocciamelone was one of the

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<sup>4</sup> License: CC. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Trittico\\_della\\_Madonna\\_di\\_Rocciamelone\\_Susa.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Trittico_della_Madonna_di_Rocciamelone_Susa.jpg) (accessed on April 8, 2020).

<sup>5</sup> On the triptych, see Piardi (1999, 121); Bertolo (1986, 9–20).

<sup>6</sup> License: CC. [https://it.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Madonna\\_Rocciamelone.jpg](https://it.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Madonna_Rocciamelone.jpg) (accessed on April 8<sup>th</sup> 2020).

<sup>7</sup> The collection of Rosaz' official documents and discourses, the acts of his cause for canonization and copies of the newspaper *Il Rocciamelone* are kept in the diocesan archive of Susa. Some documents are also kept in the seat of the Congregation that he founded in Susa, namely



**Figure 2:** The bronze triptych offered by Boniface Rotarius (1358).



**Figure 3:** The statue of the Madonna del Rocciamelone.

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the Congregation of the Suore Francescane Missionarie di Susa. The seat of this Congregation also hosts a small museum about the founder.



central points of interest in Rosaz' actions and discourse. He often described the Virgin as a sentinel, protecting the Valley of Susa from above, and he saw the practice of pilgrimage as a powerful way to reinforce the faith and the cohesion of the Catholic community, which he used to describe as menaced by several enemies, in particular the masonry and the liberal spirit promoted by the French Revolution and spreading across Europe since then. The centrality of the Rocciamelone in Rosaz' view is also demonstrated by the fact that he founded a local newspaper dedicated to the mountain ("Il Rocciamelone"). In order to help to collect the money necessary to build the statue of the Virgin, Giovanni Battista Ghirardi, director of the children periodical "Innocenza," launched a national campaign, asking all Italian children to make a little offering. The initiative had a large success and 130,000 children sent their obol, because Ghirardi promised that a register with the names of all the donors would have been placed at the foot of the statue, where it still lies, underneath a placard reading: "I bimbi d'Italia a Maria" (the children of Italy to Mary). Pope Leo XIII was moved by this initiative, so he proposed the following dedication, also put on the base of the statue: "Alma Dei mater / nive candidior / Maria lumine / benigno Segusiam respice tuam ausoniae tuere fines / coelestis patrona" ("Oh Mary, great Mother of God, brighter than snow, look with benignity at your Susa and protect, heavenly patron, the borders of Italy"). The statue was realized by the Turin sculptor Giovanni Stuardi and was brought on the top of the mountain, divided into eight pieces and there assembled by the Alpini, the Italian army's mountain infantry corps. This fact testifies to the institutional and communitarian engagement in this endeavor. The statue was entitled as "Madonna delle Nevi" (Virgin of the Snows), one of the traditional appellatives of the Virgin venerated on August 5, which is consequently also the date of the yearly celebration taking place on the top of the mountain, but the local community calls and evokes her much more often with the title "Madonna del Rocciamelone."

The development of the cult was accompanied by a progressive development of the sanctuary: the original cavern was substituted by a wooden chapel which was rebuilt several times, the last of which in 1895. In 1913, the wooden chapel was destroyed by fire and therefore a stone sanctuary was projected: the inauguration of the sanctuary that is still there today dates from 1923 (Piardi 1999, 36–37), but important works of renovations were made between the 1970s and 80s (figure 4).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> License: CC. [https://it.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Chiesa\\_vetta\\_Rocciamelone.jpg](https://it.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Chiesa_vetta_Rocciamelone.jpg) (accessed on April 8, 2020).



**Figure 4:** The sanctuary on the top of the Rocciamelone as it looks today. The statue of the Madonna is placed behind and above the sanctuary.

In what follows, we adopt a semiotic viewpoint to look into the construction of the meanings and values surrounding the mount Rocciamelone, its sanctuary and statue, and the related practice of pilgrimage. After some general reflections about the homologating structures connecting meanings to topological categories, we take into consideration the semiotization of the Madonna del Rocciamelone in the discourse of a key figure in the promotion of the cult, bishop Edoardo Rosaz, and then in a corpus of poems and hymns by local authors devout to the Madonna del Rocciamelone.

## 2 Homologating structures of the religious discourse

To approach the case of the Rocciamelone, we introduce some relations of homologation between a manifesting category and some manifested semantic values which often recur in religious discourse. These general structures will turn useful to frame the Rocciamelone sanctuary, in order to understand the diachronic development of its meaning.

The first homologating structure concerns the idea of heaven. In particular, since the Rocciamelone sanctuary is the highest in Europe, one should notice that a phenomenological glance at the religious discourse reveals immediately

how the topological opposition top / bottom is widely used to manifest the abstract demarcation between sacred and profane. Thus, we can start noting the homology (a):

a. top / bottom = sacred / profane

In fact, heaven is deified in many ancient religions (cf. the Chinese 天, tiān). In Plato's chariot allegory (*Phaedrus*, 245c–249d), the kingdom of the Gods is located in heavens; winged human souls try to rise to contemplate being, the truth. If they fail, they lose their wings and they fall to Earth. In the *Lord's prayer* (Matt 6:9–13), Our Father is in heaven. Because of this fundamental homomorphism, the Gospels and Neoplatonic tradition could merge in such authors as Dionysius the Areopagite.

However, the homology (a) is obviously an arbitrary relationship. For example, in Teresa of Avila's *The Interior Castle—The Mansions*, the soul is represented as a castle: Jesus lives in the seventh mansion. To reach Him, the soul has to enter into itself—Teresa was well aware of the paradox—and to cross all the mansions of the castle. Thus, we have a second and different homology between topological and abstract categories:

b. interior / exterior = sacred / profane

This homology is present in Teresa's religious culture, since it belongs to the Gospel: "And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, 'The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.'" (Luke 17:20–21, KJV).

However, as in the case of the chariot allegory, even in the interior castle there is a possible journey that souls can begin to leave the material dimension and to reach a spiritual plane, to enter into communion with God. Another trait in common is related to the phenomenological experience: the journey starts from everyday life, and it is directed toward an uncommon space. In Teresa's description, this journey can imply also intermediate stages. For the same reason, the pilgrimage to the Roccamelone can be seen as a spiritual journey, with the intermediate stage of the Ca' d'Asti mountain hut, foreseen by the founder himself, Boniface Rotarius.

