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Premodern Popular Culture: Between Democratization and Marginalization

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Abstract. Leader article of *Pre-Modern "Pop Cultures"? Images and Objects Around the Mediterranean (350-1918 CE)*. The aim of this monography is to analyze, from the most significant images and objects, to the traditions that have accompanied us to this day.
Keywords: Popular Culture; Images; Objects; Mediterranean.

[es] Cultura popular premoderna: entre la democratización y la marginación

Resumen. Editorial de *¿"Cultura Pop" antes de la Modernidad? Imágenes y objetos en el Mediterráneo (350-1918 d. C.)*. El objetivo de esta monografía es analizar, desde las imágenes y objetos más significativos, hasta las tradiciones que nos han acompañado hasta nuestros días.
Palabras clave: Cultura popular; imágenes; objetos; Mediterráneo.

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[en] Democratizing Popular Culture?

As noted in a recent book by cultural historian Kaspar Maase, the notion of "popular culture" is almost impossible to define[4]. It is vague, its boundaries constantly shifting, so much so that it has been described as an "open phenomenon"[5]. Popular culture is also an idea with which some of the greatest thinkers of the twentieth century – Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, Antonio Gramsci, or Pierre Bourdieu to cite just a few – have grappled[6]. An additional aspect should be considered: the current phenomenon of overlap between the notion of popular and commercial cultures is one that is now deeply damaging to the whole tradition of popular/folkloristic culture inherent to previous centuries. This is without mentioning the historical problems behind the definition of "folkloristic" and "popular" and their use by totalitarian ideologies in the 20th and 21st centuries. Dedicating a volume of the journal *Eikón Imago* as guest editors to such a theme thus seems provocative, if not downright hazardous. And to make it even more so, the volume in question bears the title *Pre-Modern "Pop Cultures"? Images and Objects Around the Mediterranean (350-1918 CE)*.

At first glance, when juxtaposed, the terms "pre-modern" and "popular culture" indeed seem unreconcilable. One encompasses what happens before modernity, the other what is often considered the result of modernity itself:

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4 Kaspar Maase, *Populärkulturforschung. Eine Einführung* (Bielefeld, 2019), 23-41, with a rich bibliography. See also Holt N. Parker, "Toward a Definition of Popular Cultures", *History and Theory* 50 (2011): 147-170. Given the broad topic assess over the course of this introduction, only a selective bibliography will be quoted for all subjects, with no ambition of exhaustivity.
5 See, e.g., Hermann Herlinghaus, "Populär/volkstümlich/Popularkultur", in *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe*, Karlheinz Barck et al. (eds.), vol. 4 (Stuttgart/Weimar, 2010), 834-884. On the notion of open phenomenon (*Phänomenoffenheit*), cf. Christine Bischoff, "Empirie und Theorie", in *Methoden der Kulturanthropologie*, Christine Bischoff, Karoline Oehme-Jüngling, Walter Leimgruber (eds.) (Bern, 2014), 14-31, esp. 24.
6 For an overview of the theories, see Maase, *Populärkulturforschung*…, 44-71.

the culture industry, mass media, consumerism[7]. To the point that "modern" and "popular", or more commonly "pop", are often paired. Such an attitude to the notion of popular is the result of a cultural development seeing an "evolution" in popularization and democratization of culture from the French Revolution through the Cold War and up to today. In the last century this equation became almost mainstream in Western society: popular = democratic = modern. The further step, visible in the cultural and political spheres of the last thirty years, is the shift towards a "pop" culture aiming almost exclusively at financial benefits. Obviously, such a vision is particularly useful for the economic structures governing the mass production of the current consumerist culture. Furthermore, to increase their impact, politicians –but not only– are making an active use of the most radical forms of strategies developed precisely by this commercial culture, from TV to YouTube and to social media. These are propagated through the unprecedented power of omnipresent smartphones[8].

Two main tendencies can be revealed when looking at this phenomenon: on the one hand, an apparent opposition between high and popular culture, promoted by populist movements, with the "high culture" often being accused of subjugating the interests of the people, and academics (especially in the humanities) inculpated of contributing to such a system. On the other hand, paradoxically, populist right-wing movements across Europe, Great Britain, and the US also rail against the popularization and loss of "culture". But in their discourse, the source of danger has shifted and no longer comes from class struggle, but rather from immigration and cultural mixing, from what is termed an imminent "civilization clash"[9].

