

Figures of Memory and Memories of the Figure

The Group of Martyrs in the *Litany of the Saints*

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TITOLO IN ITALIANO: Figure della memoria e memorie della figura: il gruppo dei martiri nelle *Litanie dei Santi*

ABSTRACT: In the *Litany of the Saints*, the group of martyrs is of fundamental hierarchical importance: it follows the apostles and disciples and precedes the bishops and doctors of the Church. The list of martyrs did not change significantly until the 20th century, when many new martyrs were added. Martyred women were relocated here from their original position in the group of holy women. This move to recover the original thematic role (witness of the passion) suggests an attempt to rediscover the Early Church. We can gain a better understanding of the value originally associated with martyrdom by comparing the most ancient versions of the litany to their most ancient liturgical sources. Here, female martyrs are presented at the same level as men and not relegated — as in the older versions — to the group of virgins. The passage from the third and fourth centuries, during which litanic sources were developed, marks an ecclesiological change. With the Church's emergence from the underground, martyrs are flanked by other kinds of saints to build up the collective memory. The saint is not just a witness of the Passion (as martyrs are); he, or she, becomes an *intercessor*. However, the martyr, as a figure of memory, also exhibits a specific memory of the figure, carried with it when migrating from one text to the other. If the Christian community can be considered a collective, active subject of historical becoming, then martyrdom is an operator which organizes temporality. The day of martyrdom is *dies natalis*, when true life begins; the moment of origin of the Christian era according to Diocletian's calendar.

KEYWORDS: thematic role, diachronic change, morphodynamics, figure, memory.

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1. Introduction¹

This work aims to underline the role of the group of the martyrs in the *Litany of the Saints*. Starting from its first appearances, dating back to the 7th century, the structure of this responsorial prayer remained substantially unchanged. New groups of saints were added and forgotten saints were sometimes replaced by newer ones; during the 20th century, however, significant changes took place and a large number of new saints entered the group of martyrs. I therefore reconstruct the meaning of the litanic text as a syntagm so as to shed new light on the thematic role of the martyr, on the reason for the prominent role played by martyrs in the hierarchical organization of the litanic invocations, and on the temporal dimensions of the figure of the martyr.

According to Francesco Marsciani (2014), semiotic relations follow three principles: a principle of difference, a principle of inherence, and a principle of recursivity. According to the first principle, an element has a value because it is different from the other elements of the system to which they all belong. This idea draws on Ferdinand de Saussure's notion of value. The second principle speaks to the phenomenological notion of value: the value of an element presupposes an observer, not necessarily human, according to which it receives its value. Finally, recursivity is

a very general operating principle which governs most of the signifying combinations between elements or syntagmatic portions and which makes it possible, ultimately, to insert any element within its horizon of belonging, of its universe of value, of this background from which it can stand out (Marsciani 2014, p. 19).

Taking up Marsciani's suggestion, my analysis will consider these three axes. In particular, I represent litanic structures as a *discursive*

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configuration, trying to reconstruct the syntagmatic organization of this configuration, its role in constituting the notion of sanctity as a semiotic system, and its hierarchical organization (with reference to the *principle of difference* and *principle of recursivity*). According to this view, I consider ‘martyr’ a specific semantic category, a *thematic role*. In the second part of the analysis, litany is considered in a diachronic perspective in order to investigate how this *form of the content* changed its relationship with the *substance of the content* during certain periods, registering the memory of each change in the notion of sanctity: new saints substitute the old ones, new categories are appended to the old ones. In the final part I refer to the *principle of inherence* to inquire into the value of martyrdom, which is the oldest model of sanctity in the project of constituting Christian community as a collective, active subject through memory.

2. A Synchronic Glance at Litany

In the attempt to define the invariant syntagmatic structure of the litany and express its relationship to the implied paradigm, I have proposed a regular narrative generative grammar (rNKG) — Galofaro and Kubas (2016). The grammar is an algorithm capable of generating all litanies and only litanies: it is a peculiar case obtained by imposing restrictions on the general narrative generative grammar (gNKG) I had proposed in Galofaro (2013), which represents the syntactic component of Greimas’ generative trajectory². The goal of the rNKG is to provide a scientific description of litany as a *discursive configuration* — Greimas and Courtés (1979) — defined by the kind and order of the allowed syntagms.