Another consequence of the arbitrariness of the homology (a) is the variability of the values that can be manifested by the topological opposition top / bottom. In *Phaedrus*, the "top" position is associated to truth and knowledge. Thus, we have:

c. top / bottom = knowledge / absence of knowledge



If we compare (a) and (c), we see how in (c) a privative opposition (s / -s) is manifested by an antonymic relation (s1 / s2). Thus, the ascendant journey is connected to the conjunction of the subject with both sacred and cognitive values (knowledge). As we will see, this is true also in the case of the Rocciamelone, the Virgin of which is compared to a lookout by mons. Rosaz.

In language and literature, the substance of the expression plane is made of phonemes or graphemes<sup>9</sup> organized in words, sentences, paragraphs...whereas both the manifesting, topologic oppositions and the manifested, cognitive ones belong to the content plane: they are semantic, abstract categories which organize the figurativity of the represented world (cf. Greimas 1966). The sacred / profane thence manifests a phoric opposition:

d. sacred / profane = euphoric / (dysphoric or aphoric)

When we analyse pilgrimage, we are no more considering language, but the semiotics of the world of our experience. Thus, the analyst can attribute the top / bottom category directly to the expression (i. e., manifesting) plane, while cognitive and phoric oppositions are relative to the content plane. The reason is simple: according to Louis Hjelmslev (1943), expression and content plane are interdefined in reciprocal opposition. They are never to be identified with specific substances.<sup>10</sup> Thus, in semiotic tradition, the ultimate decision on what is expression and what is content is always left to the analyst, who identifies the locus of the semiosis. In the specific case of pilgrimage, the relation between expression and content plane is clearly heteromateric: while the matter of the content plane is identified with a transcendent semantic universe, where the soul and the sacred / profane values are individuated, the matter of the expression plane is constituted by the world of our experience (mountains, lowlands). We project on the content plane the net of relations constituted by the form of the expression plane, the same that we found above, in the phenomenology of religious and philosophic discourse. Thus, the ascendant journey of the soul from the profane to the sacred, where it becomes conjoint to a euphoric value of knowledge, is manifested by the ascendant journey of a manifesting body, including the possible intermediate stages.

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<sup>9</sup> Graphemes are the smallest functional unit of a writing system. See Hjelmslev (1959, 82).

<sup>10</sup> To found linguistics on substances, one should list the existing substances, distinguishing the ones of the expression from the ones of the content plane, providing an explanation for the variability of their attribution to the first or to the second. In other terms, we would need an indisputable metaphysical theory.

### 3 The *Madonna del Rocciamelone* in Rosaz' discourse

The sanctuary of the Rocciamelone is an interesting case study to test the semi-otic relations we reconstructed above. As we said, it is the highest European sanctuary (3.538 m). Boniface Rotarius of Asti, the crusader who founded it, left a bronze triptych on the peak, and marked also an intermediate stage, now identified with the mountain refuge Ca' D'Asti. After a period in which the pilgrimage was limited by ecclesiastic authorities, it was restored by Blessed Mons. Edoardo Giuseppe Rosaz in 1899, by posing there a colossal bronze statue of the Virgin. Before realizing the restoration, however, Mons. Rosaz wrote different considerations on the symbolic meaning he associated to the top / bottom topological opposition.

#### 3.1 The lookout

In Rosaz (1884) we read this passage:

The Holy Father [...] at every opportunity insists on the need for prayer and intercession of the Great Mother of God Mary Most Holy. Elevated above the high mountain, which is the Church, she sees better than we do the plots of the enemies and therefore that watchful custody of the flock, entrusted to her by God, does not cease to raise her voice as a warning and makes us careful to avoid them.

Interestingly, we are in presence of a military metaphor: Mary is a lookout, watching for the enemies. Thus, Mary is a figure, embodying the abstract value of “knowledge” because she plays the thematic role of the lookout. This is clearly a variant of the homologation (c).

#### 3.2 Manifesting the cult

A second important function of Marian devotion is related to what Rosaz (1899) calls the *external cult*. In the pastoral letter for Lent 1899—the same year of the inauguration of the sanctuary—Blessed Rosaz explains that liberals promote an interiorization of the cult, in particular contrasting Catholic exterior forms of devotion. However, they omit to criticize other confessions. Rosaz explains that Catholicism promotes self-renunciation to exercise virtues, while other religions are based on freedom of speech and manners. In this context, the external cult is

useful to let God be known, because we manifest affections through external senses. It is a way to disseminate knowledge among uneducated people, and to preserve them from heresy. Finally, it builds up social links, spreading happiness. He eventually dedicates two pages on Marian devotion and to the Madonna of Rocciamelone, which evidently has the same function of manifesting the cult.

### 3.3 The Enemy and the war

As we said above, while the Virgin embodies a helper and the acquisition of knowledge, liberals embody an anti-subject spreading ignorance of the truth. Ten years before, Rosaz (1889) had written about the confrontation between the army of the City of God (St. Augustine) and the army of the world (rebellion and revolution): “[...] the dominant liberalism strives to remove Jesus entirely from society.” He draws a comparison between the program of revolution and the program of the Church:

**Table 1:** Rosaz’ comparison of revolutionary and ecclesial programs.

| Program of the revolution  | Program of the Church  |
|--|--|
| Freedom against God; religion is no more the basis of rule of law; freedom of cult; freedom of the press; atheist education; separation of Church and State; marriage as a civil contract. | to promote welfare, peace among people, wellness; to let Jesus rule above the Nations. |

Rosaz returns to this war in 1898, when he justifies sacred zeal as rebuttal against irreligious zeal, motivated by charity and by the war that Jesus said He came to make. In the conclusion of the letter (Rosaz 1898), the Virgin, and more specifically the Madonna of the Rocciamelone, is represented once again as a helper.

### 3.4 Another top/bottom opposition

In 1885, Rosaz wrote a pastoral letter on *mortification*. In this occasion, he addressed the problem of the relation science/faith. According to him, religion is not an enemy of scientific knowledge. However, the latter is not capable, when left alone, to grant a fraternal union of peoples; it rather leads to revolution, civil war, extermination and death. Thus, *reason* must guide science. According to Rosaz, human beings are subdivided in two parts:

e. top / bottom = reason / passion

Mortification is directed top-down, since the bottom part frees itself from the rule of reason. Rosaz does not explicitly connect the opposition (e) to the Virgin, but we think it is nevertheless significant because we find the same euphoric/dysphoric opposition that we already saw in relation (d): top is euphorically related to reason and to the fraternal union of peoples; bottom is dysphorically linked to passion, conflict and death.