From a historiographical perspective, the idea that the popularization of culture is not necessarily a positive factor was widespread long before. To quote just an example, one of the many scholars who are sceptical of the idea of popularization, Michael Rostovtzeff (1870-1952), considered the "democratization of culture" as one of the factors of civilization decline[10]. They applied such conceptions to the history of the Roman empire, which was allegedly brought down by its lower classes and by the loss of culture of its elites. For Rostovtzeff, the empire had started collapsing in the third century because of the alliance between what he calls the proletariat and the military. In contrast, in the 1960s, Italian historian Santo Mazzarino (1916-1987) believed that democratization had to be seen as a positive aspect of the late Roman world[11]. Popularization is in his view not a social revolution leading to economic and cultural decline, but as a force of creativity, able to shake and break through the established systems of the old Roman world, to awake religious consciousness and new national identities[12].

Both perspectives are, of course, intimately tied to these scholars' own present and past, an aspect particularly appreciated by the editors of the present volume: Rostovtzeff had fled from Russia in 1918, at witnessed, at the age of 50, the crumbling of his old culture because of the rise of the "popular class"; whilst Mazzarino, a member of the Italian Communist party, wrote in the wake of the Second World War, witnessing the rebirth of a new democratic Europe[13]. Nevertheless, both scholars show how very divergent views on the role of popular culture can impact historical questions as fundamental as the transformation of the late Roman Mediterranean world.

Coming back to the populist movements of our century, it is evident that the uses and abuses of popular culture are today at the heart of a transformation impacted by media, and that the possibilities of mass culture noted and feared already by Horkheimer, and Adorno have again reached a most radical turning point. But what possibly, then, could the investigation of premodern visual studies tell us in this entangled period?

The Problem of Pre-modern Popular Visual and Material Cultures

If we look back to historiography, another type of positive attitude to pre-modern popular culture can be found – marked by the impact Bakhtin and of the Annales School – in Aron Gurevich's (1924-2006) influential *Medieval Popular Culture*[14]. His goal was "to focus on

[7] For the initial understanding of mass culture, see Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer, "Kulturindustrie, Aufklärung als Massenbetrug", in *Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente*, 16th ed. (Frankfurt am Main, 2006) [1944], 128-176; see also Jean Baudrillard, *La Société de consommation. Ses mythes, ses structures*, (Paris, 1970). For the most important developments and transformations of the notion of popular culture, cf. Maase, *Populärkulturforschung…*, 44-71.

[8] Cf. e.g., Nicole Ernst *et al*., "Populists Prefer Social Media Over Talk Shows: An Analysis of Populist Messages and Stylistics Elements Across Six Countries", *Social Media + Society* (2019): 1-14. See also Torgeir Uberg Nærland, "Populism and popular culture: the case for an identity-oriented perspective", in Perspectives on populism and the media, B. Krämer, C. Holtz-Bacha (eds.) (Baden-Baden, Nomos) (forthcoming).

[9] Following Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York, 1996). See also Hervé le Bras, *Le Grand Enfumage. Populisme et immigration dans sept pays européens* (Paris, 2022).

[10] Michael Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1926). On the question, cf. *La "démocratisation" de la culture dans l'Antiquité tardive = Antiquité tardive*, 9 (2002), especially Jean-Michel Carrié, "Antiquité tardive et 'démocratisation de la culture': un paradigme à géométrie variable", 27-46.

[11] Santo Mazzarino, "La democratizzazione della cultura nel 'Basso Impero'", in *XIe Congrès International des Sciences Historiques (Stockholm, 21-28 août 1960)*, *Rapports*, vol. 2: *Antiquité*, 35-54. Cf. Andrea Giardina, "Mazzarino e Rostovtzeff", in *Rostovtzeff e l'Italia*, Arnaldo Marcone ed. (Naples, 1999), 117-129 and Noel Lenski, "Santo Mazzarino: Revolutions in Society and Economy in Late Antiquity", in *The New Late Antiquity: A Gallery of Intellectual Portraits*, Clifford Ando, Marco Formisano (eds.) (Heidelberg, 2021), 273-296.

[12] For a broad perspective, cf. Peter Brown, "The study of elites in Late Antiquity", *Arethusa* 33, no. 3 (2000): 321-346.

