

MARCO PAPASIDERO*

MEMORIES AND *FAMA SANCTITATIS* IN THE HAGIOGRAPHIES
AND THE CANONIZATION PROCESS OF GERARD MAJELLA

MEMORIA E *FAMA SANCTITATIS* NELLE AGIOGRAFIE E NEL PROCESSO
DI CANONIZZAZIONE DI GERARDO MAIELLA

ABSTRACT

Our article focuses on the fame of sanctity of St. Gerard Majella (1726-1755), a lay brother of the Congregation of the most Holy Redeemer who lived in the South of Italy, and the elaboration of his memory. Through a historical and anthropological approach, we take into consideration different kinds of sources: the bio-hagiographical texts; the hagiographies; furthermore, and above all, the witnesses' depositions in the canonization process. Firstly, we present the Saint and his canonization process. Then, we examine the question of the witnesses and their written or oral "sources", from which emerges the highly "mediated" nature of the whole process, considering that they had not known Gerard on a personal basis. Our second part is aimed at studying the "elaboration of memory" through the analysis of an episode of the Saint's youth, mentioned in the hagiographies and in the canonization process as well.

Keywords: Gerard Majella – Hagiography – Canonization – Sanctity – Memory

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Gerard Majella¹ was a lay brother of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer – generally known as the Redemptorists –, founded by St. Alphonsus Lig-

* Università di Torino (marco.papasidero@unito.it). This paper is part of the project NeMo-Sancti (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).

¹ On Gerard Majella see: N. FERRANTE, *Le fonti storiche della vita di S. Gerardo Maiella*, «Spicilegium historicum CSSR» 2 (1954), 125-49; Id., *Il nome e cognome di San Gerardo Maiella*, *ibi*, 461-62; O. GREGORIO, *Bibliografia alfonsiana e gerardina (1930-1964)*, s.l. 1965; N. FERRANTE, *Gerardo Maiella*, in *Bibliotheca Sanctorum*, VI, Roma 1965, col. 192-96; G. ZITAROSA, *San Gerardo Maiella mistico. Dagli Scritti e dalle Lettere*, Ercolano (NA) 1969; G. DE ROSA, *Pertinenze ecclesiastiche e santità nella storia sociale e religiosa della Basilicata dal XVIII al XIX*

uori (1696-1787)² in Scala, near Amalfi, in 1732, and approved by Pope Benedict XIV in 1749. Majella was born in Muro, in Lucania, on 6th April 1726, and died in the convent of Materdomini, a district of Caposele (AV), on 16th October 1755. He devoted himself to humility, the practice of penitence, the collection of alms and the worship of Jesus and the Virgin Mary. His very brief life was troubled by poor health, and he died of tuberculosis at the early age of 29. He had already been considered a saint during his lifetime, but his *fama sanctitatis* increased during the next few years, even if it was not possible to start the beatification process until the end of the XIX century due to the priority of canonizing the promoter of the Congregation, St. Alphonsus, and the huge costs of the procedure. For this motive, Gerard was beatified by Pope Leo XIII only on 29th January 1893, and canonized by Pius X on 11th December 1904. His figure is very interesting from a number of points of view, but in this case it could be very useful to draw attention to the role of memory, particularly the way in which it emerges from the acts and documents of the canonization process³. From this perspective, the most interesting source is represented by witnesses' depositions. The article starts with a general presentation of the canonization process and of witnesses from a sociological outlook (social classes, gender, etc.). It then considers the theme of memory and the way in which this has been built by the witnesses, reflecting particularly on the distinction between written (hagiographies) and oral (family tales) sources about Gerard's life and sanctity. The second part is devoted to the way in which memory was modified over the decades, through the comparison between witnesses' depositions, biographical notes and some hagiographical texts. A case study of an episode in Gerard's childhood will clarify this aspect.

In more general terms, my choice of studying memory in Gerard's process is motivated by the fact that it was celebrated many years after his death and, for this reason, almost all witnesses had never known him personally, so the memory is strongly "mediated". Furthermore, Gerard, although he was canonized after St. Al-

secolo, «Ricerche di storia sociale e religiosa» 4/7-8 (1975) (a version of this contribution was also published in ID., *Storie di santi*, Roma-Bari 1990, 34-48 and, with the same title, in ID., *Chiesa e religione popolare nel Mezzogiorno*, Roma-Bari 1978, 47-101); L. MARTELLA, *Pellegrini a san Gerardo, ricerca socio-antropologica*, Napoli 1984; G. CAIONE - G. MAJELLA, *Appunti biografici di un suo contemporaneo*, ed. by S. MAJORANO, Materdomini 1988; *San Gerardo tra spiritualità e storia*. Atti del convegno nel 1° centenario della beatificazione del santo (Materdomini 24-26 giugno, 1993), Materdomini 1993; D. CAPONE, *L'immagine di S. Gerardo Maiella. Ritratti - Icone - Spiritualità*, Materdomini 1990; S. GIORDANO, *Gerardo Maiella, santo*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, LIII, Roma 1999, 363-64; *Gerardo Maiella. La sua storia e il nostro tempo*, a cura di A. DE SPIRITO - A. AMARANTE, Materdomini (AV) 2006 (particularly, for the anthropological approach: A. DE SPIRITO, *Personalità e stile di vita di Gerardo Maiella*, 7-64).

² For a first overview of his figure see: G. CACCIATORE, *Alfonso Maria de' Liguori*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, II, Roma 1960, 342-50; G. DE ROSA, *Sant'Alfonso e il secolo dei lumi*, in ID., *Storie di santi*, 51-73.

³ On the canonization process and models of sanctity in the modern era see: G. SODANO, *Modelli e selezione del santo moderno. Periferia napoletana e centro romano*, Napoli 2002. Also very interesting is the book ID., *Il miracolo nel Mezzogiorno d'Italia dell'età moderna tra santi, madonne, guaritrici e medici*, Napoli 2010.

phonusus, is an older model of sanctity, considered by some the last great hagiographic legend of Southern Italy and of the modern age. He was, in fact, deeply attached to penitential practices, with a strong mystic dimension.

The number of witnesses to Gerard Majella's canonization process was very large because of the two diocesan and two apostolical processes⁴. They were celebrated in Muro Lucano, the city that was his birthplace, and in Conza, the diocese in which there is the Redemptorist convent of Materdomini of Caposele, where he died in 1755. The diocesan part of the process was started in April 1843 by the bishop of Muro, Antonio Gigli, and dealt with Gerard's virtues and fame of sanctity. There were sixty witnesses, principally linked to his childhood and youth. In December 1843, a parallel process started in Conza, with ninety-four witnesses⁵. In both cases, the postulator was Giuseppe Mautone (1765-1846). Later, after the *nihil obstat* of the Congregation of Rites on the opening of the beatification process and Pope Pio IX's authorization, the apostolical processes started in the two dioceses. That in Muro was celebrated between 1850 and 1853, with thirty-eight depositions, while that in Conza was celebrated between 1848 and 1856, with forty-four witnesses. On Mautone's death, Domenico Centore was nominated the new postulator.

The total number of witnesses over the course of thirteen years – the period from the opening of the ordinary processes in 1843 to the conclusion of the apostolic ones in Conza in 1856 – is 153 people⁶.

According to the analysed data, there is an important female quota among the witnesses. Particularly, in the Muro process there is a higher level of female representation, and that is due to the large number of depositions by nuns from the Poor Clare Monastery of Saint Bartolomeo in Melfi⁷, the Discalced Carmelite Convent in

⁴ On the canonization process see: A. DONATO - A. V. AMARANTE, *Il processo per la canonizzazione di Gerardo Maiella*, in *Gerardo Maiella. La sua storia e il nostro tempo*, 217-35; F. CHIOVARO, *Formazione e significato della leggenda di San Gerardo*, in *San Gerardo tra spiritualità e storia*, 107-44; in particular p. 121-22, 125-35. For the list of *positiones* see: A. SAMPERS, *Positiones in causis beatificationis et canonizationis servorum Dei CSSR*, «Spicilegium historicum CSSR» 10 (1962), 282-86. On the sociological approach to canonizations see: P. DELOOZ, *Sociologie et canonization*, Liège-La Haye 1969. On sanctity in the XVIII century and also on its political dimension see: M. CAFFIERO, *La politica della santità. Nascita di un culto nell'età dei Lumi*, Roma-Bari 1996; P. PALMIERI, *I taumaturghi della società. Santi e potere politico nel secolo dei Lumi*, Roma 2010. On the relation between society and sanctity see also D. WEINSTEIN - R. M. BELL, *Saints and Society. The two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000-1700*, Chicago-London 1982; J.-M. SALLMANN, *Santi barocchi. Modelli di santità, pratiche devozionali e comportamenti religiosi nel regno di Napoli dal 1540 al 1750*, Lecce 1996, 190-225; ID., *Sainteté et société*, in *Santità, culti, agiografia. Temi e prospettive*, ed. by S. BOESCH GAJANO, Roma 1997, 328-40.

⁵ Sacra Congregatio Rituum, *Murana seu Compsana beatificationis et canonizationis ven. Servi Dei. Fr. Gerardi Majella, laici professi Congregationis SS.mi Redemptoris, Positio super virtutibus*, Card. Alexandro Barnabò Relatore, Roma, Ex Typographia Joseph Aurelj, 1871 [= *Positio super virtutibus*].

⁶ In the apostolical processes, a part of the witnesses were taken from the ordinary ones. For a more detailed analysis of the witnesses see: CHIOVARO, *Formazione e significato della leggenda di San Gerardo*, 132-35.

⁷ The monastery was built in 1574 under Pope Gregorius XIII.

Ripacandida⁸, the Benedictine Monastery in Aiella⁹, and the Poor Clare Monastery in Muro Lucano¹⁰.