### 3.5 Rosaz and the encyclopedia of his time

The new sanctuary of the Rocciamelone simply translates the homologating structures (a, c, d) from literature to architecture, engraving them directly onto landscape in form of journey and pilgrimage, and embodying a military metaphor. The hostility toward liberals is motivated, above all, because the new Italian State was founded at the expense of the annexation of the former Pontifical State. The *encyclopaedic format* (Eco 1984) of the times is represented in a pastoral letter on charities (Rosaz 1885b): charities underline the failings and failures of the liberal state and of political ethics based on selfishness in the care of populations. In fact, Rosaz' engagement in creating charities is one of the reasons why he has been beatified.

However, the military metaphor is also part of the rhetorical sensibility of the period. For example, Therese of Lisieux writes: “The person to whom you deign to unite myself with the sweet bonds of love will go and fight in the plain to conquer hearts, and I, on the mountain of Carmel, I will beg you to give him the victory” (Teresa di Gesù Bambino 2009, 945). Like the little saint, Mons. Rosaz quotes Exod 17:9–13: while Joshua fights Amalek, Moses praises God staying on the top of a hill.

Regarding the Virgin, she is often associated to the war in defense of faith. For example, according to tradition, the Akathist hymn was first sung in 626 AD when it was performed in the Blachernae Church to thank the Virgin Mary for saving Constantinople from a military invasion of Persians and Avars. This practice influenced Polish tradition: the war song *Bogurodzica* (Mother of God) was sung by Polish armies at the battle of Grunwald, when they defeated the Prussian Teutonic Knights—cf. Jakóbczyk-Gola (2019). During the early modern period, after the 1571 defeat of the Ottomans at the Battle of Lepanto, Catholics attributed the victory to the banner of “Our Lady of Victory,” and raised this battle standard also against protestants—cf. Tvrtković (2020). Thus, Mons. Rosaz was updat-

ing tradition to the fight against liberals, the new heretics who had put an end to the ultramillennarian Papal State.

Ironically, the same military corps of the Italian army that carried the Virgin's statue on the top, placed near it the bust of Vittorio Emanuele II, the first Italian king, who had conquered the Papal State, realizing the dream of the Italian liberals of a unified State.

The military isotopy is not a necessary component of the meaning of the pilgrimage, otherwise the identification of the Virgin with a lookout would not be a metaphor: in fact, nowadays pilgrims do not actualize this virtual value.

In semiotic terms, we can interpret the situation as a borrowing of a semantic value from a military section of the encyclopedia (Eco 1984) to the religious one. Let us label "militant" this semantic value. Rastier (1987) proposes an interesting model of this transfer of semantic values. In keeping with structural semantics, Rastier calls these semes *afferent*, to distinguish them from the inherent semes, which already hold in the system of language. From a methodological point of view, to prove this transfer we must indicate two taxemes,<sup>11</sup> i.e., two minimal classes whose elements are semes, that already share at least one seme, to allow the borrowing. If we label /lookout/ the military taxeme and /pilgrimage/ the religious one, they share the search for *knowledge*, associated to a euphoric state:

- Taxemes: /lookout/ (T1), /pilgrimage/(T2)
- Shared inherent semes: "search" + "knowledge" + "euphoric"
- Afferent seme from T1 to T2: "militant"

These values explain a wide superposition that we can register in historical terms between the two encyclopedic regions, as it is proved by such sememes as *mission*, *scout*, *expedition*, *patrol*, *sentinel*. Pilgrimage and war are wonderfully merged in the term *crusade*: curiously, this military isotopy is present in the Rocciamelone pilgrimage from the foundation: thus, we must conclude that it is periodically reactualized, depending on the ideological norm.

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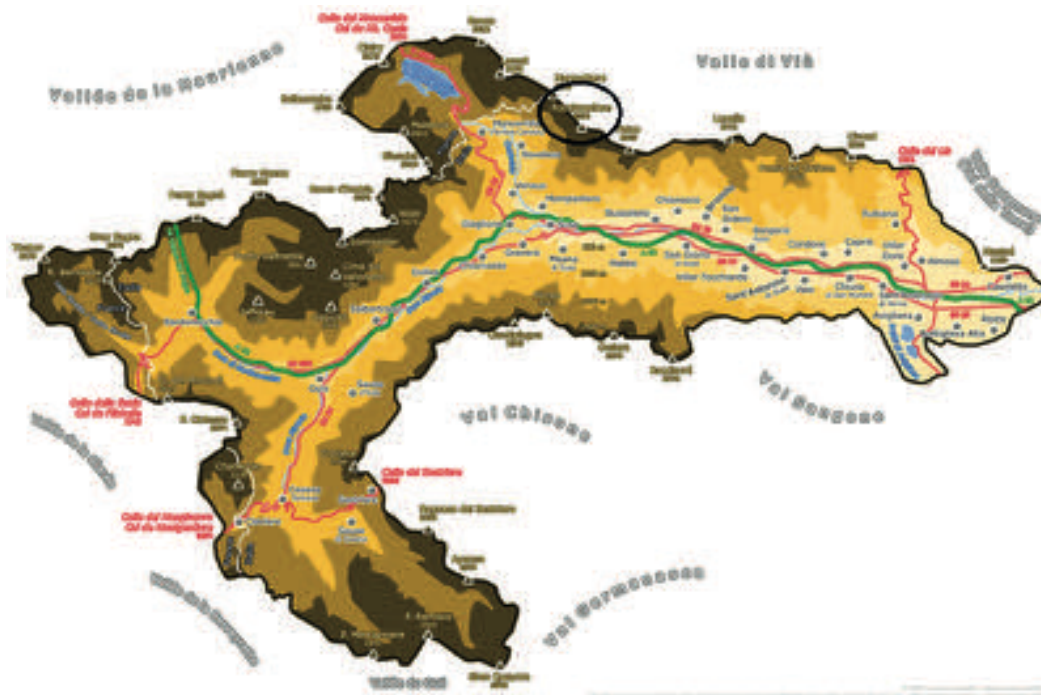
<sup>11</sup> Rastier (1987) defines the taxeme as a minimal class whose elements are semes. For example, *bus* and *metro* belong to the classeme of /urban transportation/, and *coach* and *train* belong to the taxeme of /inter-urban transportation/. – see also Kurdi (2017, 84–91). In Hjelmslev (1943, 99) the taxeme is defined as the output of the analysis when it is not possible to reach a further stage using the criterion of selection, i.e., searching for functions between a constant and a variable in a process.