On the basis of the grammar, it is possible to decide whether a given text is a litany or not: a text is a litany if and only if it can be

2. Regarding grammars, automata, and regular expressions my reference is Hopcroft *et al.* (2009).

generated by the grammar. Thus, I considered the ancient Syriac and Coptic inscriptions I am going to present in the second part of this paper to be fully-fledged litanies because they can be generated by the grammar; other documents, such as the *Commemoratio pro defunctis* in the Roman Canon, cannot be considered litanies even though they represent a possible source and literary model for the litanies. This is a way to avoid referring to litanies through the fuzzy notion of *genre*, which expresses both too much and too little.

The *Litany of the Saints* unquestionably displays the litanic grammar. Its structure remained stable over the course of centuries. In some cases, newer saints replaced older ones whose cults had been forgotten; however, the overall syntagmatic organization of the different variants proved to be constant.

The first part consists of an introduction (usually a *Kyrie*) and a list of invocations directed to different saints. Categories of saints are arranged in a precise hierarchic order: *Virgo Maria et Angeli; Patriarchæ et Prophætæ; Apóstoli et Discípuli; Martyres; Episcopi et Doctores, Presbyteri et religiosi, Sanctae, Laici*. The group of the martyrs appears in the earliest versions of the *Litany*, while the other groups were progressively appended to the list.

The order of the categories, locating martyrs immediately after the apostles and before every other kind of saint, is always respected. In early litanies the groups following *Episcopi et Doctores* are missing.

The second part consists of a list of petitions directly addressed to Christ and an envoy (usually an *Agnus Dei*). The petitions can be further subdivided into *Deprecations, Obsecrations, Intercessions*, on the basis of worshipers' invocations (*Ab x libera nos, Domine; Per x libera nos, domine; Ut x te rogamus, audi nos*). The presence or absence of the second part can depend on the liturgy and on the calendar³.

The second part of the *Litany* is related to the Byzantine *ektenia*, which is an important part of Eastern Liturgy consisting of a series of petitions (Sadowski 2011). In the Western tradition, only

3. See Williamson (2019).

the formula “Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison” has been preserved; this formula opens the *Litany*. It is more difficult to reconstruct the diachronic development of the first part, the part Sadowski calls *polyonimic*, as we will see in the final part of the paper.

The syntagmatic structure of litanies entails the role of mediator: saints (martyrs included) build a bridge between the immanent universe in which value is not created *ex nihilo* or destroyed, and the transcendent universe in which God, the source of values, is located. It is a case of *participative communication* (Greimas 1973).

Thus, in order to address their petitions to God (the ektenial part), worshippers must first ask for the mediation of the saints. This explains why these two syntagms, which have different diachronical origins, have converged in the litanic structure. According to Marscianni (2008) the enunciational structure of a prayer usually involves two subjects, the worshippers and the divinity. The worshippers are inferior to the divinity in terms of power; thus, they use knowledge to seduce the divinity. The *Litany of the Saints* represents a special case wherein seduction is addressed firstly to the saints, in their role as mediators.

The same structure of mediation is expressed by the enunciation of the litany: the priest (or cantor) proposes a verse and the worshippers (or choir) answer. Thus, the enunciated structure (worshippers–saints–God) is isomorphic with the enunciational structure (worshippers–priest–God).

As these brief notes about their syntagmatic organization suggest, litanies can be considered an exceptional document, registering as they do the changes that took place in the notion of sanctity after the end of the persecutions. A generative grammar could provide a rule reflecting diachronic change: new categories are *recursively* added to the grammar. It is worth noting that groups are implicit in earlier versions of the litany. Thus, each group represents a different deep semantic category of the grammar, not necessary expressed at the surface level: the groups of saints — martyrs included — can be considered a *form of the content*.

For this reason, the litany also works as a mnemonics: the context provided by the nearest saints suggests the thematic role of each saint. The *Litany of the Saints* is a text of a reticent kind. Some knowledge can be deduced by the context in which an unknown name is inserted: for example, if it appears between two martyrs, then it is a martyr. However, the *Litany* lives inside an encyclopedic environment, namely that of oral culture. The copyist might try to spare some ink by noting only the name of the saint, without any biographical information. This explains how the syntactic structure has been able to remain stable throughout time, whereas new cults have substituted forgotten ones, and introduces the problem of the link between litanies and collective memory.