The religious world is well represented with a significant presence of priests, nuns, friars, etc.¹¹. Most of these religious witnesses are to be found in the processes celebrated in Conza, while a lower number appears in Muro. The motive is that the former are more deeply related to Gerard's adulthood, and therefore there are a lot of depositions by brothers from the convent. Conversely, in the latter – more related to the first part of his life – many depositions have been given by lay people.

From the canonization process, it would seem that Gerard was extremely popular across different social classes, also thanks to the miracles performed. On the basis of the depositions, we can recognise at least three classes. The first, represented by a few witnesses, is composed of highly qualified people, identified by titles such as “most illustrious” (*Illustrissimus*), “most excellent” (*Eccellentissimus*, *Perillustrissimus*), and so on. They are lawyers, doctors, prefects, chancellors, etc. The second is constituted largely by middle-class people – principally landowners (*possidentes*) – generally characterized by the title of “sir” (*Dominus*). The third class is made up of numerous artisans, probably with little education, as confirmed by the absence of titles next to their names. In detail, they are woodworkers, blacksmiths, bricklayers, workmen, weavers, tailors, peasants, and so on. Among the lay people, this is the most representative category, proof of the deep devotion to the Saint among the lower classes¹².

In sum, therefore, Gerard was known across the different social classes, though a special devotion was shown him by women, small landowners, farmers and artisans, as Francesco Chiovaro highlights¹³.

⁸ The building hosted the nuns until 1908, when it was closed down due to the lack of novices. Mary of Jesus and of the Holy Trinity (Maria Teresa Araneo [1725-1803]) was the prioress of the monastery. She exchanged some letters with Gerard and was a friend of Alphonsus Liguori.

⁹ The monastery was built during the XV century. According to some depositions, in this church a lot of people attended Gerard's miraculous levitation during an ecstasy.

¹⁰ The Poor Clare nuns were in Muro Lucano until 1608, with their settlement in the church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

¹¹ In this category are included all witnesses who took vows or lived in a convent, even if they were lay people.

¹² On the context of sanctity in the South of Italy, particularly through Gerard's example, and from a sociological approach, see: A. DE SPIRITO, *Il Santo nella storia del Mezzogiorno*, «Sociologia. Rivista di scienze sociali» 2 (1976), 99-118; G. DE ROSA, *Sainteté, clergé et peuple dans le Mezzogiorno italien au milieu du XVIII^{ème} siècle*, «Revue d'histoire de la Spiritualité» 52 (1976), 245-64; G. GALASSO, *Santi e santità*, in Id., *L'altra Europa. Per un'antropologia storica del Mezzogiorno d'Italia*, Milano 1982, 64-120; SALLMANN, *Santi barocchi*. On society and social classes in the XVIII century see: G. ORLANDI, *Società e religione nel Regno di Napoli alla metà del '700*, in *San Gerardo tra spiritualità e storia*, 169-245: in particular p. 185-87, 192-93, 214-22.

¹³ CHIOVARO, *Formazione e significato della leggenda di San Gerardo*, 135.

1. *The witnesses' depositions: oral and written sources*

Due to the lengthy period of time that lapsed between Gerard's death (1755) and the opening of the canonical process (1843), only one of the witnesses had known or met him personally: Saverio Pascucci, 98 years old, who gave his deposition in the Muro ordinary process, related that when he was ten or twelve, he had met Gerard, who was involved in the Redemptorist missions, many times:

I was ten or twelve when brother Gerard came here with the mission of the Ligorian Fathers, of whom St. Alphonsus was then the Superior. I spoke several times face to face with the above-mentioned Servant of God¹⁴.

This is the only *de visu* witness of the entire canonization process. In fact, all the other witnesses knew of him mainly through the mediation of their families (parents, uncles, grandparents) or other people such as nuns, elders and so on. While Saverio Pascucci had had the possibility to talk with Gerard, the others used a "mediated memory"¹⁵, not composed by personal experiences, but only by tales and stories heard from those who had known him personally (*de auditu a videntibus*)¹⁶. Precisely because of this significant delay, one of the questions the witnesses were asked related to the "typology" of sources of their knowledge of the Saint; particularly, one recurring question was whether they had read biographies or hagiographies about Gerard. The reference was to the *Vita*, the first hagiography written by Antonio Tannoia and published in Naples in 1811, which had had widespread diffusion¹⁷. From the point of view of the process' authority, it was important to verify that all witnesses' depositions came from a direct knowledge of Majella's life, although mediated

¹⁴ «Io aveva dieci o dodici anni allorché venne qui il Frat. Gerardo colla Missione de' PP. Ligorini, di cui era allora Superiore S. Alfonso e parlai più volte faccia a faccia col d. Servo di Dio» (*Positio super virtutibus, Summarium super dubio*, 19, teste 22).

¹⁵ On cultural memory see: M. HALBWACHS, *La mémoire collective*, Paris 1950; J. ASSMANN, *La memoria culturale. Scrittura, ricordo e identità politica nelle grandi civiltà antiche*, Torino 1997; U. FABIETTI - V. MATERA, *Memoria e identità. Simboli e strategie del ricordo*, Roma 1999; D. BAKHURST, *Memoria, identità e psicologia culturale*, Napoli 2000; P. RICOEUR, *Ricordare, dimenticare, perdonare. L'enigma del passato*, Bologna 2004; M. BLOCH, *Apologia della storia o mestiere di storico* [first edition 1949], Torino 2009; *Figure e forme della memoria culturale*, a cura di F. FIORENTINO, Macerata 2011.

¹⁶ The use of the *de auditu a videntibus* witnesses is due to the antiquity of the case. At the same time, to balance this aspect and the lower reliability of this type of testimony, in accordance with the coeval regulations on the processes of saints, four *post mortem* miracles were required and not just two, as happened for the *de visu* witnesses' processes.

¹⁷ It is important to underline the role of Tannoia's work from the point of view of the reciprocal influences between hagiography and counterrevolutionary literature, as argued by Pasquale Palmieri. He emphasizes that writing the lives of various saints, including that of St. Alphonsus Liguori – and, probably, also of St. Gerard – «significò, per i loro biografi, tracciare la strada per la ricostruzione di una società cristiana, per il ritorno verso un mondo perduto». The candidates to sanctity, also on the basis of hagiographic compositions, were promoted as healers of society, «colonne portanti di una palingenesi fondata sul rifiuto dell'empietà rivoluzionaria e napoleonica» (PALMIERI, *I santi taumaturghi*, 259).

by someone else, and not from the reading of books. This is a crucial point in the analysis of a saint's public memory. In fact, the diffusion of information that came from different *media* – such as books, journals and, for more recent saints, television and internet – could influence the authenticity of personal memory, for example by mixing one's own memories of information related by parents, friends and acquaintances, with details coming from other – not primary – sources.

In this case, the principal aim of the process, that is, defining the memories of people who had personally met the saint or spoken with someone who knew him, would fail. It was important that the *fama sanctitatis* emerging from the acts and *Positio super virtutibus* should be spontaneous and not artificial; for this reason, too, the wide diffusion of Tannoia's *Vita* could be an element of alteration of "natural memories". Some of the witnesses, however, highlighted that Gerard's fame of sanctity was not caused by the circulation of hagiographies. It is useful to consider some examples related to this question¹⁸.

In certain cases, the depositions were declared to be true because the witnesses were illiterate and therefore unable to read books about Gerard¹⁹. This is the case with Lorenzo Di Masi, who was only able to listen to information and not to read:

I cannot read to my misfortune, and I have supported my depositions on the sayings of old, moderate, and trustworthy men²⁰.

The depositions in which witnesses affirmed not to have read any books about Gerard are very numerous²¹. In other cases, witnesses stated they had never read any

¹⁸ In the depositions, the role of Tannoia's *Vita* was very important. As Chiovaro argues, the book was used for the interrogatories and, sometimes, the witnesses quoted the text (CHIOVARO, *Formazione e significato della leggenda di San Gerardo*, 125). In our opinion, despite these aspects, reflecting on depositions and declarations is in any case useful.

¹⁹ An example is the deposition of Giacomo Caruso, a settler: «I cannot say anything about this Servant of God's life; since I never knew how to read»; «Non so dir niente sulle vite di questo Servo di Dio; giacché non ho saputo mai leggere» (*Positio super virtutibus, Summarium super dubium*, Conza Ord. Proc., 56, teste 15).

²⁰ «Io non so leggere per mia disgrazia, ed ho appoggiato le mie deposizioni sul detto di uomini vecchi, moderati e degni di ogni fede» (*ibi*, 54-5, teste 11).

²¹ Some examples: Michele Borrelli, landowner: «I have not read any writing or life of the Saint», «Niuno scritto o vita del Santo ho io letto» (*ibi*, Conza Ap. Proc., 43, teste 20); Francesco Vecchi, landowner: «I learnt various things about Gerard's life, birth, sanctity and other matters especially from my Mother, from a sister of my father's, not from written Lives, which I never read», «e specialmente da mia madre, da una sorella di mio padre non già da Vite scritte, che io non mai lessi, ho attinto varie cose sulla vita, nascita, santità e altro di Gerardo» (*ibi*, 43, teste 21); Teresa Gasparri Mazzone, textile worker: «I do not know if Lives have been written about Gerard», «Non conosco se siansi scritte Vite su di Gerardo» (*ibi*, 44, teste 22); Paola Trimarco, landowner: «I have never heard anyone read lives written about him», «Non ho mai udito leggere vite scritte su di lui» (*ibi*, 44, teste 24); Pasquale Marinaro: «But I have not read any written life», «Non ho letto però alcuna vita scritta» (*ibi*, 50, teste 43); Angelo Sturchio, priest: «I have never read Gerard's life, although I knew there was one written by Father Tannoja», «Non ho letto mai la vita di Gerardo, sebbene sapessi essere stata scritta dal P. Tannoja» (*ibi*, Proc. Ord. Conza, 54, teste 7); Bonifacio Ceres, priest: «I have never read [...] written or printed lives about the Servant of God», «Vite o scritte od impresse del Servo di Dio [...] non mai ho lette» (*ibi*, 56, teste 16); Serafina Pizza-Grasso,

Life on Gerard, even if they had had the opportunity to do so. This is the example of Claudio Maria Ripoli, several times Rector of the Congregation, and Consultor at the boarding school in Nocera dei Pagani, who claimed he had never read the *Vita*: «also because of my many cares, I have never read the life written by Father Tannoja»²².