[13] For Rostovtzeff's background, cf. Glen W. Bowersock, "The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire by Michael Ivanovitch Rostovtzeff", *Daedalus* 103, no. 1 (1974): 15-23. On the question of Russian scholarship in art history and emigration, see Ivan Foletti, Adrien Palladino, *Byzantium or Democracy? Kondakov's legacy in emigration: the Institutum Kondakovianum and André Grabar, 1925-1952* Ivan Foletti, Karolina Foletti, Andrien Palladino (eds.), (Rome, 2020). *Transformed by Emigration. Welcoming Russian Intellectuals, Scientists, and Artists 1917-1945*, *Convivium Supplementum* (Brno, 2020).

[14] Aron Gurevich, *Problemy srednevekovoi narodnoi kul'tury*, Moscow 1981, translated as *Id*., *Medieval Popular Culture: Problems

the world-view of the common people who did not know Latin"[15]. In Gurevich's work and as we have seen above, popular culture is thus always considered in terms of an encounter with official, or high culture, for example thematizing the opposition between Latin and vernacular culture in the post-Roman world[16]. Such opposition is defining also for more recent endeavours, such as Jerry Toner's *Popular Culture in Ancient Rome* or the recent research project and publications by Lucy Grig[17]. Toner's or Grig's publications are just examples –dealing respectively with the ancient world – in an ocean of bibliography from a variety of disciplines promoting, especially since the 1970s, the idea that premodernity has produced high and popular cultures worthy of scholarly attention[18]. Perhaps the most fruitful aspect of this long historiographical movement is that the focus on the dichotomy popular versus high cultures has underlined, with strength, the coexistence of a variety of different cultures within given societies and the profound permeability between cultural groups. This permeability is particularly welcome for human sciences as it offers the possibility to go against established categories and narratives, to de-marginalize and de-colonize certain areas and periods.

While it is of course not the goal of this thematic volume to question the divide between advocates and enemies of popularization and popular culture, the editors of this volume are forced to note that if many disciplines' confrontation with popular culture has been a difficult but ultimately fruitful one, that between art history and popular culture still presents boundaries to be crossed.

The origins of such a rupture should be seen at the very roots of art history as a field, namely in the weighty legacy of Giorgio Vasari (1511–1574). In his *Vite*, Vasari durably introduced into art historical scholarship ideas such as the decadence of arts, made himself judge of those artists worthy or unworthy of being studied, and consecrated the divide between "major" and "minor" arts[19]. Canonizing architecture, monumental sculpture, and painting as the three major techniques for artistic production, he effectively damaged the understanding of entire periods and spaces of pre-modern material culture. Over the course of the 18th and 19th centuries, following the main lines of such tradition, art history usually studied only the production of the elite. There are, of course, exceptions – such as the deep interest promoted in early 20th century Russia for the true national/folk art – however these can usually be explained by a very specific context. Revealing in this sense is for example the reflection of Nikodim Kondakov, the first professional Russian art historian, who at the very beginning of the 20th century developed an interest for folk icon production because of its importance for the national Orthodox identity of Tsarist Russia[20].

Vasari's original impact is still palpable today in the mental structures of the discipline, embedded in 19th-century scholarship. For example, while challenging the Vasarian narrative, studies focused on the "minor" or "decorative" arts consider only a fragment of what could be termed "popular culture", focusing rather on arts which are minor but "sumptuous" and produced for the consumption by elite circles. In the excellent volume edited by Colum Hourihane entitled *From Minor to Major*, for example, out of 16 essays only one is dedicated to medieval pilgrim badges, which also the only one which can be considered as devoted to elements of authentic popular devotional culture[21]. A similar attitude has profoundly affected for example Islamic art history, where the established narrative has been entirely constructed on the divisions of classical art history and on the arts of the cultural elites, from a Western perspective: it is only fairly recently that objects belonging to "popular culture" or considered as such by scholars – from stamped paper amulets and talismans (Fig. 1) to "mass-produced" small scale objects – started to enter the narrative of Islamic visual culture[22]. The same can be said about the very idea of ex-vota produced throughout the millennia and often neglected in the historiography, reaching the attention of art historians only sporadically[23]. Images used in devotional-sensorial contexts, such as ingested images

of Belief and Perception (New York, 1988). Cf. Peter Burke, "Aron Gurevich's Dialogue with the *Annales*", in *Saluting Aron Gurevich. Essays in History, Literature and Other Related Subjects*, Yelena Mazour-Matusevich, Alexandra Korros (eds.) (Leiden, 2010), 69-80.