3. Remarks on the Diachronic Development of the Litany

In the first part of this article I have reconstructed the structure of the litany, considered a stable *form of the content* according to the principles of difference and recursivity. In the second part, I will address a different issue, namely the *substance of the content* formed by this structure, through a survey of its diachronic change.

I will not provide a complete history of the litany in this context, but rather focus on those structural phenomena concerning the syntagmatic organization of this practice, making reference to different traditions and focusing in particular on the group of martyrs. However, diachronic change is contextual to the diffusion of the *Litany* in space and time (see Fig. 1).

To my knowledge, the earliest list of saints can be found in the Roman Canon, specifically in the *Commemoratio pro defunctis*:

Nobis quoque peccatoribus, famulis tuis, de multitudíne, miserationum tuarum, sperantibus, partem aliquam, et societatem donare digneris, cum tuis sanctis, Apostolis et Martyribus: cum Ioanne, Stephano, Matthia, Barnaba, Ignatio, Alexandro, Marcellino, Petro, Felicitate, Perpetua, Agatha, Lucia, Agnete, Cæcilia, Anastasia, et omnibus Sanctis tuis.



Figure 1. *Litany of the Saints*: Origins and diffusion.

After St. John (the Baptist), who can be considered an ur-martyr, the list contains fourteen martyrs, seven men and seven women. The list is hierarchically ranked: apostles, popes, and virgins; these groups will be inherited by litanies. At the end of the list, all the saints are invoked. Since the list contains only martyrs, the final closure basically identifies martyrs and saints.

According to scholars, the list might have been inserted in the Canon by Pope Symmacus at the beginning of the 6th century. In the section *Communicantes* of the Canon, there is another list including, after the Holy Virgin, 12 apostles and 12 martyrs. By following the diffusion of the cult in Rome, the original nucleus, dating back to the 4th–5th century, can be identified as consisting of: Mary, Peter, Paul, Sixtus (probably Pope Sixtus II, martyr), Laurence, Cornelius (Pope and martyr), and Cyprian⁴.

4. This debate is summarized in the Cathopedia: https://it.cathopedia.org/wiki/Canone_Romano (accessed June 20, 2019).

We consider this list to be a pre-litanic source, a literary model. It is not a litany. In fact, it cannot be generated by the grammar I introduced above since these figures are not invoked as intercessors. Their thematic role is different. Instead, they represent the memory of early Christian community: in fact, the first martyrs were *witnesses of the passion*. This memory has been inherited by the *Litany of the Saints* and transmitted to the contemporary Catholic Church. Thus, the martyr as a figure retains its memory, a quality capable of migrating along with him or her between different texts and within society (Bertetti 2013). As a thematic role, in this period the martyr performs an anthropological function which enables the creation of the Christian Church as a collective actor, an active subject in history.

The earliest document consisting of a litanic list of invocations to the saints can be found in Syria (7th century) and Egypt (starting from the 6th century). Unlike the pre-litanic sources, this list can be generated by the grammar. Baumstark (1904) published a proto-litanic text dating back to the 7th century, belonging to the Melkite Church that remained loyal to the emperor after the Monophysite schism. Baumstark translated the litany into Latin, and here below is the group of the martyrs:

Sancti martyres domne Stephane, Georgi, Theodore, Sergi et Bacche,
Cosma et Damiani, Demetri, Cyriace, Joannes, Procopi, Pantaleemon,
Hermolae, et omnes sancti maryres supplicamini pro nobis peccatoribus.

Unfortunately, we have no information on the liturgic use of this text. However, a clue can be found in the Egyptian monophysite environment of the same period, specifically in the more than 200 litanic steles commemorating monks discovered by James Edward Quibell in the monastery of Apa Jeremias in Saqqara (see Quibell 1909 and 1912).

Some steles were already known in Europe. Three of them, sold by the painter Pelagio Palagi to the Museo Civico Archeologico of Bologna, were translated by Emilio Teza (1878, see Fig. 2).