In other cases witnesses admit to having read a book about Gerard, but highlight that it happened so long ago that they do not remember anything or the reading did not influence their memory²³. It is very interesting to notice how the principal issue remains the authenticity of memory, to such an extent that even if the witnesses read the book during their lives, it is not important because this authenticity – direct and personal, unmediated or only slightly mediated – is not at risk. One example is the deposition of Francesco Pucella, a land surveyor and landowner, who in the apostolical process of Muro stated that he had read the life of Gerard when he was younger – at the moment of testifying he was 65 years old – but that the deposition was based on what he had heard from other people:

When I was a young man I read the life of the Venerable Servant of God: at

taylor: «I cannot spend a word [...] on the written lives of Brother Gerard, because I know nothing about them», «Non posso spender parola [...] sulle vite scritte di Fratello Gerardo, perché niente ne conosco» (*ibi*, 57-58, teste 21); Giovanni Pietro Greco, priest: «The lives – that I have never read – written long after this well-founded fame [...], have not given support to this fame», «Non le vite scritte molto tempo dopo questa fama ben fondata, vite mai da me lette [...], hanno dato appoggio a questa fama» (*ibi*, 60, teste 30); Giuseppe Papio, landowner: «it cannot be said that his lives, which I have never read, have established this fame», «[...] non può dirsi che le sue vite, che non ho lette mai, hanno stabilita questa fama» (*ibi*, 62, teste 36); Angela Izzi, tailor: «it cannot be attributed [*sc.* the knowledge of Gerard's *fama sanctitatis*] to his lives, which I have no knowledge of», «non può attribuirsi [*sc.* the *fama sanctitatis*] alle sue vite, di cui non ho alcuna conoscenza» (*ibi*, 64, teste 41); Caterina Acciani, landowner: «I have never read these lives. Nor did I glean what I have laid down from those who had read them», «Io non ho letto mai queste vite. Né quanto ho deposto ho ricavato da chi le aveva lette» (*ibi*, 66, teste 49); Beatrice Capano, nun: «this fame [...] came to us independently [...] of Gerard's written or printed Lives, on which I never laid eyes»; «questa fama [...] ci sia venuta indipendentemente [...] dalle Vite di Gerardo a penna o a stampa, mai venute sotto gli occhi miei» (*ibi*, 71, teste 62); Carmine Boccardi, farmer: «I have never read the life of Brother Gerard», «Io non ho letto mai la vita di Fratello Gerardo» (*ibi*, 74, teste 73).

²² «il detto P. Tannoja ne scrisse la vita [*sc.* of Gerard] [...] pure per le molteplici mie cure non ho mai letta» (*ibi*, Muro Ord. Proc., 32, teste 3).

²³ In addition to the examples quoted, there are other witnesses that have read the book: Angelo Antonio Pirofalo, municipal chancellor: «I also read his life once; but the facts I refer to are those drawn from public fame, and from my elders», «Io ho letto anche una volta la sua vita; ma i fatti da me riferiti sono quelli attinti dalla fama pubblica, e dai miei maggiori» (*ibi*, Conza Ap. Proc., 43, teste 19); Luigi Ceres, expert in law: «I also protest having read the life of this holy man about 20 years ago: but I don't remember an iota of what I read in that», «Protesto pure di aver letta circa 20 anni addietro la vita di questo sant'uomo: ma non ricordo un jota di ciò che in quella io lessi» (*ibi*, Conza Ord. Proc., 55, teste 13). It is possible that Giuseppe dell'Orto, timber seller, read a *Vita*, because he states in the deposition: «All the news we have of his holiness and admirable life has always reached us immediately from our elders [...] nor is it derived from his Lives. Because his lives are reached to this great fame», «Tutte le notizie che si hanno della sua santità e vita ammirabile sempre ci sono prevenute immediatamente da nostri maggiori [...] né è derivata delle Vite di lui. Giacché le di lui Vite sono posteriori a questa gran fama» (*ibi*, 63, teste 39).

the present time, that which I am about to testify, I have learnt from others, not remembering what was read by me²⁴.

A particular case is that of Giovanni Camillo Ripoli (1780-1850), Major Rector and General Superior of the Redemptorist Congregation, the first witness in the apostolical process of Conza. Even if he collaborated in writing the *Vita* of St. Gerard, he declared that in all his depositions he reported what he had heard from his father, his uncle and others:

In all my present depositions I have constantly recalled the testimonies that I received in Corato when I was between 10 and 18 years or so of age, from the dear memoirs of my Father, of my Canon Uncle D. Domenico Ripoli, and from the other two very exemplary Canons D. Vito Zezza, and D. Felice Di Gioja²⁵.

The following deposition was along the same lines. Francesco Maria Alfani, a priest in Naples and Rector of the boarding school of Nocera dei Pagani, admitted to having read Tannoia's *Vita* but, at the same time, affirmed that he was going to report in his depositions just what he had heard when he was a young student in the boarding school of Caposele:

I also confess having knowledge of the life of the Venerable Gerard written by our Father D. Antonio Tannoja [...]. But I will only keep to what I remember having been told in Caposele by De Rubertis and which was forgotten in those spare moments, which the Superiors allowed a student²⁶.

In the reconstruction of authentic memory it is important also to verify that the people from whom the witnesses had heard about Gerard had not read any books on his life, as highlighted by Michele Santorelli, priest and nephew of Nicola Santorelli, Gerard's personal doctor, particularly during his last illness:

Although I read one of these lives about twenty years ago in order to inspire my brother to devotion to Gerard [...] yet I depose [...] because this is what my Forefather told, and the other Elders of the village, who knew him personally, and of my own knowledge, and I did not learn [...] from others that they had read the lives²⁷.

²⁴ «Da giovane lessi la vita del Ven. Servo di Dio: al presente ciò, che sono per deporre, ho inteso da altri, non ricordandomi ciò che fu da me letto» (*ibi*, Muro Ord. Proc., 7, teste 15).

²⁵ «In tutte le presenti mie deposizioni mi sono costantemente riportato alle testimonianze fattemene in Corato da' miei 10 a 18 anni circa delle care memorie di mio Padre, di mio Zio Canonico D. Domenico Ripoli, e dagli altri due esemplarissimi Canonici D. Vito Zezza, e D. Felice Di Gioja» (*ibi*, Conza Ap. Proc., 28-9, teste 1).

²⁶ «Confesso pure aver conoscenza della vita del Ven. Gerardo scritta dal nostro P. D. Antonio Tannoja [...]. Io però mi atterrò solo a quanto mi ricordo essermi detto in Caposele da' detti De Rubertis e sperduto in que' ritagli di tempo, che i Superiori permettevano ad uno studente» (*ibi*, 30, teste 2).

²⁷ «Sebbene io abbia letto una di queste vite circa venti anni dietro per infervorare mio fratello alla divozione verso Gerardo [...] pure io depongo [...] perché così raccontava mio Avo, e gli altri

Particularly interesting is the deposition of Nicola de Blasi, archpriest of the church collegiate of Deliceto, who affirmed that he had personally taken dictation of part of the *Vita* of father Tannoia, and that he was unsure as to which source he was using – the book or Gerard's public fame – as a witness in the process; at one point in his deposition he intimated that he favoured the information that came from the book, but elsewhere he declared his desire to use details that came from people he had heard during his life:

Now, having to give evidence, I would not know which of the two sources to attribute my knowledge to with a clear conscience: for safety's sake I will adhere to what is contained in the written life²⁸.

However, he then partially changed his position and stressed that all details included in his deposition came from his direct knowledge of someone who had personally met Gerard, and that both sources – books and *publica fama* – had the same content:

As I have generally narrated things, so did I also learn them from other sources of public fame. [...] What I have deposed as to his Life, death, miracles, gifts, and holiness, is all based on his constant, general and continuous and uninterrupted public fame among men of every class. Nor could the written life have influenced it: because I recall that the same things were being said even before it was written²⁹.

All the witnesses' memories are mediated by the direct knowledge of people who had known and met Gerard. In this regard, it is interesting to describe those who preserve memory of the Saint. All the witnesses declared the sources of their knowledge to be mainly family members: mothers, fathers, uncles, grandparents. They are the custodians of memory that talked to the witnesses – when they were young – about Gerard. Therefore, the house is the first place in which the witnesses listened and learned of his *fama sanctitatis*. At the same time, another oral source is represented by the congregation and all religious figures who lived in the same places as Gerard. As pointed out earlier, a great number of depositions are made by priests, nuns and friars. They had heard of Gerard not only from their families, when they were younger, but also and above all from other religious people who knew him personally and lived in the convent. This is the case with the Redemptorist brothers but also the nuns. The religious community safeguarded the memory of its own Saint.

Vecchi del paese, che lo conoscevano di persona, e di mia propria scienza, e non ho appreso [...] da altri che avessero lette le vite» (*ibi*, Conza Ord. Proc., 52, teste 1).