## 4 The semiosphere of the Rocciamelone in the Valley of Susa

### 4.1 Topological and eidetic categories

The Valley of Susa is about 50 km long and placed on an east-west line. The Rocciamelone appears as a topologically dominating element in the valley not only because it is the highest mountain, but also because it is placed in a central position, on the side facing South, the one more enlightened by the sun (figure 5)<sup>12</sup>.



**Figure 5:** The Valley of Susa: the Rocciamelone is in the black circle. On the left, the thin white line indicates the border with France.

This centrality of the Rocciamelone is a pertinent topological category in the discourse of the people of the valley. For instance, the local tourist guides often invite visitors to note that the Rocciamelone is perfectly framed by the Roman Arch of Augustus in Susa, one of the most important historical monuments of the town. The Madonna of the Rocciamelone is moreover a center of the local devo-

<sup>12</sup> License: CC. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Val\\_di\\_Susa\\_mappa.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Val_di_Susa_mappa.png), created by Lorenzo Rossetti (accessed on April 8, 2020).

tion, and this centrality is also represented by a spatial directionality; for instance in the village of Foresto, where a series of small chapels devoted to the Virgin are placed in an axial line converging with the top of the Rocciamelone and its Madonna (figure 6). The statue of the Virgin works therefore as a central perspectival spot, reachable through a vertical movement (of the head and the eyes if one watches it, of the whole body in the case of pilgrimage).



**Figure 6:** The village of Foresto: the mount Rocciamelone is the highest and whiter peak, and the small Marian chapels on the mountain (in the black circles) are placed so as to point towards the top and the Madonna of the Rocciamelone.

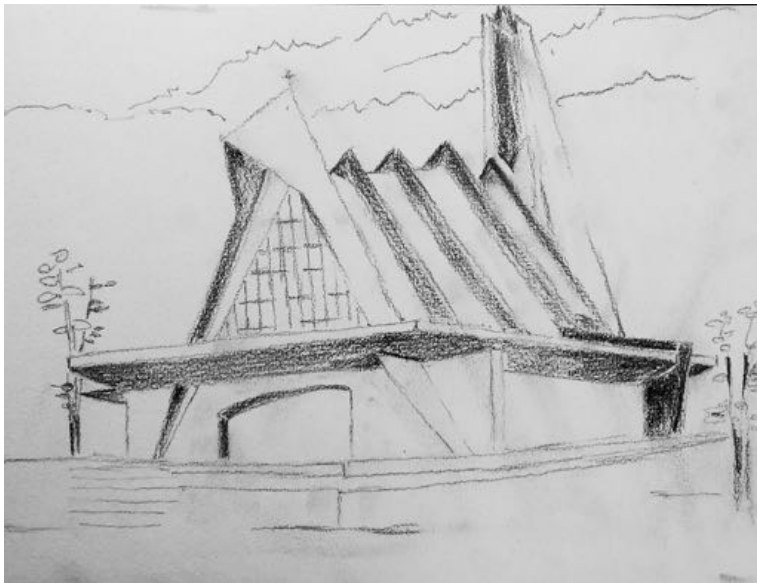
A similar pattern can be observed in a kind of *via crucis* present in different northern Italian regions. The *via crucis* is a Catholic ritual that retraces the story of Jesus and, in particular, his Passion and the ascent to Mount Golgotha, where he was crucified: the narration of the story is accompanied by a physical movement articulated in stops in the correspondence of icons (paintings, reliefs, tables, sculptures, etc.) representing the main events. Each spot hosting an icon and connected to a particular event is called “station.” In most cases, the stations are located inside a church, but there are several *via crucis* where the Passion and the ascent of Jesus are reproduced on the sides of mounts or hills, so that the faithful too, during the performance of the ritual, take part in the labor of a physical ascent, generally ending in a sacred place, such as a sanctuary. Instances of this kind of *via crucis* can be found in Lussari (in the Eastern

Alps), at the *Sacro Monte* (Sacred Mount) of Varallo (Piedmont), and at the Santuario della Beata Vergine del Carmelo (Sanctuary of the Blessed Virgin of the Carmel) of Montevicchia, in the province of Lecco (Lombardy).

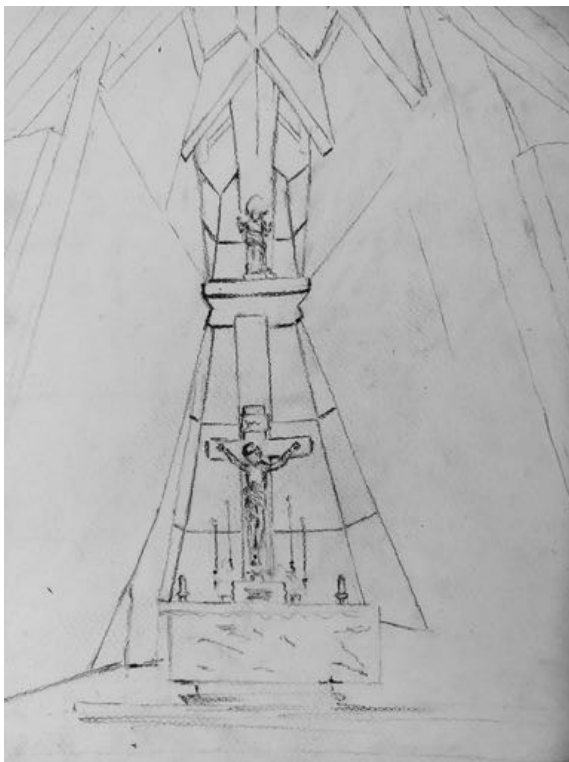
The topological semantization of the Rocciamelone is related to an eidetic feature. Indeed, the idea of ascent is connected to the idea of converging oblique lines, namely to the form of the triangle. This triangular form is the natural form of the mountain and is emphasized by the shape of the statue's base, which further increases the acuteness of the top angle of the mount. The thinning of the rocks (of the matter) and its culmination in the icon of the Virgin is a symbol of ascent towards the sky, intended in this case as heaven. The fusion between natural elements and cultural/religious values is very effective here, and it also involves the chromatic area: the image of the Madonna of the Rocciamelone, reproduced in countless pictures, is most often surrounded by a blue sky. It is known that blue is a color traditionally connected to the figure of the Virgin, and in particular with her veil or mantle, and that our culture tends to associate the color blue with spirituality (Pastoreau 2000).