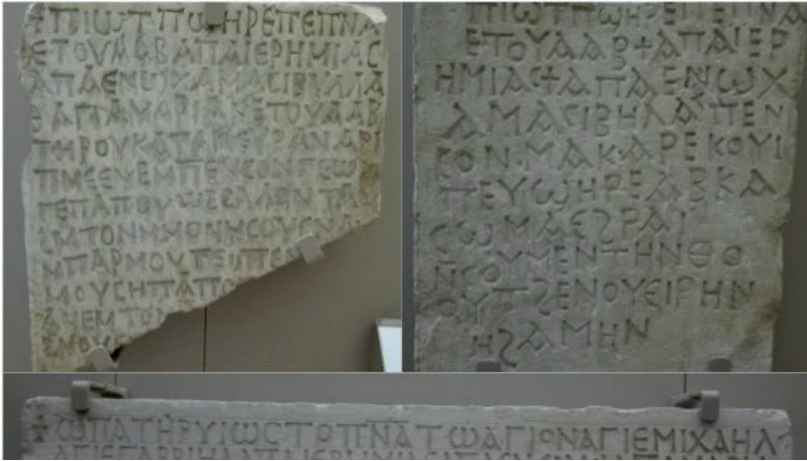


Figure 2. Coptic stelae at the Museo Civico Archeologico of Bologna.

The monastery was founded by Emperor Anastasios I (431–518) and later destroyed in 750 under the Umayyad Caliphate. The monastery belongs to the Coptic Church. For this reason, in the longest remaining stele (n. 203), after the invocation to the martyrs as a whole, we find invocations to individual martyrs⁵ appearing before the names of the Popes of Alexandria and the founders of the monastery (Jeremias and Enoch):

- Victor (a soldier from Asyut, martyr)
- Phoebammon (Aba–Fam, a soldier, martyr from Awsim)
- Menas (martyr and wonder–worker)
- Saint George
- Saint Cyriacus
- Father Philoteusli (?)
- The forty martyrs,
- Father Alou (?)
- Father Orion of Egypt
- Father Kloug (physician, ascetic, priest, and martyr)

5. Some of them belong to the Coptic tradition. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Coptic_saints#P (accessed June 20, 2019).

Since proto-litanies can be found in both the Melkite and Coptic traditions, I would hypothesize that this practice was already in use before the Council of Chalcedon and Monophysite schism (Galofaro 2018). The liturgic function of these proto-litanies is clearly related to funeral rites. The martyrs acquire a new function in that they are not only figures of memory, but also mediators between life and death. In other words, their function is not only anthropological but also cosmological, linking the Church in Heaven to the Church on Earth. The new function is associated with the morphodynamic development of the litany from early memorial lists. New groups of saints are added to the litany, namely archangels and angels, biblical characters, and high priests.

The earliest western versions of the *Litany of the Saints* derive from the Anglo-Saxon environment and date to the 7th century, when Theodore of Tarsus, Cilicia, having resided in Constantinople and then in Rome, finally became Archbishop of Canterbury and there introduced the *Litany* into western culture (Lapidge 1991). From that moment onward the litany achieved immediate success, spreading all across Europe. In particular, it is possible to reconstruct the route it took from England to France, as this trajectory is recorded by the *Laudes Imperiale* sung during Charlemagne's coronation (800) (Woolley 1915⁶).

In the Ambrosian rite we find what might be the oldest Italian version of this litany, in the manuscript "T 96 sup" located in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana that dates back to the 10th–11th century, published by Magistretti (1905). In this version of the litany, none of the saints is posterior to the 7th century. In later versions, there is a gap between the 7th and 12th centuries, when Saint Galdino (1166–1176) was added to the list (Magnoli 1995). Some saints indicate a relationship with the Gallican environment (e.g. Saint Hilary of Poitiers and Martin of Tours⁷). Interestingly,

6. <https://archive.org/details/coronationritesoowooluft> (accessed June 20, 2019).

7. The Ambrosian litany shows also some peculiarities. Near the traditional hierarchy of saints (Maria, Archangels, Johannes the Baptist, Peter and Paul, Apostles, Evangelists, Martyrs, Popes, etc.) there are interesting groups: Bishops of Milan from the 3rd to the 5th century (Castritian, Calimerius, Maternus, Eustorgius I, Dionysius; Ambrosius, who usually ends the litanies; Simplicianus; Magnus; and Galdino, only in later versions of the litany). Bishops belonging to churches with an historical relation with the Church

they can be found in a list of saints added by a later hand to a manuscript from the 9th century. The list reveals a link to the *Gelasian Sacramentary* (8th century), proving that the litany traveled along a route leading from France to Milan and from there to the rest of Italy. It is worth noting that litanic lists are not included in the *Sacramentarium Veronense* (6th century).