²⁸ «Or dovendo io deporre non saprei per quiete di mia coscienza quale de' due fonti addurre per causa della mia coscienza: per sicurezza mi riporto a quanto contiensi nella vita scritta» (*ibi*, Conza Ap. Proc., 49, teste 39)

²⁹ «Come così ho in genere narrato le cose, le ho anche apprese da altre fonti della pubblica fama ancora. [...] Quanto ho deposto sulla Vita, morte, miracoli, doni, e santità di lui, è tutto poggiato sulla fama pubblica costante, generale e continua e non interrotta e presso uomini di ogni ceto. Né la vita scritta ha potuto influirvi: perché ricordo che le stesse cose si dicevano anche prima di scriversi» (*ibidem*).

In addition to these two sources, there is also the *vox populi*, the totality of elders of the town, acquaintances, etc., who knew him and talked about him, contributing to the preservation of his memory.

A recurrent theme in the depositions is the reference to a relative who knew the Saint personally and, for this reason, was able to speak about him. The parents have an important role in this process of memory transmission, but very interesting too are the figures of the grandparents, who are the depositories of devotional and historical memory. Old age is the virtual place in which the remembrance of Gerard and of his sanctity is cultivated: it is a considerable guarantee of the historical credibility of witnesses because of the antiquity of the source.

2. Modifications in memory between depositions and bio-hagiographies

It is possible to analyse the way in which memory changes through a comparative reading of biographical and hagiographical sources and the depositions of the processes.

The *corpus* of the traditions about Gerard Majella that I will use is composed of three different parts: the biographical notes, the first hagiography and the process depositions. With the word “biographies” I refer to the three texts written after the death of the Saint, in the XVIII century. Specifically we have: *Notizie del nostro fratello Gerardo Majella*, the first, small manuscript biography, written by Caspar Caione probably around 1756³⁰; *Notizie della Vita del fratello laico Gerardo Maiella del Ss.mo Redentore*, a very brief text taken from the work of Joseph Landi bearing the date of 24th May 1782³¹; the third text is a second and larger version written by Caspar Caione around 1764³². This part represents the first level of written memory about the life of Gerard.

The second source is constituted by the hagiographies. The first *Vita* of the Saint, as already mentioned, was composed by Antonio Tannoia around 1805 and published in 1811³³. There are also other hagiographical sources, written between the XIX and

³⁰ G. CAIONE, *Notizie del nostro fratello Gerardo Maiella*, in G. CAIONE - I. LANDI, *Tria manuscripta circa vitam S. Gerardi Maiella, a coevis auctoribus composita, primum eduntur*, ed. by N. FERRANTE - A. SAMPERS, «Spicilegium Historicum CSSR» 7/2 (1960), 187-209. The original manuscript is kept at the General Historical Archive of the Congregation of the Holy Redeemer in Rome. In the opinion of Francesco Chiovaro, the manuscript was written in 1756 (CHIOVARO, *Formazione e significato della leggenda di San Gerardo*, in *San Gerardo tra spiritualità e storia*, 107-44; in particular p. 115).

³¹ I. LANDI, *Notizie della Vita del fratello laico Gerardo Maiella del Ss.mo Redentore*, in CAIONE - LANDI, *Tria manuscripta circa vitam S. Gerardi Maiella*, 210-16. The chapter was taken from G. LANDI, *Istoria della Congregazione del SSmo Redentore*.

³² C. CAIONE, *Notizie della Vita del fratello laico Gerardo Maiella del Ss.mo Redentore*, in CAIONE - LANDI, *Tria manuscripta circa vitam S. Gerardi Maiella*, 217-97.

³³ A. TANNIOIA, *Vita del Servo di Dio Fr.lo Gerardo Maiella laico della Congregazione del SS. Redentore descritta dal P.D. Antonio M.a Tannoia sacerdote della medesima congregazione*, Napoli 1811. The quotes come from the eighth edition of the book, published in 1839. On his figure see also: A. V. AMARANTE, *Antonio M. Tannoia (1727-1808). Cenni biografici*, «Spicilegium Histo-

XX centuries³⁴, but we will analyse just one of them, because this paper focuses only on the process depositions and the more ancient sources³⁵.

One of the most characteristic episodes in Gerard's childhood is that of the miraculous bread given to him by the Baby Jesus³⁶. The first narration of the episode is included in the biographical notes of Caspar Caione. He writes:

When he was 7 years old, his being a very poor house, he would go out around lunchtime and go to a place outside the city, called above Raia, and then return with bread in his hands. Asked by his mother as to who had given him [the] bread, [he would reply] that he had received it from a certain little boy. And so it continued for a long time. Having then his sister, called Bridget, gone to see him in Iliceto, when he was of the Congregation, Brother Gerard said: "Now I know that that little boy who gave me bread was Jesus, and I thought he was a child like me". His sister added: "If you go to Muro and go to this place, you will find him again," and he replied: "Now I find him in every place"³⁷.

From a narrative point of view, the essential elements of the tale are: Gerard leaves his home and goes out somewhere; he comes back with a small loaf of bread which he has received from a child; the child is the Baby Jesus; Gerard only understands this after becoming an adult; he now knows that Jesus is always with him. This narration is part of the episodes of his childhood, the section of the *Notizie* in

ricum CSSR» 56 (2008), 5-32. On the work of Tannoia, also considering the *Vita* of St. Alphonsus Liguori, see Palmieri. *I taumaturghi della società*, 146-158; in particular p. 259.

³⁴ On part of these texts see FERRANTE, *Le fonti storiche della vita di s. Gerardo Maiella*.

³⁵ From Ferrante's point of view, the *Articles* of the process – i.e. the questions the witnesses were asked – deeply influenced the depositions themselves, driving the witnesses, at the moment of deposition, to use the same words as the articles. These were written by the two Postulators of the processes and were deeply influenced by Tannoia's *Vita* (on this issue see N. FERRANTE, *Appendice storico-critica sui miracoli*, in *Id.*, *Storia meravigliosa di S. Gerardo Maiella*, Roma 1959², 417-539; in particular p. 425). From our point of view, the analysis of depositions is in any case useful both because the depositions are not a copy of the articles but sometimes quote some words or expressions, and because the texts of the articles perhaps influenced their answers, but were mixed with other information which they already had.

³⁶ Ferrante also writes about this episode: *ibi*, 145-46. In his opinion, Caione's narration is simpler and more linear («semplice, lineare e, soprattutto, coerente») and, for this reason, more credible than that of Tannoia, although the latter is more spectacular («più spettacolare ma meno verosimile»). In Tannoia's tale, for instance, the young Gerard does not recognize Jesus in the child who gave him the white bread.

³⁷ «Nell'età di 7 anni, stando la casa in molta povertà, se ne usciva verso ora di pranzo e se ne andava in un luogo fuori della città, chiamato sopra la Raia, e poi se ne tornava col pane alle mani. Domandato dalla madre che gli avesse dato [il] pane, [rispondeva] che l'aveva ricevuto da un certo fanciullino. E così continuò per molto tempo. Essendo poi detta Brigida, sua sorella, ita per trovarlo in Iliceto, quando era della Congregazione, disse il Fratello Gerardo: "Ora conosco che quel fanciullino che mi dava il pane, era Gesù ed io mi credea ch'era un fanciullo simile a me». Gli soggiunse sua sorella: «Se venite in Muro e vi portate in detto luogo, lo troverete un'altra volta», ed egli rispose: «Adesso lo ritrovo in ogni luogo»» (CAIONE, *Notizie del nostro fratello Gerardo Maiella*, 187-88, nr. 4-5). On the miracles of Gerard see: FERRANTE, *Storia meravigliosa di S. Gerardo Maiella*, Roma 1955 and the appendix.

which Caione writes about the Saint's growing faith³⁸, proving that his sanctity was not something that he learnt on growing up, but an innate aspect of his person.

In the second version of *Notizie*, Caione quotes the episode from his previous notes, using the same words, omitting just the reference to the mother who asks Gerard who had given him the bread, substituting this with a more general question («Asked [...] who had given it to him»³⁹). Some important innovations in the episode of the bread are included in the hagiographical *Vita* of Antonio Tannoia. In the second chapter of the book, titled *Natali del fratello Gerardo; sua infanzia, e favori ricevuti da Dio* (Natalis of Brother Gerard; his childhood, and favours received from God), the author writes:

There are in Muro outside the City various Churches dedicated to the Most Holy Mary. In one of these a simulacrum is venerated with the Child Jesus in its arms. When the blessed boy entered this Church by chance, the Holy Child approached him, and playing with him, gave him a small white loaf of bread. Returning home joyfully he brought it to his mother; and asked who had given it to him, he said it had been given him by a child. The Mother believed he had received it from the son of some gentleman, and did not care to learn more. Gerard, enticed by the sweet attractions of the child, in the morning merrily took himself off to the same church; and every time he went, the child, playing with him, gave him the usual gift of bread. Being already ours, visited by his sister Brigid in the House of Caposele, he said with his customary simplicity: "Now I know that it was the Child Jesus, and not an ordinary child, who gave me bread". "Let's go," said his sister jokingly, "to Muro again, so that we can find him again, and have bread from that child". Now Gerard answered, "as long as I want to, I find him in every place". How and why this favor ceased, and how many times it was bestowed, is not known to us⁴⁰.

A rapid reading of the text clarifies how many new elements are included by

³⁸ Caione argues also that Gerard, when he was young, imitated the priest when he celebrated Mass, praying in front of sacred images – particularly that of St. Michael – in his house, and lighting candles; there is also the episode of his first Holy Communion not by the priest but directly from the hand of the Archangel («per mano di S. Michele» CAIONE, *Notizie del nostro fratello Gerardo Maiella*, 188). For children with a very early devotion see *infra* note 41.