The isotopy with the triangular form and the associated semantic values can also be found in examples of local architecture, and, in particular, in the church devoted specifically to the Madonna of the Rocciamelone in Mompantero, a small town near Susa.

The sanctuary of Mompantero is placed at the starting point of the most direct pathway leading to the top of the Rocciamelone. A first chapel was built there in 1858, in occasion of the fifth centenary of the sanctuary on the top; the local community intended to substitute the chapel with a proper sanctuary on the occasion of the sixth centenary, in 1958, and the new building, projected by the architect Emanuele Godone, was consecrated in 1961 (Bertolo 1986, 85–150). The whole sanctuary is projected as a set of acute triangles, spatially pointing to the statue of the Madonna del Rocciamelone, towards which the church is oriented, and which can be seen from the big glass wall of the apse (figures 7 and 8). The same pattern characterizes the majestic apse tower (26,2 m high), formed by two oblique—almost vertical—slabs of reinforced concrete, culminating with a statue reproducing the Madonna of the Rocciamelone. The church thus evokes the shape of the mount Rocciamelone, working as a deictic sign pointing to the Madonna on the top, and evokes the meaning of spiritual ascent towards the Madonna and, by her intercession, to the sky/heaven. The shape of the sanctuary, as Bertolo (1986) observes, also is reminiscent of two hands joined in prayer towards the Virgin on the top of the mountain.



**Figure 7:** The Sanctuary of Mompantero, sketch by Noelle Cuk.



**Figure 8:** The interior of the Sanctuary of Mompantero: the apse with the altar and the glass wall, sketch by Noelle Cuk.

## 4.2 Poems and hymns

The centrality of the Rocciamelone in the local culture also emerges from the numerous poems and hymns that local people devoted to the Madonna. A rich collection of these texts, from the period of the inauguration of the statue of the Madonna to our days, was gathered by the local author Laura Grisa and published in Piardi (1999). In this corpus, including 70 compositions, we can identify several recurring themes.

### 4.2.1 Physical/spiritual, ascending/descending movement

The poems and hymns describe several patterns of movement between top and bottom. This movement can be physical or mental/spiritual. The physical movement goes in two directions: the first is of course the ascent to the top of the mountain, which characterizes the pilgrimage. Many poems describe personal experiences of ascent to the mount;<sup>13</sup> some of them describe the itinerary of Rotarius, the first pilgrim of the Rocciamelone, and a third, quite curious, movement of ascent is the one of the Madonna, which some poems composed in the period of the construction and inauguration of the statue describe in her journey towards her sanctuary. A small number of poems focus on the contrary on the opposite movement: the descent of the pilgrims from the mount, in the concluding phase of the pilgrimage.<sup>14</sup>

A second kind of movement, which is only partially physical, concerns the movement of the eyes: on the one hand, several poems describe the look of the people down in the valley up to the Madonna; on the other hand, the Madonna looks down to the people of the valley from the top of her mountain.

A third kind of movement is a spiritual and mental one, entailing a temporal and aspectual dimension connected to the wait for the visit to the statue on the top: typically, the poets imagine the moment of the pilgrimage to the Virgin, during the summer, and their thought flies up to the Madonna all alone in the snow and surrounded by a perfect silence. A further kind of mental movement is the spiritual ascent towards faith through the Madonna: in several poems the Madonna is described as a lighthouse and a star, a center of irradiation of divine truth.

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<sup>13</sup> For instance, Carmela Savaris Banaudi, “Rocciamelone,” from *Santuario Madonna del Rocciamelone*, anno XXX, n. 1, 1° semestre 1993, cit. in Piardi (1999, 203).

<sup>14</sup> The descent is described for instance in Giovanni Germena, 1928, “Rocciamelone” from *La Valsusa*, n. 22, 21/05/1928, cit. in Piardi (1999, 187).



The elevated position of the statue is also connected to the most recurrent figure of the sentinel. In many cases, especially in the poems composed until the 1950s, the figure of the sentinel is coupled with references to the semantic field of war,<sup>15</sup> thus constituting an isotopy with regard to the discourses of Mons. Rosaz. However, while Rosaz mainly used the lexicon of war as a metaphor (as we said, he mainly referred to an ideological war), especially the poems composed in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century refer to the actual military conflicts menacing Italy and its national borders, which were recommended to the protection of the Madonna. In general, the figure of the sentinel is usually connected to the theme of motherhood: the Madonna is represented as a lovely mother, watching her people from above to protect them from dangers. The use of this metaphor is often connected to an eidetic component, because the metaphor of the motherly sentinel is often reinforced through the description of the pose of the statue: the arms of the Madonna look opened in a protective gesture.<sup>16</sup> With time, the Madonna loses her connotation of military sentinel, and is rather represented as a lovely mother guarding her children.

Further recurring themes are connected to the chromatic area. The Madonna of the Rocciamelone is often described by using the traditional Latin epithet *nive candidior*, often in relation to the bright character and whiteness of the snow that surrounds her. An interesting figure regards the description of the sky as her mantel or crown: the blue of the sky or the orange and red tones of the dawn frame the statue and appear as her attributes.<sup>17</sup> This figure, as mentioned above, underlines the close relationship between the Virgin and the Heaven, and her role of guidance of mankind towards Heaven and Paradise. Coherently, she is also often described as a star and a lighthouse, which orientates the look and the spirit of her people.<sup>18</sup>

The following extracts from various poems provide examples of these recurring themes.

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**15** For instance, Mary is invoked as the protector of the homeland against the foreigner and armed invader in Luigi Vitali, 1900, “Alla Madonna del Rocciamelone,” from *Il Rocciamelone* n. 12, 24/03/1900, cit. in Piardi (1999, 182–183); P. Paolo Belgrano, 1944, “Al Rocciamelone,” from *Avanguardia Serafica* n. 1, 15/02/1944, cit. in Piardi (1999, 194); Natale Reviglio, 1955, “Per la cappella sul Rocciamelone,” from *La Valsusa* n. 41, 15/10/1955, cit. in Piardi (1999, 190).

**16** The gesture of the Madonna, with her open arms, is described for instance in: Giuseppe Manni, 1900, “Alla Madonna del Rocciamelone” in *Il Rocciamelone* n. 31, 04/08/1900, cit. in Piardi (1999, 184).

**17** For instance, Mary appears as surrounded by a blue cupola in Giuseppe Manni, 1900, “Alla Madonna del Rocciamelone” in *Il Rocciamelone* n. 31, 04/08/1900, cit. in Piardi (1999, 184).