Unfortunately, as Magistretti (1905) has noted, the order of the saints reported in “T 96” is distorted, making it impossible to reconstruct two distinct groups of martyrs (broad and local) and their potential syntagmatic relationships. The cults of many of these saints are both local and universal, attesting to the importance of Milan as a capital of the Roman empire and Christianity.

In the Ambrosian rite, the liturgical function of the litany is extremely interesting. Litanies are not only sung during baptism, but also during last rites and funerals (Ponzo, Galofaro, and Marino, in press). This fact led Magnoli (1996) to hypothesize that litanies, originally sung during the anointing of the sick, became part of the baptism later on through the intermediate stage of the *baptismum gravitale* addressed to infants in life-threatening situations. The relationship between litany and death seems to have been inherited from the oriental proto-litanies. In semi-otic terms, we can consider litany to be a specific form of the content, whose relationship with the *substance of the content* changed in the middle ages; in particular, its early liturgical function shaped the values related to the end of life, as nowadays it marks the beginning of life. In both cases there is an inchoative aspect: the beginning of life on earth and the beginning of true life in heaven.

Contemporary versions of the litany display a number of differences in comparison to earlier versions⁸. A comparison between the litanies after the Council of Trent and after the Second Vatican Council is presented in Table 1.

of Milan (For example, Syrus of Pavia, 4th century; Zeno of Verona, +380); Bassianus of Lodi, 376–413); Martyrs whose relics were found by S. Ambrosius (For example, Nazarius and Celsus, Protasius and Gervasius).

8. http://www.vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/libretti/2013/20130312ingresso-conclave.pdf (accessed June 20, 2019).

Commemoratio pro defunctis (6th century)	Rituale Romanum (Pope Pius XI, 1925)	Litany sung by the Cardinals at the entry in Conclave in 2012
Cum [...] Stephano,	Sancte Stéphane, ora	Sancte Stéphane, ora
Matthia,	–	–
Barnaba,	–	–
Ignatio,	–	Sancte Ignáti Antiochéne,
Alexandro,	–	–
Marcellino,	–	–
Petro,	–	–
–	–	Sancte Polycárpe,
–	–	Sancte Iustíne,
–	Sancte Lauréti,	Sancte Lauréti,
–	Sancte Vincenti,	–
–	Sancti Fabiane et Sebastiane,	–
–	Sancti Johannes et Paule,	–
–	Sancti Cosma et Damiane,	–
–	Sancti Gervasi et Protasi,	–
–	Omnes sancti Mártyres	–
–	–	Sancte Cypriáne,
–	–	Sancte Bonifati,
–	–	Sancte Stanisláe,
–	–	Sancte Thoma Becket,
–	–	Sancti Ioánnes Fisher et Thoma More,
–	–	Sancte Paule Miki,
–	–	Sancti Isaac Jogues et Ioánnes de Brébeuf,
–	–	Sancte Petre Chanel,
–	–	Sancte Cárole Lwanga,
Felicitate,	–	Sanctæ Perpétua et Felícitas
Perpetua,	–	–
Agatha,	Sancta Agatha,	–
Lucia,	Sancta Lucia,	–
Agnete,	Sancta Agnes,	Sancta Agnes,
Cæcilia,	Sancta Caecilia,	–
–	Sancta Catharina,	–
Anastasia,	Sancta Anastasia,	–
–	–	Sancta María Goretti,
et omnibus Sanctis tuis	Omnes sanctæ virgines et vi- duæ,	Omnes sancti Mártyres,

Table 1. A comparison between two versions of the *Litany of the Saints*, after the Council of Trent and after the Second Vatican Council.