³⁹ «Domandato chi glielo avesse dato» («Asked who had given it to him»); the episode is in CAIONE, *Notizie della Vita*, 217-18, n. 5-6.

⁴⁰ «Esistono in Muro al di fuori della Città varie Chiese dedicate a Maria Santissima. In una di queste vi si venera un simulacro col Bambino Gesù tra le braccia. Entrato a caso il benedetto fanciullo in questa Chiesa, si gli fece incontro il S. Bambino, e bamboleggiando con esso, regalo gli fece di un bianco panettino. Festoso ritornando a casa lo porta a sua Madre; e dimandato chi ce l'avesse dato, disse avercelo dato un fanciullo. Credette la Madre averlo ricevuto dal figliuolo di qualche gentiluomo, né curò altro saperne. Invogliato Gerardo dalle dolci attrattive del fanciullo, festoso di mattino portavasi nella medesima Chiesa; e sempre che vi andava, il fanciullo, trastullando con esso, facevagli regalo del solito panettino. Essendo già nostro, visitato da Brigida sua sorella nella Casa di Caposele: "Ora conosco", disse colla solita semplicità, "che era Gesù Bambino, e non un fanciullo ordinario, che mi dava il pane". "Andiamo", disse la sorella scherzando, "una altra volta in Muro, acciò possiamo ritrovarlo di nuovo, ed aver il pane da quel fanciullo". Ora rispose Gerardo, "sempre che voglio, lo ritrovo in ogni luogo". Come, e perché questo favore cessò, e quante volte ne venne degnato, non ci è noto» (TANNOIA, *Vita del Servo di Dio*, 11-12).

Tannoia. It is important immediately to highlight that he takes his information from Caione or, more specifically, from his second version notes – an unpublished work – but also from other witnesses, listed in the introduction (*L'autore a chi legge*) to the book, like other fathers of the convent, priests, laypeople and from personal memories. In the text, the hagiographer speaks about a church in which there was a statue of the Virgin Mary with the Baby Jesus. Gerard, probably before the age of seven, enters this church where he meets the Holy Infant, who gives him a small white loaf of bread⁴¹. When he gets back to his house, his mother asks him who gave him the bread, imagining that he received it from the son of some nobleman. The next day, Gerard goes to the church and meets the child again, plays around with him, and again receives the bread. Tannoia's narration is longer than the biographical notes of Caione, and indeed there are some additions. The first is the reference to the statue of the Virgin Mary. While in the other tales Gerard simply meets a child who gives him the bread, in the hagiography there is an iconic representation of the Baby Jesus. In other words, the tale suggests that the statue – or part of it – comes alive («the Holy Child approached him»⁴²), and that the child he met was the child carved in the statue. Another important innovation is represented by the colour of the bread, which is white («a small white loaf of bread»⁴³). The third element of innovation is the fact that the young Gerard plays with the Baby Jesus. This is an important element because it helps confer on the Saint, when he was younger, a specific dimension of childlikeness, countering the image of *puer senex* that biographies and hagiographies attribute to him⁴⁴.

⁴¹ The colour of the bread does not only have a theological and symbolic value, but also a specific historical reference. The flour with which poor people cooked bread was generally not white, because it was not wheat flour. On this Cf. CHIOVARO, *Formazione e significato della leggenda di San Gerardo*, 137, n. 105; A. LEPRE, *Storia del Mezzogiorno d'Italia*, II, Napoli 1986, 59; DE ROSA, *Pertinenze ecclesiastiche e santità nella storia sociale e religiosa della Basilicata dal XVIII al XIX secolo*, 48. A miracle related to the white flour is included in the experience of the *santolillo* Francesco Bartolomeo Belli (P. SCARAMELLA, *I santolilli. Culti dell'infanzia e santità infantile a Napoli alla fine del XVII secolo*, Roma 1997, 27-28).

⁴² «gli si fece incontro il S. Bambino».

⁴³ «un bianco panettino».

⁴⁴ The *puer senex* is a diffuse *topos* of hagiography according to which the young Saint is presented, already during his childhood, as a mature person, with behaviours typically expressed by adult Saints. Other examples of this theme are his devotion, thanks to which even when Gerard was just a child he preferred to pray rather than play with other children. For example Tannoia writes: «Born to be merciful, he ignored the entertainments of children, a hundred small exercises in devotion were the occupations of his childhood», «Nato per la pietà, ignorava gl'intertentimenti dei fanciulli, cento piccoli esercizi divoti furono le occupazioni della sua infanzia» (TANNOIA, *Vita del Servo di Dio*, 10). On the *puer senex* see: T. C. CARP, «*Puer senex*» in *Roman and Medieval Thought*, «*Latomus*» 39/3 (1980), 736-39; *Bambini santi. Rappresentazioni dell'infanzia e modelli agiografici*, ed. by A. BENVENUTI - E. GIANNARELLI, Torino 1991; E. GIANNARELLI, *Il puer senex nell'antichità: appunti per la riconsiderazione di un problema*, in *Infanzie. Funzioni di un gruppo liminale dal mondo classico all'età moderna*, ed. by O. NICCOLI, Firenze 1993, 73-112; P. TOMEA, «*Corpore quidem iuvenacula sed animo cana*». La «*Passio Agnetis*» BHL 156 e il «*topos*» della «*puella senex*» nell'agiografia mediolatina, «*Analecta Bollandiana*» 128 (2010), 18-55; *Il bambino nelle fonti cristiane*. XLV Incontro di Studiosi dell'Antichità Cristiana (Roma, 11-13 maggio

The most interesting elaboration of this episode emerges from the canonization acts. The personal memory of the witnesses who remember the story of Gerard and the Baby Jesus who gives him the bread is sometimes very different from the “official” tale narrated by Caione, and the hagiographer Tannoia. It is particularly interesting to underline how the popular memory elaborates, modifies and sometimes transforms the tale.

As has been highlighted in the first paragraph, the two processes in Muro – and particularly the apostolic one – include the majority of testimonies about Gerard’s childhood. According to the *Positio super virtutibus*, in the apostolic process there are nine witnesses who talk about the matter and four in the ordinary one. There are, instead, just three witnesses who do so in the two processes in Conza.

On the basis of the depositions, it appears Gerard used to go to the rural church of Capotignano⁴⁵, in which there was a statue of the Virgin Mary with the Baby. Here the Saint prayed at length, playing and joking with Jesus, who came down from his Mother’s arms, and from whom, at the end, he received a small loaf of bread. An example:

I testify that as a boy Gerard used to go to the Church of Capotignano far from this city about a mile and a half by way of an uncomfortable mountain road. When he got there he would kneel before the Holy Virgin and pray, until the Child came down to joke with him, and he received from him a small loaf of bread, on Gerard’s returning home, his Mother asked him to account for whom he had received it from. The son said he had received it from the son of a beautiful lady [...]. When he was in Caposele, Gerard assured his sister that the child from whom he had received the bread when he was in Muro was Jesus⁴⁶.

This example of deposition allows us to observe how the main elements of the tale included in the bio-hagiographical sources are present. The original elements are: the name of the church, in the locality called Capotignano; the fact that Gerard prayed; the act of the Baby Jesus who descended (*came down*, “*calato*”) from the statue.

Another important innovation, included in some depositions, deals with the identity of the child. In the case just mentioned, in accordance with the bio-hagiog-

2017), Roma 2019. More related to the historical context in which Gerard grew up was the theme of “Santolilli”, the young saints venerated in Naples in the XVII century. On this issue see the already quoted SCARAMELLA, *I santolilli*; ID., *Fonti agiografiche e fonti inquisitoriali: il caso dei santolilli napoletani*, in *Santità, culti, agiografia*, 341-61.

⁴⁵ Capotignano (today called Capodigiano) is a district in Muro Lucano. Here there is a church, dedicated to the Virgin, built during the XII or XIII century, perhaps on a previous small rural church.

⁴⁶ «Io depongo che Gerardo da ragazzo si portava alla Chiesa di Capotignano lungi da questa Città un miglio e mezzo circa per via alpestre ed incommoda. Colà giunto s’inginocchiava avanti la Vergine SSma, e faceva orazioni, finché calato il Bambino vi si poneva a scherzare, e ne riceveva una panelluccia, Gerardo tornato a casa, la Madre cercava conto da chi l’aveva ricevuta. Il figlio diceva averla ricevuta da un figlio di una bella Signora [...]. Stando in Caposele Gerardo assicurò alla sorella, che quel bambino da cui riceveva il pane essendo in Muro, era Gesù» (*Positio super virtutibus*, Muro Ap. Proc., 93, teste 4).

raphical sources, Gerard understands that the child was Jesus only when he becomes an adult; instead, some witnesses claim that he already knew that during childhood.

Another element is the uncertainty about who gives the bread to Gerard. Most of the witnesses – thirteen in total – argue that it was the Baby Jesus who did so, and this is the dominant tradition, present in the bio-hagiographical sources as well. But there are some depositions in which the bread is given by the Virgin Mary or, more naively, by a Lady⁴⁷.

From a historical point of view, Gerard's uncertainty about the identity of the Baby Jesus – in some depositions considered an ordinary child, in others Jesus Christ – would be due to his age⁴⁸, even if, as Ferrante highlights, the Saint had a lot of spiritual experiences already during his childhood⁴⁹. In various instances Gerard – through the words of the witness – talks about Baby Jesus/Jesus Christ, a beautiful boy, or the son of a Lady⁵⁰.

Very interesting, both on account of its naivety and as concerns the issue of the child's identity, is the testimony of Antonio de Cosimo, who says that Gerard, in his innocence, declared he had taken the bread from a baby who was being caressed by the Lady who held him: «and he [*sc.* Gerard] in his innocence replied that he had received it from a Child, whom a Lady caressed while holding him in her arms»⁵¹.