**18** The Madonna is described as a lighthouse and as a polar star in the darkness by Pietro San Pietro, “15 giugno,” from *Il Rocciamelone*, n. 24, 17/06/1899, cit. in Piardi (1999, 180).

“Madonna del Rocciamelone” – 1986

Quando il vento urla nei dirupi  
sferzando di neve i rami spogli  
dei pioppi in fila lungo la Dora  
penso a te mia dolce Madonna  
avvolta in un manto di gelo,  
tutta sola sul Rocciamelone.

Tornerò sulla tua vetta  
nel mese di luglio,  
allo sbocciar dei fiori  
sul ripido sentiero.  
Vergine dei monti,  
porterò con me la rosa  
che ho coltivato  
quaggiù nella valle.

Quando il sole cocente dell'estate  
scioglie in lacrime lungo il tuo bel viso  
Le gemme fredde di ghiaccio fulgente  
che t'impennano fronte e corona,  
è l'ora mia cara Madonna  
di vederci sul Rocciamelone.

[...]

Quando penso all'appuntamento  
io preparo lo zaino e la piccozza  
poi scruto il cielo al tenue tramonto  
e mentre la cima si arrossa  
chiamo il mio amore vicino  
a guardare il Rocciamelone.

Vito Brusa and Mario Piovano, from *La Valsusa*, n. 28, 12/07/1986, cit. in Piardi (1999, 209).

“Madonna of the Rocciamelone”

When the wind screams in the cliffs  
beating with snow the bare branches  
of the poplars lined along the (river) Dora  
I think of you my sweet Madonna  
wrapped up in a cape of frost,  
all alone on the Rocciamelone.

I will return to your peak  
in the month of July,  
when the flowers bloom  
on the steep path.  
Virgin of the mounts,  
I will bring with me the rose  
which I cultivated  
down here in the valley.

When the hot sun of the summer  
melts in tears along your beautiful face  
the cold gems of shining ice  
that bead your forehead and crown,  
it is time, my dear Madonna,  
to meet you on the Rocciamelone.

[...]

When I think of the date  
I prepare the backpack and the ice ax  
then I scan the sky in the tenuous sunset  
and as the top reddens  
I call my love next to me  
to look at the Rocciamelone.

This poem develops the theme of the expectation and the spiritual and mental movement of ascent towards the Madonna. In the first strophe, the thought of the poet ascends to the top of the Mountain; in the refrain, he expresses the wait for the time of the pilgrimage, in the summer; in the second strophe, the movement of the thought is accompanied by the symbolic act of sending a kiss up to the Madonna; and only in the last strophe the mental and spiritual movement towards the Virgin converts in the physical movement of the eyes that look upwards to the Madonna, in the imminence of the pilgrimage (the

poet prepares his equipment for the pilgrimage). The poem therefore designs a climax of concretization of the ascent from the purely mental one, to the physical ascent to the mountain, which is only foreshadowed. The passage of time is symbolized by the reference to meteorological conditions, which provide a chromatic element: in the beginning, when it is winter, the frost forms a mantle around the statue, and in the end, in the summer, the top is surrounded by a tenuous red sunset.

“Preghiera” – 1986

Maria,  
Signora della Valle,  
ancora una volta  
fin qui  
son salito  
per guardare  
il tuo bronzeo volto  
contro l’azzurro,  
per chiederti  
di stendere la tua mano  
su un pargolo  
che è alle soglie  
della luce  
e per implorare  
(non vorrei!)  
un miracolo.  
Tu sai, Maria,  
che laggiù  
a quattro anni  
una bimba  
ancora non muove i primi passi  
e non sa ripetere il tuo nome.  
[...]  
Raggiungi  
ti prego  
mia madre  
su qualche nuvola del Cielo  
e dille che non sono mutato  
da quando ci ha lasciati.  
[...]

“Prayer”

Mary,  
Lady of the Valley,  
once more  
up here  
I have climbed  
to look at  
your bronze face  
against the blue,  
to ask you  
to stretch out your hand  
on a baby  
who is at the threshold  
of light  
and to implore  
(I would not want!)  
a miracle.  
You know, Mary,  
that down there,  
a four-years old  
girl  
does not take her first step  
and cannot repeat your name yet.  
[...]  
Reach  
I beg you  
my mother  
on some cloud in Heaven  
and tell her that I have not changed  
since she left us.  
[...]

Marco Pent, 1986, from *Pensieri di Borgata*, cit. in Piardi (1999, 199).

This poem describes the culminating moment of the pilgrimage as a very personal and intimate experience: the poet has climbed the mountain and is on the top,

in presence of the statue. His prayer takes the form of a heartfelt discourse to Mary, treated with familiarity and love. The face of the Madonna is surrounded by the blue of the sky and her proximity with the celestial dimension is also underlined by her role of mediator between the poet and his mother, who has passed away and is imagined on a cloud in Heaven. In this sense, the cult of the Virgin also guarantees the continuity of the local community through time, not only connecting living and dead people, but also because she is represented as someone knowing personally everyone, taking part empathically in life problems and feelings, almost as a family member or, more precisely, as a loving mother.

“Nostra Signora del Rocciamelone” – “Our Lady of the Rocciamelone”  
1993

Sul monte più alto  
di nostra Valsusa,  
tra la terra ed il cielo  
tu svetti o Maria.  
Lassù, t’han voluta  
o Madre, o Regina,  
in un giorno lontano  
i bimbi d’Italia.  
E tu stendi le braccia,  
sorridi pensosa  
avvolta in un velo:  
sei bella, Maria!  
Sei una cara presenza  
per chi vive  
ai tuoi piedi  
[...].  
Sei un caro pensiero  
per chi ti saluta  
passando veloce  
nel cielo o nel piano;  
sei un dolce richiamo  
a salire sul monte  
portando nel cuore  
affanni e preghiera.  
Sei stella d’Italia  
E da altissima rupe  
domini invitta  
le forze del male;  
sei faro di luce  
Per chi vuol ritrovare

On the highest mount  
of our Valley of Susa,  
between heaven and earth  
you stand out oh Mary.  
Above there, they wanted you  
oh Mother, oh Queen  
in a faraway day  
the children of Italy.  
And you stretch out your arms,  
you smile pensive  
enveloped in a veil:  
you are beautiful, Mary!  
You are a dear presence  
for those who live  
at your feet  
[...].  
You are a dear thought  
for those who greet you  
passing by fast  
in the sky or in the plain;  
you are a sweet call  
to climb the mount  
bringing in the heart  
griefs and prayer.  
You are the star of Italy  
and from the highest peak  
you dominate undefeated  
the forces of evil;  
you are a beacon of light  
for those who want to find again

|                         |                               |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| la fede perduta         | the faith lost                |
| tra le brume del mondo. | among the mists of the world. |
| O madre del Verbo       | Oh mother of the Verb         |
| a te affidiamo          | we entrust you with           |
| i nostri bambini:       | our children:                 |
| proteggili tu.          | protect them.                 |
| [...]                   | [...]                         |

Clelia Baccon, 1993, from *Santuario Madonna del Rocciamelone*, anno XXX, n. 2, 2° semestre 1993, cit. in Piardi (1999, 199).