In the *Rituale Romanum* (1925), all the martyrs listed belong to the early Christian Church, whereas the new version traces a continuous temporal line linking it with contemporary martyrs. It is worth noting that, starting from John Fisher and excepting only Paul Miki, all the new entries were canonized during the 20th century. Furthermore, some women were removed from the group of *Holy Women* to be relocated in the group of martyrs (Perpetua and Felicitas, Agnes). Other versions after the Second Vatican Council might also include Saint Teresa Benedetta Della Croce (Edith Stein) and Saint Massimiliano Kolbe. These changes in the litany suggest, firstly, that over the course of the centuries Catholic believers progressively discussed the gender distinction, trying to confer on women a more active role in the Church. However, innovation is achieved through tradition: in the *Commemoratio pro defunctis* the list is composed of only martyrs, subdivided into men and women⁹. Moreover, the very notion of sanctity changed, lending greater weight to the thematic role of the *martyr*¹⁰. The great majority (from Saint Steven to Saint Cyprian) belong to the early clandestine church. Thus, by juxtaposing its earliest and latest martyrs, the contemporary Catholic Church has rediscovered martyrdom as a link with its origins. Edith Stein is an interesting case: a woman, converted Jew, philosopher, and theologian, her identity is a superposition of different and partially conflicting values. She could be located in different groups but she is always placed among the group of martyrs, proving once again the hierarchical importance of this group.

4. Conclusions: Martyrs, Memory, and Time

The notion of morphodynamics can prove useful for understanding the logic of diachronic change in the litanic form. In particular, it is possible to observe three phenomena:

9. This phenomenon is not unusual. In different cases the editor of the text uses the source of his source to enrich liturgic texts — see Mazza (2001).

10. Matthia and Barnaba have been reclassified as Apostles in the Litany of the Saints.

1) During its diffusion, the litanic form of the content *forgot* its relationship with the original substance of the content and changed its function¹¹. Pre-litanic sources relate martyrs to memory. By transmitting the testimony of the passion, the martyrs enabled the construction of the collective identity of Early Christian communities (anthropological function); thence, the saints were entrusted with new functions: to mediate between life and death (cosmological function), linking the word to a transcendent, eternal dimension (as evidenced by Coptic litanies) and to mediate between worshippers and God, considered the transcendental source of values (soteriological function), as in western litanies. The development of these functions is outlined in Tab. 2.

<i>Function</i>	<i>Values associated with martyr's thematic role</i>	<i>Liturgical use of the list of martyrs</i>
Anthropological	Witness (/Sacrifice/, /Memory/)	Commemoratio pro defunctis
Cosmological	Mediator (/Life/, /Death/)	Funeral litanies (Ambrosian rite)
Soteriological	Interceder (/Good/, /Evil/)	Baptism; Laudes regiae in the coronation and before the Conclave

Table 2. Relation between theological function, values associated with the martyr's thematic role, and the liturgical use of the list of martyrs, from the older to the newer ones.

2) During this process, the form of the litany underwent a coherent development following a rule allowing new saints and groups to be generated. Starting from a list of male and female martyrs, a process of speciation¹² took place: apostles, virgins, patriarchs and prophets;

11. This kind of diachronic change is not unusual in language. As Hjelsmlev (1956) pointed out, in ancient Indo-European languages, the masculine/neuter opposition (form of the content) was related to the animated/inanimate one (substance of the content). Later on, this relation was forgotten by the masculine/neuter opposition — e.g. in German — and therefore re-introduced in different languages. For example, in Polish, the animated/inanimate opposition is addressed by different masculine declensions.

12. D'Arcy Thompson's theory of morphogenesis deeply influenced Lévi-Strauss perspective on diachronic change. This perspective represents a promising research field on narrative texts; see Ferraro (2014).

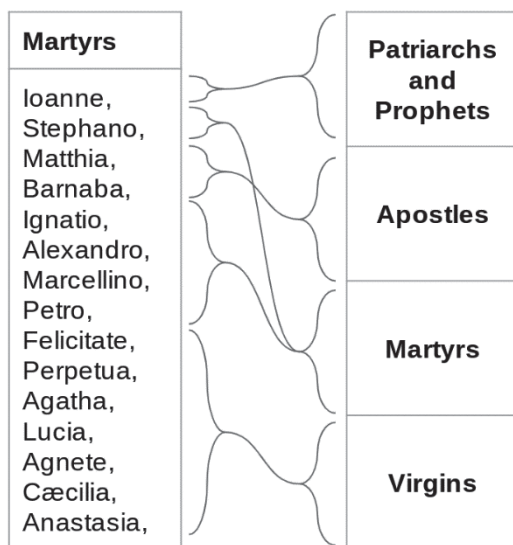


Figure 3. Diachronic differentiation of litanic groups.

later the Holy Virgin and angels; bishops and doctors, and, in recent times, laity (Fig. 3). This process started in the 5th century, when Christianity had already become the official cult of the Roman Empire and new figures of saints flank the martyrs. This shift corresponds to the end of the underground Church and its transformation into a source of transcendent legitimation of political power, and the role of the saints changed accordingly (Monaci Castagno 2015).