Among the narrative variants that we can find in the episode narrated by the witnesses, there is that of the person who asks Gerard who has given him the bread. In some cases it is his mother, in others his sister Brigid, the same person to whom the adult Gerard will confess that the child was really Jesus⁵².

⁴⁷ «Gerard answered her [*sc.* to the mother] that the Blessed Virgin had given it to him», «Gerardo le rispose [*sc.* to the mother] che ce l'aveva dato la Vergine Santissima» (*ibi*, 96, teste 13); «and asked by his mother who he had received it from [*sc.* the bread] replied that he had received it from a Lady», «e domandato dalla madre da chi l'avesse ricevuto [*sc.* the bread] rispondeva che l'aveva ricevuto da una Signora» (*ibi*, 98, teste 17); «Asked by his mother, and sisters who had ever given him such a gift, Gerard replied, that a Lady had given it to him», «Domandato dalla sua madre, e sorelle chi mai gli avesse fatto tal dono, rispondeva Gerardo, che una Signora ce lo dava» (*ibi*, Muro Ord. Proc., 101, teste 20); «they saw that Our Lady gave Gerard some bread» (*ibidem*); «and Gerard said the Holy Mother had given it», «viderò che la Madonna dava del pane a Gerardo» (*ibidem*); «e Gerardo diceva averlo dato la Madre SSma» (*ibi*, 102 teste 33).

⁴⁸ In the opinion of some witnesses, he was 4 or 5 years old.

⁴⁹ Cf. note 38.

⁵⁰ The references to the Baby Jesus are: «He dealt with the Child Jesus», «Trattava con Gesù Bambino» (*ibi*, Muro Ap. Proc., 91, teste 1); «he spent time with the Baby Jesus», «si tratteneva con Gesù Bambino» (*ibi*, 92, teste 2); «with the Child Jesus», «col Bambino Gesù» (*ibi*, Muro Ord. Proc., 103, teste 47). Three references to the son of a Lady: «a boy child of a Lady», «un ragazzo figlio di una Signora» (*ibi*, Muro Ap. Proc., 92, teste 3); «a son of a beautiful Lady», «un figlio di una bella Signora» (*ibi*, 93, teste 4); «son of a Lady», «figlio di una Signora» (*ibi*, 94, teste 8). One reference to a beautiful boy: «from a beautiful boy», «da un bellissimo ragazzo» (*ibi*, 100, teste 27). One reference to Jesus himself: «by Jesus Christ», «da Gesù Cristo» (*ibi*, Muro Ord. Proc., 101, teste 1).

⁵¹ «ed egli [*sc.* Gerard] nella sua innocenza rispondeva averlo ricevuto da un Bambino, che una Signora carezzava tenendolo fra le braccia» (*ibi*, Conza Ap. Proc., 104, n. 5).

⁵² The depositions in which it is the mother who asks Gerard are: *ibi*, Muro Ap. Proc., 92, teste 3; 93, teste 4; 96, teste 13; 98, teste 17; Muro Ord. Proc., 101, teste 1; 101, teste 20; 103, teste 47;

In the narrations there are also some witnesses to the miraculous episode of the bread – a sort of second-degree witnesses to those in the process –: they are characters in the tales who are secretly present at the meeting between the Baby Jesus and Gerard. Generally, the character-witness is his sister Brigid⁵³.

The hagiographical dimension of the depositions themselves – that is, the presence of hagiographical *topoi* and folkloric themes – sometimes emerges in the text. For instance, the popular tradition includes an interesting element found in the words of Angela Pierri. The witness testifies that when Gerard went to the rural church of Capotignano, if this was closed, the doors opened by themselves («and when the church was closed, the doors would open»⁵⁴). In the opinion of one witness, the rural church was also the place in which Gerard went to teach the catechism to other children/boys, almost a new Jesus teaching in the Temple: «he used to go to the church of the Blessed Virgin of Capotignano almost every morning [...], and there he taught the doctrine to the boys»⁵⁵.

there is just one in which the questions come from his sister (*ibi*, Muro Ap. Proc., 94, teste 8). There are two depositions in which both mother and daughters ask Gerard who gave him the bread (*ibi*, Muro Ap. Proc., 101, teste 20; 102, teste 33; Conza Ap. Proc., 104, teste 5); and one case in which the witness does not mention who asks the question (*ibi*, Muro Ap. Proc., 100, teste 27).

⁵³ «To make sure, one of the mornings his sister followed Gerard who was going to Capotignano, and in front of the church door saw Gerard, who was joking with the Child. When he came out he said to his Sister “Do you see that Child? (pointing to him in the arms of the Holy Virgin) he gave me the bread you see”», «La sorella per assicurarsi una delle mattine seguì Gerardo che andava a Capotignano, ed innanzi la porta della chiesa intese Gerardo che scherzava col Bambino. Uscito disse alla Sorella “vedi quel Bambino? (indicandolo tra le braccia della SSma Vergine) egli mi ha dato il pane che vedi”» (*ibi*, Muro Ap. Proc., 94, teste 8); «His Sister decided to spy on him on following days; and she saw him receive that bread from the Child, whom the Virgin of Capotigliano had in her arms», «Lo si volle spiare dalla Sorella nei dì consecutivi; e si vide quel pane lo riceveva dal Bambino, che la Vergine di Capotigliano aveva nelle braccia» (*ibi*, Conza Ap. Proc., 104, teste 5); «being once his own Sister a spectator, who for that purpose had gone there secretly», «essendone una volta spettatrice la sua propria Sorella, che a tal’uopo erasi ivi recata segretamente» (*ibi*, Conza Ord. Proc., 107, teste 9); in another deposition the witness argues that his sisters go with him: «To make sure one of the times his sisters went with Gerard to the said church in Muro and they saw that the Madonna gave some bread to Gerard», «Per assicurarsi le sue sorelle una delle volte andiedero in compagnia di Gerardo in detta chiesa di Muro e videro che la Madonna dava del pane a Gerardo» (*ibi*, Muro Ap. Proc., 101, teste 20). In another deposition the mother herself follows him: «The mother could not guess who gave him that loaf of bread: on the contrary, she suspected that he had procured it in ways that were not good; so one of the mornings, on Gerard’s leaving the house, she went after him, and saw that he was going to the church of the Virgin of Graces in Capotignano, where the mother entered behind her son; and learnt that Gerard was laughing with the Child Jesus; and leaving the church, the Mother sees a loaf of bread under her son’s arm, and so is assured that he received it from the Child», «La madre non poteva indovinare chi gli dava detta pagnotta: anzi sospettò di aversela procurata con maniere non buone; per cui una delle mattine, uscendo di casa Gerardo, gli andò appresso, e vide che andava alla chiesa della Vergine delle grazie detta di Capotignano, dove la madre entrò dietro il figlio; e conobbe che Gerardo rideva col Bambino Gesù; ed uscito di chiesa la Madre vede sotto il braccio del figlio una pagnotta, ed allora si assicurò che quella la riceveva dal Bambino» (*ibi*, 103, teste 47).

⁵⁴ «e quando la chiesa era chiusa, si aprivano le porte» (*ibi*, Muro Ap. Proc., 100, teste 38).

⁵⁵ «si portava quasi ogni mattina nella chiesa della Beata Vergine di Capotignano [...], e colà insegnavà la dottrina ai ragazzi» (*ibi*, Muro Ord. Proc., 101, teste 1).

The entire description of Gerard's childhood has a lot of hagiographical nuances, in accordance with the *topoi* of the young saint who is already totally devoted to God, uninterested in playing with other children, already manifesting that aptitude to the religious life which will fulfil itself in the future. Both the bio-hagiographical sources and the process depositions stress Gerard's moral and practical perfection, even as a child⁵⁶.

A very interesting element that emerges exclusively from the canonization acts is the reference by some witnesses to another similar episode, always related to bread given to Gerard by the Baby Jesus⁵⁷. The episode is dealt with by Article IV of the information processes, later taken up by some witnesses. Pasquale Menzoni, who came to know of the episode from his father Vito – who declared he had heard it from Gerard's mother –, says in his deposition:

My father said he understood from Gerard's own mother, that when her son was small he went to the garden of the late Archpriest De-Cillis with some boys, and placed a cane cross on an almond tree which existed there, and continually prayed. When it was time for lunch, a child came down from that tree, giving bread only to Gerard without giving it to the other boys around him. The mother, seeing that her son had not eaten the bread left to him, asked him why he had been fasting; he replied that he had received the bread from the Child⁵⁸.

Vincenzo di Napoli also argues that Gerard used to light candles on different trees in the garden of the archpriest De-Cillis⁵⁹. This witness says, too, that Gerard met the Baby Jesus not only in the rural church of Capotignano, but also in the archpriest's garden. In his deposition, he highlights that the archbishop himself declared having seen with his own eyes the Baby Jesus descending from the illuminated tree and giving the white bread to Gerard⁶⁰:

⁵⁶ Among the *topoi* is the tale of how when he was a baby, Gerard would refuse to feed at his mother's breast on specific days, when the Church decreed one should fast: «On some days, even as a child he refrained from drinking his mother's milk», «In dati giorni si asteneva anche bambino dal poppare il latte della madre» (*ibi*, Conza Ap. Proc., 108, teste 43).

⁵⁷ On the episode see: FERRANTE, *Storia meravigliosa di S. Gerardo Maiella, Appendice storico-critica sui miracoli*, 433-34.