15 Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture…*, 1.

16 On the antithetic position of popular/high culture, cf. Maase, *Populärkulturforschung…*, 25ff.

17 Jerry Toner, *Popular Culture in Ancient Rome*, (Cambridge, 2009): 1-18; *Popular Culture in the Ancient World*, Lucy Grig (ed.) (Cambridge/New York, 2017).

18 It is, of course, impossible to provide even an overview, but a model-study for historical popular culture remains Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York, 1978).

19 Cf., e.g., Barbara Forti, "Vasari e la 'ruina estrema' del Medioevo: genesi e sviluppi di un'idea", *Arte medievale* 4 (2014): 231-252.

20 Nikodim Kondakov, *Sovremennoe položenie russkoj narodnoj ikonopisi* (St. Petersburg, 1901); *idem*, *The Present Situation of Russian Folk Icon Painting*, Ivan Foletti (ed.) (Rome/Brno, 2022). See also Oleg Tarasov, "The Russian Icon and the Culture of the Modern: The Renaissance of Popular Icon Painting in the Reign of Nicholas II", *Experiment* 7 (2001): 73-101; Robert L. Nichols, "The Icon and the Machine", in *Christianity and the Arts in Russia*, William C. Brumfield, Milos M. Velimirovic (eds.) (Cambridge, 1991), 131-144, esp. 141-143.

21 *From Minor to Major. The Minor Arts in Medieval Art History*, Colum Hourihane (ed.) (University Park, 2012); see also the volume *Arti minori e arti maggiori. Relazioni e interazioni tra Tarda Antichità e Alto Medioevo*, Fabrizio Bisconti, Matteo Braconi, Mariarita Sgarlata (eds.) (Todi, 2019). On the notion of objects and object studies more broadly, see also Philippe Cordez, *Treasure, Memory, Nature: Church Objects in the Middle Ages* (London/Turnhout, 2020), 9-17; *idem*, "Object Studies in Art History. Research Perspectives", in *Object Fantasies. Experience and Creation*, Philippe Cordez *et al.* (eds.) (Berlin/Boston, 2018), 19-30.

22 An excellent example is Finbarr Barry Flood, *Technologies de dévotion dans les arts de l'Islam: pèlerins, reliques et copies*, Paris 2019. See also Avinoam Shalem, "What do we mean when we say 'Islamic art'? A plea for a critical rewriting of the history of the arts of Islam", *Journal of Art Historiography* 6 (2019): 213-215. The literature on amulets, talismans, and magic has been exponentially growing in recent years. The scorpion-amulet reproduced here was published by Lajos Berkes, "An Arabic Scorpion-Amulet on Paper from the 10th-11th c. and its Coptic and Hebrew Parallels", *Chronique d'Égypte* 94 (2019), 213-215.

23 See Georges Didi-Huberman, *Ex-voto: image, organe, temps* (Paris, 2006); *Ex Voto: Votive Giving Across Cultures*, Ittai Weinryb (ed.) (Chicago, 2015); *Agents of faith: votive objects in time and place*, Ittai Weinryb (ed.) (New York, 2018).

– e.g., the phenomenon of the so-called *Schluckbildchen* or *Esszettel* which reproduce miraculous images in the purpose to be swallowed (Fig. 2) –, are also coming to the forefront of studies on elements of material cultures which can be considered as marginalized in past historiography because of their potentially "popular" origins[24]. All these objects were, until recently, deemed as belonging rather to the fields of popular religion, folk beliefs and superstitious behaviours, and thus relegated from the field of art history to that of materiality of religion[25].

Figure 1. *Scorpion-amulet on paper*, from Egypt (?), 10th-11th century. Source: Heidelberger Papyrussammlung, P. Heid. Inv. Arab. 161.