3) The most important and stable group of martyrs is represented by the early ones, belonging to the foundation and underground Church (1st–3rd century). It is important to underline that the new functions they assumed over time did not erase their older function.

There is evidence of a profound link between martyrdom, the consciousness of time, and the construction of Christians' collective identity. The Church of Alexandria used to number years starting from the year 284 AD, when the emperor Diocletian began his reign, opening the *Era of the martyrs*, and the contemporary Coptic Church still employs this calendar. It is worth noting that Christian calendars commemorate the day of the saint's death, considered the beginning of his or her real life (*dies natalis*).

A clue for understanding the relationship between the memory of the dead and the construction of collective identity is suggested by Edith Stein (1970). According to Stein, it is possible to distinguish between community and mass in that community is considered a collective, active subject, whereas mass is a passive set of individuals influenced by a leader through a mechanism of contagion. Communities are distinguished by collective lived experience; although every member of the community has an individual *Erlebnis*, all these experiences share the same real, correlated object. In our case, the death of the martyr would be the identical correlated object of the collective lived experience of the community, the element enabling its constitution as a collective subject (community of worshippers). This subject must be capable of maintaining its identity across time through its own peculiar form of temporalization, a notion which is semiotic and phenomenological at the same time. According to Husserl, time is constituted through a two-fold process starting from memories: the consciousness of the past is not only continuous, it is also a ‘consciousness of continuity’ (see e.g. Husserl 1966, n. 44, p. 318).

Three forms of temporal construction can be found in the memory of the saints: first, linear time, in which death constitutes a breaking point; second, cyclical time, which associates the memory of each saint with a day in the liturgical calendar; and third, eternity featuring the Church in Heaven¹³.

An interesting perspective on the relationship between liturgy, memory, and the constitution of Christian community is found in *The pilgrimage of Egeria*¹⁴.

Then the bishop is summoned, and he comes and takes a raised seat, and likewise the priests sit in their proper places, and hymns and antiphons are said. And when all these have been recited according to custom, the

13. For a discussion of this subject, see also Gabriele Marino’s paper in this volume.

14. Egeria, English translation: <http://www.ccel.org/m/mcclure/etheria/etheria.htm> (accessed June 20, 2019).

bishop rises and stands before the rails, that is, before the cave, and one of the deacons makes the customary commemoration of individuals one by one. And as the deacon pronounces each name the many little boys who are always standing by, answer with countless voices: *Kyrie eleyson*, or as we say *Miserere Domine*.

Acting as a proto-ethnologist of the late 4th century, Egeria describes the liturgy in use during daily services in Jerusalem. It is evident that the responsorial structures foreshadow the *Litany of the Saints*.

As we have seen, during the 20th century the list of martyrs was supplemented by a great number of new entries and the semantic structure of the litany was reshaped, relocating female martyrs to the end of the group. The two phenomena create a connection with early pre-litanic lists of martyrs. The contemporary Catholic Church rediscovered the martyr as the saint *par excellence*, thus reshaping its identity around this figure of memory — and the memory of this figure.

The importance of the link between historical time and Christian identity has been expressed clearly by John Paul II, who metaphorically defined the list of the 512 lay people canonized and beatified in the 20th century as ‘litanies’: for the pontiff, the sequence of their names and appellations (such as ‘mater familias,’ ‘puer,’ and ‘iuvenis’) constitutes a sort of ‘identity card’ containing ‘the history of the Church’ and transmitting a message and invitation to all believers (Ponzo, Galofaro and Marino, in press).

In the litany, the main role of the saints is to mediate between worshippers and a far-away God, between historical time and eternity. However, the original group of martyrs is more ancient than other kinds of saints. It shows a different role in the construction of the temporal identity of the community, thus allowing the Church to assume a collective identity and active role as a subject acting in history.

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