⁵⁸ «Mio padre diceva avere inteso dalla stessa madre di Gerardo, che il di lei figlio quando era piccolo si univa a varii ragazzi andava nell'orto del fu Arciprete De-Cillis, e su di un albero di mandorle ivi esistente poneva una crocetta di canna, e di continuo pregava. Giunta l'ora del pranzo da quell'albero scendeva un bambino, che dava al solo Gerardo un pane senza darlo agli altri ragazzi circostanti. La madre vedendo che il figlio non aveva mangiato il pane lasciatogli, lo domandava perché fosse stato digiuno; egli rispondeva che aveva ricevuto il pane dal Bambino» (*Positio super virtutibus*, Muro Ap. Proc., 97, teste 16).

⁵⁹ «He did this [*sc. lit the lights*] not only at home, but also in the garden of the quondam Archpriest De-Cillis, where he placed various small candles on different trees», «Faceva questo [*sc. accendeva i lumi*] non solo in casa, ma ancora nell'orto del quondam Arciprete De-Cillis, ove collocava varie piccole candele su diversi alberi» (*ibi*, 91, teste 2).

⁶⁰ The detail of the colour of the bread is also in other depositions: «very white bread», «pane bianchissimo» (*ibi*, 91, teste 2); «a very white bread», «un bianchissimo pane» (*ibi*, 95, teste 13); «a white bread», «un bianco pane» (*ibi*, 98, teste 17); «a little loaf of white bread», «un panettino

Jesus the Child dealt with the Servant of God, Brother Gerard, not only in Capotignano, as they told me [...] but the Archpriest De Cillis told me that he was an eyewitness, that the Child Jesus came down from the lighted Tree, as he said in the interrogatories; that He gave Gerard his usual bread, and replied to the Mother, who was saying “why are you fasting and not coming to eat?”. “I have eaten: The Child gave me bread”. The Archpriest De-Cillis with many others from the neighborhood rushed to see the lighted tree, and were overcome by great astonishment⁶¹.

Maria Antonia Sansone, to whom the episode was told by her mother-in-law Anna Cerone, relates how, in that garden, Gerard built small altars and made little processions, and observes that «from the tree descended a Child, who gave him bread»⁶².

The central nucleus of the two tales is the same: Gerard meets Baby Jesus, who gives a small loaf of bread to the young Saint. In the second case, there is a different context: not the rural church consecrated to the Virgin but the archpriest's garden; the figure of Mary is absent, substituted by an almond tree that, in the narrative structure, has the same function as the Virgin, from whom the Baby Jesus can descend to meet Gerard.

In this tale, compared to the previous one, there is a reference to a group of children who were with Gerard, while in the tale of the Virgin Mary Gerard was alone. Here the Saint puts a small cane cross on the tree while praying, a more complex gesture absent in the other tale, in which he simply prays to the Lady. Moreover, the moment in which the Baby Jesus descends from the tree corresponds to lunchtime, and the small loaf of bread is a gift just for the Saint and not for the other children. The two tales are so similar in their general structure that it is possible to define a list of common traditional elements: Gerard goes to a place; he receives a visit from the Baby Jesus, who descends from something/someone; he receives bread from him; he

di bianco pane» (*ibi*, Muro Ord. Proc., 101, teste 1); «a small white loaf of bread», «un panettino bianco» (*ibi*, 101, teste 20; 102, teste 33); «a very white small loaf of bread», «un bianchissimo panettino» (*ibi*, Conza Ap. Proc., 104, teste 5); «a very white bread», «un bianchissimo pane» (*ibi*, Conza Ord. Proc., 107, teste 9).

⁶¹ «Gesù Bambino trattava col V. Servo di Dio Fr. Gherardo non solo in Capotignano, come mi hanno detto [...] ma l'Arcipr. De Cillis mi diceva esser stato ei testimone oculare, che Gesù Bambino scese dall'Albero illuminato, come ha detto negl'Interrogatorii; che diede a Gerardo il solito pane, e rispose (V. S. D.) alla Madre, che gli diceva “perché stai digiuno e non vieni a mangiare?”. “Ho mangiato: Il Bambino mi ha dato il pane”. L'Arciprete De-Cillis con molti altri del vicinato accorsero per vedere l'albero illuminato, e restarono presi da grandissimo stupore», (*ibi*, Muro Ap. Proc., 92, teste 2). According to the witness, the Archpriest de Cillis was supposed to have been an eyewitness to what happened but, as Ferrante points out, De Cillis in fact was only born a few years after the alleged apparition (FERRANTE, *Storia meravigliosa di S. Gerardo Maiella, Appendice storico-critica sui miracoli*, 434). In the apostolic process, the same witness states that Gerard affixed the candles to the trees and that they were lit only by blowing on them (*ibidem*).

⁶² «dall'albero discendeva un Bambino, che gli dava del pane» (*Positio super virtutibus*, 103, teste 47). The small altar calls to mind the same habit of the *santolilli* Francesco Bartolomeo Belli (SCARAMELLA, *I santolilli*, 21, 25) and Pietro Gisolfo (*ibi*, 194-95). Another example is Baldassare Nardi (SALLMANN, *Santi barocchi*, 304-05).

is the only recipient of the miracle; there are sometimes witnesses who see the miracle with their own eyes; Gerard's mother asks him who gave him the bread.

Regardless of the historicity of the two episodes that has created two distinct traditions, it is very interesting to underline how memory – or experience – creates two different stories, evidently very similar and perhaps originating from the same narrative nucleus⁶³. Tannoia's hagiography, for example, does not transpose the second tale, but the question is more complex.

Because of the length of this article, we have taken into account just one late hagiography, which represents an example of the elaboration and reception of the two tales. This is the book *S. Gerardo Maiella*, written by father Eugenio Pilla in 1957⁶⁴, and contains both the tales examined. In the chapter *I due panini* (the two loaves), the hagiographer writes:

Gerardiello [...], accompanied by his Guardian Angel, scampered to the chapel of the Madonna of Capotignano [...]. The little boy, who was barely six springs old, traveled swiftly along the mountain path to go and venerate the beautiful statue of the Virgin with the heavenly Child close to her heart. As soon as he entered among those sacred walls wrapped in religious silence, Gerardiello began to pray with his eyes fixed on the graceful statue and, suddenly, he saw that the heavenly Babe, who had almost flown down from his mother's loving arms, was approaching him smiling and joyous with a small loaf of bread in his little hands, as delicate as a peach blossom. After having talked with him, Jesus offered him the bread that smelled of lily and had an extraordinary taste. Having thanked the heavenly giver and glanced lovingly at the little Madonna with the celestial face, Gerardiello gaily left the chapel to return home. When questioned by his mother about who he had received that white bread from, her little son replied that he had received it as a gift from a "beautiful Boychild with gold hair and hands like flowers". This second meeting made Gerardiello so nostalgic that he returned to the chapel again, where the "Boychild"'s apparitions were repeated. One of these was also witnessed by a sister of the little Saint, who was enthusiastic about it. Mother Benedetta, too, on being informed of this, wanted to see how her little son procured that bread and found that the divine Child came down from the arms of the Virgin to graciously offer him that gift. At other times, instead, as was deposed at the processes, Gerardiello received the bread from the "beautiful Lady", while he pointed out the statue to his mother. [...] Having then become a Redemptorist, Gerard specified to his sister Brigida who had gone to visit him, that "that Child was Jesus, the divine prisoner of the tabernacle, who had become the Bread of the soul"⁶⁵.

⁶³ In Ferrante's opinion, the original tale is that of the Baby Jesus at Capotignano, while that of the Archpriest's garden is a variant (FERRANTE, *Storia meravigliosa di S. Gerardo Maiella*, *Appendice storico-critica sui miracoli*, 434).

⁶⁴ E. PILLA, *S. Gerardo Maiella*, Bari 1957.

⁶⁵ «Gerardiello [...], accompagnato dal suo Angelo custode, sgambettò fino alla cappella della Madonna di Capotignano [...]. Il ragazzino, che aveva appena sei primavere di vita, percorse sollecito l'alpestre sentiero per andare a venerare la bella statua della Vergine con il celeste Bambino al cuore. Appena entrato tra quelle sacre pareti fasciate di religioso silenzio, Gerardiello si pose a pregare con gli occhietti fissi sulla graziosa statua e, a un tratto, vide che il celeste Pargolotto, disceso quasi di volo dalle amorevoli braccia materne, si avvicinava a lui sorridente e festoso con

When reading this paragraph, the most evident aspect is the length of the episode. Compared to the previous bio-hagiographical sources, the *Vita* of Pilla gives more space to the tale, also thanks to a more narrative form and syntax. From the point of view of the context, the hagiographer adds some interesting elements. The first is the presence of the Guardian Angel, who accompanies Gerard to the rural church of Capotignano. Gerard is six years old, while in the previous texts he was 4, 5, 7 or, sometimes, his age was not expressed. According to the earlier tradition, the Baby Jesus descended from the statue of the Virgin, but in this text he almost flies down (*quasi di volo*). Moreover there is the reference to the question asked by his mother about the identity of the person who gave him the bread, and the presence of one of his sisters («a sister of the little Saint», «una sorella del Santino») who was present at one of the Baby Jesus' appearances, as was his mother, Benedetta.

Unlike the previous tradition, here Gerard's experience is very sensorial. The Baby Jesus, when he descends from his Mother's arms, holds the bread in his hands, which are as delicate as a peach blossom («le manine delicate come un fiore di pesco») and the bread itself, in addition to being white, smells like a lily and has an extraordinary taste. The Baby Jesus, in the description that Gerard gives his mother, is a beautiful child with golden hair (*capelli d'oro*) and hands like flowers (*manine di fiore*). It is obvious that the author's style is very sensitive and sweet, things that help accentuate the hagiographical nuances of the text. Another example is the Virgin's face, which is celestial (*celestiale*), and the recurring use of the diminutive and hypocoristic forms (*Gerardiello*, *Madonnina*, *figliuolletto*, *Fanciullino*, *Santino*, etc.).