This poem underlines the special relation between the Madonna of the Rocciamelone and the Italian children: after the initial invocation, the poet evokes their active participation in the construction of her statue and in the end, they are especially entrusted to her protection. This reference to the children provides the poem with a ring composition. The Madonna is placed between Heaven and earth, and she is a powerful sentinel. Her smile and look are put in a direct connection with the pose of her open arms to convey the meaning of protection of her people. While the Madonna looks down, the inhabitants of the valley look up to her: the Madonna is a “star,” a “lighthouse” for those who lost their faith, a central point of reference not only visually but also for the thought of her people; she is a point of orientation, both spatially and spiritually.

“Il Simulacro di Maria sul Rocciamelone”      “The Simulacrum of Mary on the Rocciamelone”  
– 1899

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Mio manto è neve. Sul mio crin più bella      | My cape is snow. On my hair more beautiful   |
| Ad annunziare il dì sorge l’Aurora;           | The Dawn rises to announce the day;  |
| E al Sol che nasce il bel cammino infiora,    | And she decks with flowers the rising Sun’s Beautiful path, as he adorns himself with rays |
| Mentre ei di raggi sempre più s’abbella       | In the blue sky I am the Star of the see;  |
| Nel cielo azzurro I’ son di mare Stella;      | [...]  |
| [...]   | Tower of David I rise here in defense,   |
| Torre di David qui m’alzo a difesa,           | So that I show my power on the enemy,  |
| Che sul nemico mia potenza mostri,            | To the Italian borders, to the Holy Church,  |
| A le fini d’Italia, a Santa Chiesa,           | Here you wanted me, children? O sons, me too   |
| Bimbi, qui mi voleste? O figli, anch’Io       | I want here with me your pure hearts [...]   |
| Con me qui voglio puri i cuori i vostri [...] |  |

C.co Giovanni Battista Spadini, camer. Serg. Super.o di S. Santità, form *Il Rocciamelone*, n. 37, 16/09/1899, cit. in Piardi (1999, 179).

This poem, which has the peculiarity of imagining a discourse pronounced by the Virgin herself, was composed by the secretary of Leo XII in honor of the Madonna of the Rocciamelone, in the year of the inauguration of the monument.



The text mentions traditional epithets of the Virgin, which can be found, for instance, in the litanies, such as *Turris Davidica* and *Stella Maris*, and it displays the theme of the snow mantle of the Madonna, of the rising sun that forms a crown on her hair, and of the blue sky surrounding her. The Madonna is also a motherly sentinel, protecting her children from the enemy.

“Nel giorno sacro a nostra Signora del Rocciamelone” – 1898      “In the day sacred to our Lady of the Rocciamelone”

[...] Ma se l'Arte T'onora, e la Natura,  
Ne la pompa di sole e di colori,  
Men grato da la valle di sventura  
L'omaggio salirà de' nostri cuori?

[...] But if the Art and the Nature honor you,  
In the pomp of sun and of colors,  
Will the homage of the valley of misfortune  
Rise less grateful from our hearts?

[...] Perché de' Tuoi Santuari al più sublime  
Tra noi la sede, o Vergine, sceglievi.  
Fra quanti monti lanciano le cime  
Nel lor candido vel d'eterne nevi?  
D'Italia nostra bella ed infelice,  
sentinella avanzata in sul confine,  
Por tiolesti, e l'arida pendice  
Infiorar di bellezze peregrine!  
Sì, noi faremo al tuo altar ritorno,  
Colla prece sul labbro, e in cor la speme,  
Che, Tua mercè, Ti rivedrem nel giorno,  
Che tramonti né nuvole non teme!

[...] Why, o Virgin, did you choose your seat  
Among us, in the most sublime of your shrines,  
Between the mounts that rise their peaks  
In the brilliant white veil of eternal snows?  
You wanted to place yourself as the sentinel  
Advanced on the border  
Of our beautiful and unhappy Italy, and to  
Embellish the dry slope with pilgrim beauties!  
Yes, we will return to your altar,  
With prayer on our lips, and hope in our heart,  
That, with your help, we will see you again  
In the day that fears no sunsets nor clouds!

Cyclamen, 1898, from *Il Rocciamelone*, n. 31, 30/07/1898; Piardi (1999, p. 178).

This long poem presents three recurring themes: the veneration of the faithful ascends to the Madonna; the Madonna is a sentinel watching the Italian borders, and for this reason she chose the highest peak as her sanctuary; the poet looks forward to seeing the Madonna again, so he awaits for the pilgrimage, in a utopic future of peace. The quoted passage displays several topoi: the sun and the beauty of the nature surrounding her appear as an ornament honoring the Virgin, and she is surrounded by the bright veil of snow on the high peak.

“Alla Madonna del Rocciamelone” – “To the Madonna of the Rocciamelone”  
1928

Non sei discesa Tu, come la prole  
Saturnia, da l'olimpo al nostro monte  
in un barbaglio tremulo di sole,  
a spandere il terrore con la fronte

You did not descend, as Saturn's  
offspring, from the Olympus to our mount  
in a tremulous glimpse of sun,  
to scatter fear with a forehead

aggrottata a fierissimo cipiglio,  
 a fulminare con saette pronte.  
 No. Raggia la bontà tra ciglio e ciglio,  
 a Te, Divina Madre: ogni mortale  
 al tuo cospetto ti si sente figlio.  
 Al peso forse gli angeli dier l'ali  
 allor che il simulacro per la bruna  
 costa del monte al vertice nivale  
 lieve saliva, d'un chiaror di luna  
 illuminando l'alta rupe tetra.

[...]

Dal cielo con le palme e le corone  
 quel giorno i Santi in lunga teoria  
 su l'ardua vetta del Rocciamelone  
 incontro a te discesero, o Maria.