If the current panorama is thus announcing significant steps in the demarginalizing of premodern visual cultures, many questions should still be addressed. It is the reason why we decided to precisely propose this topic to *Eikón Imago*, a journal of art history prominent for its *longue durée* perspective, a tool necessary to a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Reproduction, seriality, and the Power of Images in the Long Middle Ages

It is indeed only, we believe, thanks to this *longue durée* perspective that crucial aspects for our understanding of what popular culture is can emerge[26]. It is the reason why we decided to propose a volume starting with Late Antiquity and going up to the First World War. Such a decision can, at first, be justified by Le Goff's concept of the "long Middle Ages", which challenged the traditional periodisation of history by showing the survival of premodern elements up to the early 20th century[27]. However, subsequently, such a perspective also allows clarification of the very notion of "popular culture" from a different point of view: in general, indeed, they are considered as being popular objects produced within popular environments. But what about objects which – indifferently from their origin – became massively popular in space and time? Such a case becomes particularly tangible when facing sacred images which are transformed in their popularity by their miraculous virtues and fame. We can evoke, amongst the dozens of examples in pre-modern Europa, the *Salus Populi Romani* (possibly promoted since its origins by one of most important roman bishops of Late antiquity, Gregory the Great) or, centuries later, the Madonna of the Church of Saint Thomas in Brno (Figs. 3-4)[28]. Both considered as protectors of their respective cities and miracle-makers, these images attract crowds and participation in the life of the city throughout the centuries and are used during the most important religious processions[29]. Thus, the success of the images does not depend on their production by the elites or by the lower classes; rather their popularity is often defined (also) by a movement coming from the bottom. This is not to say that there never is manipulation of the population by the elites, but we have significant examples of spontaneous cults of images emerging through the centuries. The history of images and their power thus opens a very specific path for the understanding of the notion of popular culture on the very *longue durée*.

[24] See Finbarr Barry Flood, "Bodies and Becoming: Mimesis, Mediation, and the Ingestion of the Sacred in Christianity and Islam", in *Sensational Religion: Sensory Cultures in Material Practice*, Sally M. Promey (ed.) (New Haven, 2014), 459-493; Kathryn M. Rudy, "Eating the Face of Christ: Philip the Good and his physical relationship with Veronicas", in *The European Fortune of the Roman Veronica in the Middle Ages*, Amanda Murphy *et al.* (eds.) (Brno, 2017), *Convivium Supplementum*, 169-179; Jérémie Koering, *Les iconophages. Une histoire de l'ingestion des images* (Arles, 2021).

[25] On this problem, see again Barry Flood, *Technologies de devotion…*, and Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian materiality: an essay on religion in late medieval Europe* (New York, 2011).

[26] For a reflection on the Braudelian concept, cf. the special number of *Annales. Histoire, Sciences sociales* 2 (2015).

[27] Jacques Le Goff, *Faut-il vraiment découper l'histoire en tranches?* (Paris, 2014).

[28] On the *Salus*, cf. Gerard Wolf, *Salus Populi Romani. Die Geschichte römischer Kultbilder im Mittelalter*, (Weinheim, 1990); *Idem*, "Regina Coeli, Facies Lunae, 'Et in terra pax'. Aspekte der Ausstattung der Cappella Paolina in S. Maria Maggiore", *Römisches Jahrbuch der Bibliotheca Hertziana* 27/28 (1991/1992): 283-336; Kirstin Noreen, "The icon of Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome: an image and its afterlife", *Renaissance studies* 19, no. 5 (2005): 660-672. On the Saint Thomas image, cf. Zuzana Frantová, Kristýna Pecinová, "The icon of Old Brno: a reconsideration", *Opuscula Historiae Artium* 62 (2013): 62-75. On the popularity of cultic images in the long term, the classic text remains Hans Belting, *Bild und Kult: eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst*, (Munich, 1990); but see also more recently Christian Michel, "La présentation d'images médiévales romaine à la période moderne: quelques pistes de réflexion", in *Survivals, revivals, rinascenze. Studi in onore di Serena Romano*, Nicolas Bock, Ivan Foletti, Michele Tomasi (eds.) (Rome, 2017), 207-216.

[29] See, e.g., Tomáš Malý, "Civic ritual, space, and imagination: the coronation of the icon from Brno (1736)", in *Ritualizing the City. Collective Performances as Aspects of Urban Construction from Constantine to Mao*, Ivan Foletti, Adrien Palladino (eds.) (Rome, 2017), 157-180; Kaliopi Chamonikola, "Milostný obraz a jeho fungování. Madona od sv. Tomáše v Brně", in *Imago Imagines. Výtvarné dílo a proměny jeho funkcí v českých zemích od 10. do první třetiny 16. Století*, Kateřina Kubínová, Klára Benešovská (eds.) (Prague, 2019), 420-435.