It is interesting that the hagiographer also refers to the depositions included in the process («as was deposed at the processes», «come fu deposto ai processi»), to underline the fact that sometimes Gerard received the bread from the Virgin Mary («received the bread from the “beautiful Lady”», «ricevette il pane dalla “bella Signora”»).

At the end, the hagiographer has included the words that Gerard himself is supposed to have said about the identity of the mysterious child. While in the other sources the words came from Caione's notes («Now I know that that little boy who gave me bread was Jesus, and I thought he was a child like me») or were very similar to them, as in Tannoia's hagiography («Now I know that it was the Child Jesus, and

un panino tra le manine delicate come un fiore di pesco. Dopo aver pargoleggiato con lui, Gesù gli offerse il panino che odorava di giglio e aveva un sapore straordinario. Ringraziato il celeste donatore e rivolto uno sguardo amorevole alla Madonnina con il viso celestiale, Gerardiello uscì giulivo dalla cappella per ritornar verso casa. Interrogato dalla mamma da chi avesse ricevuto quel bianco panino, il figliuolletto le rispose di averlo avuto in regalo da un “bel Fanciullino con i capelli d'oro e le manine di fiore”. Questo secondo incontro riuscì così nostalgico a Gerardiello, da farlo ritornare ancora alla cappella, dove si ripeterono le apparizioni del “Fanciullino”. A una di queste, assistette anche una sorella del Santino, che ne rimase entusiasta. Anche mamma Benedetta quindi, informata di ciò, volle vedere come il figliuolletto si procurasse quel pane e constatò che il divin Bambino scendeva dalle braccia della Vergine per offrirgli graziosamente quel regalo. Altre volte, invece, come fu deposto ai processi, Gerardiello ricevette il pane dalla “bella Signora”, mentre egli ne additava la statua a sua madre. [...] Divenuto poi Redentorista, Gerardo precisò alla sorella Brigida andata a visitarlo, che “quel Bambino era Gesù, il divin prigioniero del tabernacolo, divenuto Pane dell'anima”» (*ibi*, 18-20).

not an ordinary child, who gave me bread»), in Pilla's *Vita* the words are more poetic and, above all, there is an explicit reference to the bivalent function of the bread, considered food for the body – it is important not to forget that Gerard's family was poor – but also food for the spirit, a symbol of Christ himself like the Eucharist («the divine prisoner of the tabernacle, who had become the Bread of the soul»).

The second tale is included in the chapter *Prime luci* (First lights), in which the hagiographer writes:

One spring morning, when the procession arrived [*sc.* with the other children] in front of a flowering tree similar to a silver candelabrum, the little “celebrant” [*sc.* Gerard], hanging the cross on the trunk of the little plant, invited those present to venerate it. But as he prayed – an eyewitness said – the tree was suddenly seen to light up so that it looked like a burning candelstick. What, then, had happened? That mysterious light was radiating from the Baby Jesus who appeared smiling among the flowering branches to offer Gerardiello a sweet, crisp little loaf of bread. Thus perhaps the divine Babe was rewarding the little Saint for the temperance he imposed on himself in eating and drinking to resemble Him, poor and mortified from the manger to the cross⁶⁶.

The style of narration is the same as that in the other episode (for instance, the use of the diminutive form: *albarellino*, *piantarella*, *Gerardiello*, *Pargoletto*, *Santino*). From the point of view of the content, in Pilla's tale there are some elements not included in the depositions of the process. For example the image of the candelabrum and the explanation of the miracle: a way to say to Gerard that God appreciated his fasting.

These small examples from Pilla's *Vita* are sufficient to underline the endurance over the centuries of these two different, but very similar, traditions.

Conclusions

At the end of this reflection on the figure of St. Gerard Majella and, particularly, on his canonization process, it is possible to highlight the emergence of certain elements. The brief analysis of the *corpus* of witnesses allows us to understand how Gerard was considered a saint (*fama sanctitatis*) by a large and varied cross-section of people. Among the witnesses, as we have seen, were people belonging to the upper classes in society, religious men and women, but also artisans, workmen, tailors,

⁶⁶ «Un mattino di primavera, arrivato il corteo dinanzi a un alberello in fiore simile a un candelabro di argento, il piccolo “celebrante”, appesa la croce al tronco della piantarella, invitò i presenti a venerarla. Ma mentre egli pregava – affermava un testimone oculare – si vide improvvisamente l'alberello illuminarsi così da sembrare un candelabro acceso. Cos'era, dunque, avvenuto? Che quel misterioso chiarore irradiava da Gesù bambino il quale comparve sorridente tra i rami fioriti per offrire a Gerardiello un panino dolce e croccante. Così forse il divin Pargoletto ricompensava il Santino della temperanza che s'imponeva nel nutrirsi e nel bere per assomigliare a Lui povero e mortificato dal presepe alla croce» (*ibi*, 16-17).

etc., that is, people from the lower classes. Gerard, even if he came from a poor and humble family, was acknowledged a Saint by all the social classes.

A very important issue that emerges from the analysis of the documents of the canonization process is that concerning the sources and their quality. Among the different types of sources, a central role is occupied by the oral ones, through which the Church tried to discover and prove the “sanctity” of the candidate thanks to the memories of those who had known or heard of him. From the analysis of the depositions in the *Positio super virtutibus*, it is possible to define the role of memory, contemplated both as a personal remembrance of an event or a tale heard, and as a specific and collective dimension of the mind, supported by relatives, parents, elders, etc. The process appears as a big operation of memory building, in which, it is true, some discrepancies exist, but are smoothed out at the end of the process and by the hagiographies written during the years, which perpetuate some elements while rejecting others.

From the depositions of the witnesses emerges also a problematic source typology, that is, the hagiography and, more generally, the written source. A lot of witnesses, when answering the questions, declared that they had not read any hagiographies – particularly that of Tannoia – or did not remember any passages from them. The fact that witnesses might be influenced by a hagiographical source while making their depositions is very dangerous, particularly from the point of view of the “purity” and reliability of the memory. Hagiographic books are perceived as elaborated texts influenced by legend and textual strategies, not appropriate for the elaboration of a historically proven memory, but also as an expression, if read by the witnesses, of an unauthentic memory.

Even if the written sources are possibly – but not always – excluded from the witnesses’ memories, it has proven very useful to analyse the way in which personal memories and written sources (biographical notes, hagiographies, the depositions themselves) may interact. In the second part of the article, an episode from Gerard’s childhood has been considered, that of the white bread he was given by the Baby Jesus. It is interesting to observe how the episode was narrated in different written and oral sources, but mediated by the written form. From the first bio-hagiographical notes of Caione, which present a small description of the facts, we arrive at Tannoia’s *Vita*, the first published hagiography about Majella. In this case the first nucleus was developed, as the hagiographer says in the introduction, thanks to other “witnesses” consulted by him. The depositions of the process are the most representative expressions of the elaboration of memory, with some variations compared not only to the previous written sources, but also among the depositions themselves (there are indeed a lot of variants: the colour of the bread, the witnesses to the miracle, the presence of the statue of the Virgin, the Saint’s consciousness of the identity of the Baby Jesus, etc.). The witnesses’ statements confirm the existence of different versions of the same episode, but also report another episode, containing a lot of similarities to the previous one, which narrates the apparition of the Baby Jesus in a tree, from which he descends to give bread to the Saint⁶⁷. The complex process of

⁶⁷ As Chiovaro has demonstrated in his article about the formation of the Legend of St. Ge-

legends and oral tales, included in the depositions, can be analysed also thanks to the reading of a more recent hagiography, the *Vita* written by Eugenio Pilla, which contains both the tales, recognized and customised by the hagiographer. This is just one piece of the history of the elaboration of memory in the Gerardian sources, but it is enough to understand how complex the mechanism of memory and its elaboration is, particularly during the canonization process, but also through the centuries with the hagiographies.

In conclusion, the analysis conducted in the article allows us to more fully understand the dynamics of the reception and transformation of memory over time, in particular through the elaboration that witnesses to the process, who had never met Gerard, make of episodes of the life of the Saint. A sustained process of memory mediation emerges decisively, in which memory is constantly contaminated and reworked by hagiographical texts, oral traditions, legends, family stories. Memory appears therefore as a fluid object, which is not definitively fixed – except through the hagiographical writings, but they also adopt processes of remediation – but is continually reworked and updated. The case examined is a clear example of this mechanism. With the numerous variations that characterize it, it is clearly an example of how a story is the fruit of minor narrative units, which combine and change from version to version, but are always retuned in a coherent narrative aimed at demonstrating Gerard's *fama sanctitatis*.

rard, in the first hagiography and in the depositions of the processes there are a lot of extraordinary events and miracles, some of which are not present in the first bio-hagiographical notes. The author discusses some procedures for the extension of the first Gerardian legend. He writes: «I procedimenti seguiti nell'ampliare la leggenda gerardina sono quelli già conosciuti dallo studio di altri leggendari: primo fra tutti, il ricorso ad una specie di *commune sanctorum*, una riserva di pezzi di ricambio adattabili a qualsiasi vita del santo trasmessasi inizialmente solo come prove dell'eroismo delle sue virtù; infine la creazione ex novo di miracoli carenti di qualsiasi base documentaria, ma che, in genere, hanno il pregio di inserirsi bene nelle condizioni spirituali e nella realtà socioeconomica vissuta dai testimoni» (CHIOVARO, *Formazione e significato della leggenda di San Gerardo*, 131). This procedure is very interesting, particularly from a semiotic point of view, because each tale in the Gerardian tradition is composed by a lot of smaller elements, which in the memory of the witnesses, for example, it is possible to combine or to separate from the text. The example of the episode of the white bread shows us the complexity of this structure.