[...]

expressing a most proud frown,  
 to strike with ready lightnings.  
 No. Goodness radiates through your eyelashes,  
 Divine Mother, every mortal  
 in front of you feels like your son.  
 Maybe the angels put wings on the weight  
 when the simulacrum on the brown  
 side of the mount to the snowy top  
 lightly ascended, illuminating the high dark  
 rock with moonlight.

[...]

From the sky with the palms and the crowns  
 that day the Saints in a long line  
 on the hard top of the Rocciamelone  
 descended to you, o Mary.

[...]

Alpha, 1928, "Alla Madonna del Rocciamelone," from *La Valsusa* n. 21, 19/05/1928, cit. in Piardi (1999, p. 185).

In this text there are several patterns of ascending and descending movements: the pagan deity, Jupiter, descended from above, while Mary, we could say "embodied" in her statue, climbs the mountain from its foot. This curious distinction tends to underline the proximity of the Madonna to the people, her "humanity" and goodness, compared with the cruelty and pride of the pagan deities. When Mary reaches the top, saints descend from Heaven to greet her.

"Nive candidior, Segusiae tuta es fines!" – "Nive candidior, Segusiae tuta es fines!"  
 1940

Tornàro i giorni tristi, per la vetusta Susa,  
 a la prova del fuoco perennemente adusa,  
 in un tardo meriggio, nel cielo di cobalto,  
 quasi scoppi di tuono scrosciaron da l'alto:  
 dal gallico confine, in inegual tenzone,  
 echeggiava sinistro il rombo del cannone...

[...]

Ma scolta a la frontiera,  
 la "più di neve candida", – ne la figura  
 nera –,  
 distendeva le braccia, da la rôcca superna,  
 su la diletta Susa, in protezion materna:  
 e del nemico certo contro la volontà  
 non un progetto cadde su la nostra Città.

Sad days came back, for the old Susa,  
 always accustomed to the trial of the fire,  
 in a late noon, in the cobalt blue sky,  
 almost thunder bursts roared from above:  
 from the Gallic border, in an unequal battle,  
 the sinister rumble of the cannon echoed...

[...]

But the sentry at the border,  
 "whiter than snow," in her black figure,  
 stretched out her arms, from the supreme rock,  
 on the beloved Susa, in motherly protection:  
 and surely against the enemy's will  
 not a bullet felt on our City.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>... Oh Vergin Santa e pia, che [...]<br/> Volesti la tua effigie da' bimbi fosse eretta,<br/> <br/> perché degli innocenti il verginal candore<br/> facesse un'eco assidua al verginal Tuo<br/> Cuore,<br/> deh segua il tuo presidio a tutelar la chiostra<br/> de l'Alpi, che son gloria ognor d'Italia nos-<br/> tra!</p> | <p>... Oh, holy and pious Virgin, [...]<br/> You wanted that your icon was erected by the<br/> children,<br/> so that the virginal candor of the innocents make<br/> a persistent echo to your virginal heart,<br/> <br/> Oh, may your defense keep protecting the chain<br/> of the Alps that are always the glory of our Italy!</p> |
|---|---|

Cesare Napoli, 1940, from *La Valsusa* n. 50, 14/12/1940, cit. in Piardi (1999, 189).

This poem, composed during the war, develops the military theme of the Madonna as the sentinel of the Valley of Susa and of Italy, strategically placed on the border between Italy and France.

## 5 Conclusion

The cult of the Madonna of the Rocciamelone plays an important influence on the local semiotization of space. The top of the mountain with its sanctuary works as a fulcrum that polarizes the orientation of the people of the valley. If we consider that to “inhabit” a place means to be able to orientate oneself in it, to identify with it and to share with a community a set of meanings attributed its space (Norberg-Shulz 1981, Ponzo 2013), we can understand the semiotic importance of this sanctuary for the local community of the Valley of Susa. Human beings codify the space they live in by elaborating semiotic systems expressed in different substances of expression, from architecture to literature, from newspapers to speeches. In this paper, we pointed out how the discourse by the blessed Mons. Rosaz and the poems and hymns composed by the local community between the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century play a key role in interpreting and expressing systems of meanings and values that contribute to the implementation of the meaning of the space by loading it with cultural, social and, most of all, religious values, thus reinforcing the identity of the local community.

In the analyzed corpus, it is possible to single out different layers of meaning. If we apply the idea of the generative trajectory of meaning by Greimas, we can say that in the considered discourse, there is a more superficial level composed of all the specific features characterizing the local geography, community and characters or actors. At a deeper level, there is a set of more general values, organized in couples of oppositions, which coincide with the five homologating structures—or semi-symbolic systems—that we discussed. In the discourse of

Rosaz and of the local poets, the meaning appears coherent with these homologating structures, which belong to the wider culture, or, we can say in the terms of Eco (1975, 1979) to the broader encyclopedia derived from Christianity. In particular, the homologating structure (a), connecting the opposition top / bottom with the opposition sacred / profane finds a perfect expression in the idea of sacredness connected with the sanctuary and the statue on the top of the Rocciamelone and in the association of the valley with the space of human beings, afflicted with sorrow, sin and war. As we saw, also the result of the oppositions (b) and (c) is relevant, in that the pilgrimage is always not only a physical, but also a spiritual journey, an interior itinerary towards divine truth, and the Madonna is often described as a star or a lighthouse indicating the pathway towards faith. The thymic opposition (d) is often related to the other oppositions; maybe its most significant expression resides in the description of the joy of the natural elements for the ascension and then the presence of the statue of the Madonna on the top (see above). On the contrary, the homologating structure (e) results idiolectal and specifically related to Rosaz' discourse.

The comparison between the semi-symbolic structures we find in Rosaz' discourse, in poems and hymns, and the valley considered as a living world sheds new light on the link between visibility and knowledge in the case of pilgrimage. In the mountains it is possible to oppose the glance of a viewer positioned low, and looking up, to the glance positioned at the top, and looking down, and knowing everything happens in the valley. While ascending, the glance of the pilgrim progressively shifts from the first to the second point of view. We can see how, in the world of experience, *landscape is a modal dispositive* linking vision, knowledge, and power—this explains why the military metaphor is adequate—see Galofaro (2015). Likewise, the semi-symbolic structure (a-d) and the related figurative expressions are very much rooted in the local culture of the Valley of Susa, as proved by the very scarce evolution of the related themes at the figurative level over the considered period. This stability and recurrent presence are clear clues indicating that the knot of signs we analyzed occupies a central position in the local semiosphere.

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