Figure 2. *Strip of Schluckbilder reproducing miraculous images*. Source: Mariazell, Austria, late 18th century.

Figure 3. *Salus Populi Romani*, 6th (?) and 13th century repainting. Source: Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome.

Figure 4. *Madonna of Saint Thomas*, post-restoration state, Italian provenance, second half of the 13th century. Source: Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary in Old Brno, Brno.

It is also thanks to such an approach that another aspect can be revealed: the transmediatic potential of popular images. One can recall many stories of famous pre-modern and early modern miraculous images which were later copied and thus multiplied. We might think of, e.g., the Acheiropita of the Lateran or the Madonna of Ara Coeli, both in Rome. With the development of book printing in the 15th century in the Latin West, this phenomenon was further intensified. Popular images were widely spread by popular reproductions, multiplied through a new medium and increasingly democratized[30]. One of the most impressive examples in this sense is the promotion of the already-mentioned *Salus Populi Romani*, reproductions of which were spread all around the globe by the Society of Jesus starting from the mid-16th century (Fig. 5)[31]. In this case, it is crucial to note how an

[30] See, e.g., *Marie mondialisée: L'Atlas Marianus de Wilhelm Gumppenberg et les topographies sacrées de l'époque moderne*, Olivier Christin, Fabrice Flückiger, Naïma Ghermani (eds.) (Neuchâtel, 2014); *L'image miraculeuse dans le christianisme occidental (Moyen Âge – Temps modernes)*, Nicolas Balzamo, Estelle Leutrat (eds.) (Tours, 2020). See also, with focus on other forms of globalisation of sacred images and objects: *The Nomadic Object. The Challenge of World for Early Modern Religious Art*, Christine Göttler, Mia M. Mochizuki (eds.) (Leiden/Boston, 2018).

[31] Cf., e.g., Antonio De Caro, "(Re–)Producing conversion from Rome to Beijing: stories related to the replicas of the 'Salus Populi Romani' in the late sixteenth century", *Convivium* 8, no. 2 (2021): 148-165; Mia M. Mochizuki, "Sacred Art in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction: The *Salus Populi Romani* Madonna in the World", in *Sacred and Profane in Early Modern Art*, Kayo Hirakwa (ed.) (Kyoto, 2016), 129-144; Yoshie Kojima, "Reproduction of the image of Madonna 'Salut Populi Romani' in Japan", in *Between East and West: reproductions in art*, Shigetoshi Osano (ed.) (Krakow, 2014), 373-387; Ondřej Jakubec, "Obraz 'Salus populi romani' u brněnských jezuitů a obraznost potridentského katolicismu na předbělohorské

old popular image, multiplied consciously by religious authorities, becomes extremely popular in a variety of different cultural environments. Such a success can be explained, obviously, by the manipulation by the Jesuit Order, but also, we argue, by the intrinsic efficacy of its layout. It is thus plausible to argue that the general design of an image can contribute to its final success, whether consciously or not.

Figure 5. Hieronymus Wierix, *Salus Populi Romani*, engraving, 1590-1600. Source: British Museum, London, accession number F, 1. 237.

What is important to recall is that such a tradition is not exclusive to the age of printing: similarly, very famous are the ampullae from the holy land and other sites across the Mediterranean[32]. These were serially produced on cheap media – clay or lead – and bore representations possibly reproducing monumental images or holy sites, which contributed to their success all across Eurasia (Fig. 6). The same can be said about pilgrim badges, visual and material echoes of holy sites which flourished from the 11th century on. These artifacts may have reproduced devotional objects or spaces and certainly meant that it became possible to carry parts of the sacrality of these sites along the pilgrimage routes (Fig. 7)[33]. In sum, the *longue durée* is revealing in how popular images can be multiplied and spread thanks to very different and democratic media, in turn impacting broad layers of the society.

Figure 6. *Pilgrim Flask of Saint Menas*, terracotta, from Abu Mina, Egypt, 6th century. Source: The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, accession number 48.2541.

Figure 7. *Pilgrim badge with the Virgin of Le Puy-en-Velay*, tin, from Le Puy-en-Velay, Auvergne, 14th century. Source: Musée Crozatier, Le Puy-en-Velay, inv. 1937.1.108.

Moreover, it is not just a belief in transferring the miraculous effect of the image in each of its copies. The desire of a person to be in a proximity of such an image can also be considered from a psychological point of view, or, in other words, from the point of view of the natural human desire for repetition as such, and thus to understand its widespread popularity even more. The tendency of people to feel more comfortable when pre-

Moravě", in *Jezuité a Brno: sociální a kulturní interakce koleje a města (1578-1773)*, Hana Jordánková, Vladimír Maňas (eds.) (Brno, 2013), 77-98; Kirstin Noreen, "Replicating the Icon of Santa Maria Maggiore: The *Mater ter admirabilis* and the Jesuits of Ingolstadt", *Visual Resources* 24, no. 1 (2008): 19-37.

[32] William Anderson, "An archaeology of late antique pilgrim flasks", *Anatolian Studies* 54 (2004): 79-93; Susanne Bangert, "Menas ampullae: a case study of long-distance contacts", in *Incipient Globalization? Long-Distance Contacts in the Sixth Century*, Anthea Harris (ed.) (Oxford 2007), 27-33; Heather Hunter-Crawley, "Pilgrimage Made Portable: a Sensory Archaeology of the Monza-Bobbio Ampullae", *Journal on Hellenistic and Roman Material Culture (HEROM)* 1 (2012): 135-156.

[33] See especially the works of Denis Bruna, *Enseignes de plomb et autre "menues chosettes" du Moyen Âge*, Paris 2006; see also *Le plomb et la pierre: petits objets de devotion pour les pèlerins du Mont-Saint-Michel, de la conception à la production (XIVe–XVe siècles)*, Françoise Labaune-Jean (ed.) (Caen, 2016).

sented with stimuli they have experienced repeatedly is a phenomenon known in the field of psychology as the "mere exposure effect"[34]. Robert Zajonc, a Polish-American psychologist who conducted a number of laboratory experiments in the 1960s, theorized that frequent contact with a particular stimulus shapes an individual's attitude towards any kind of stimulus, and that attitude changes in a positive direction the more often the individual is exposed to the given stimulus[35]. The "mere exposure effect" has received a great deal of attention from the cognitive sciences in an area that by its very nature involves repetition, and that is music[36]. In music we have an involuntary tendency to seek out songs that we have already heard before, and we do this over and over and with increasing pleasure. Even within the frame of our favourite style of music, we favour the songs and melodies we already know over the ones that we don't know[37]. This is, incidentally, one of the key elements of pop music. Music thus provides one of the clues as to why repetition may be so psycho-emotionally seductive.

It has also been proven that images can have a similar psychological effect on the viewer, who is the recipient of the images. This can be best demonstrated on the churches along the pilgrimage routes to Santiago and their tympana with images of Christ in all his iconographic variations[38]. The image of Christ the pilgrims met and encountered day after day, and sometimes several times in one day, over and over, and in a place accessible to all became a sort of reassurance. For pilgrims this aspect is especially important considering anthropological studies that highlight the fact that pilgrimage was a decision to experience the uncertainty that accompanies the wandering man, take on the role of the pilgrim-stranger wherever he arrived[39]. In such a state the pilgrim needs to be guided and assured and encouraged in his efforts and resolutions. During the often distressing and dangerous journey, the image of Christ on the tympana was in close and familiar relationship with the viewer and thus had a soothing effect on a pilgrim (Fig. 8). Recurring images of Christ became an important and perhaps the only reassurance that he or she was on the right path, in both the physical and the spiritual sense[40]. The "power" or "popularity" of these images was thus generated first by its repeated use and the effect that its recurring presence was able to generate in the minds of pilgrims of all social classes. We thus believe that one of the key elements contributing to the popularization of an object or image –whether it be an elite creation or a bottom-up one– is the potential to multiply or repeat it. Obviously, the very idea of repetition goes against the widespread assumption that truly "creative" and inspired images or artworks should not be repeated, a prejudice, we believe, that is deeply imbedded in our modern thinking about the creative act as constantly producing novelty[41]. Of course, such idea would deserve further investigation, and we do not have the space to pursue it within the pages of this editorial. But what we wished to show here is how the very idea of "popular" images can be constructed either by time, space, or craft.

We would like to conclude this introduction by stating that with this volume, we would like to promote a trend which is gaining importance in the last years. It is evident that this thematic issue cannot systematically answer all the questions addressed in the present text, especially because it was constituted by an open call. The latter, nevertheless, showed us some of the ways in which scholars currently approach the topic.

Oriol Vaz-Romero's article investigates ancient wooden toys and the technique and of their making as carriers of meaning for given societies. Ehud Fathy examines the so-called *asàrotos òikos* mosaics as iterations –in elite contexts– of popular themes inside of Roman households. Bridging into the Late Antiquity, Chiara Croci questions the famous Roman gold-glass images found in catacombs as objects which were used (or reused) to decorate tombs in popular funerary contexts. Still in the long Late Antiquity, Joaquín Serrano del Pozo questions the role of images and other devices, such as widespread amulets and talismans, as artifacts intended to protect Roman soldiers during their Eastern campaigns. Similarly, but expanding towards the reception of ancient popular artifacts in later epochs, Lloyd D. Graham questions the use of amuletic imagery in the design of the cards of the Tarot de Marseille from the 17th century onwards. Going even further, Sharon Khalifa-Gueta analyses the contemporary reception – in the series *Game of Thrones* – of ancient Greco-Roman and medieval motives. Closely related to the question of the role of sacred images in popular devotion, An-

[34] See esp. Robert B. Zajonc, "Attitudinal Effects of Mere Exposure", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, in *Monograph Supplement* 9, no. 2 (1968): 1-28. For a brief summary of research on the "mere exposure effect", see J. E. Temme, "Effects of Mere Exposure, Cognitive Set and Task Expectations on Aesthetic Appreciation", in *Cognitive Processes in the Perception of Art*, W. Ray Crozier, Antony J. Chapman (eds.) (Amsterdam / New York / Oxford, 1984), 389-410, esp. 389-392.

[35] See also A. Harrison, Robert B. Zajonc, "The Effects of Frequency and Duration of Exposure on Response Competition and Affective Ratings", *Journal of Psychology* 75 (1970): 163-169; Robert B. Zajonc, "Feeling and Thinking: Preferences Need No Inferences", *American Psychologist* 35 (1980): 151-175.

[36] See esp. *The Psychology of Music*, Diana Deutsch (ed.) (New York, 1982); James C. Barlett, "Cognition of Complex Events: visual Scenes and Music", in *Cognitive Processes…*, 225-252; and Elisabeth Hellmuth Margulis, *On Repeat: How Music Plays the Mind* (Oxford, 2014).

[37] *The Psychology of Music*, Diana Deutsch (ed.) (New York, 1982), 4.

[38] Peter Klein, "Programmes eschatologiques, fonction et réception historiques des portails du XIIe s.: Moissac, Beaulieu, Saint Denis", *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 33 (1990), 317-349.

[39] Arnold van Gennep, *Les rites de passage*, Paris 1969 [1909]; Victor Turner, Edith Turner, *Image and pilgrimage in Christian culture. Anthropological Perspectives* (New York; 1978), 2; Victor Turner, *Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage*, in *idem*, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, (Ithaca/London, 1967), 93-111; *Contesting the Sacred. The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage*, John Eade, Michael Sallnow (eds.), (London, 1991). Simon Coleman, John Elsner, "Contesting Pilgrimage: Current Views and Future Directions", *Cambridge Anthropology,* 15 (1991), 63-73; Anne E. Bailey, "Modern and Medieval Approaches to Pilgrimage, Gender and Sacred Space", *History and Anthropology* 24, no. 4 (2013), 493-512 and *Migrating Art Historians*, *On the Sacred Ways*, Ivan Foletti *et al.* (eds.) (Brno, 2018), 53-54, 210.

[40] Ivan Foletti, "Migrating Art Historians. Objects, Bodies, and Minds", in *Migrating Art Historians…*, 27-57, esp. 44.

[41] For a reflection, see Umberto Eco, "Innovation and Repetition: Between Modern and Post-Modern Aesthetics", *Daedalus* 114, no. 4 (1985): 161-184.

drea Missagia and Feliciano Tosetto examine the presence of the image of the Madonna *Lactans* in interaction between Islamic and Christian contexts in the Middle Ages. Ilaria Molteni, in her article, highlights another fundamental aspect, that of the pictorial visualization of literary themes from chivalric romances as means of the creation of a shared collective memory between popular culture and elites. Two articles, that of Riccardo Montanari and that of Antonio De Caro, question the use of images and artifacts that can be termed as "popular" in contexts of conversion: Montanari focuses on the role of Jesuit image-making strategies in 16th-century Japan, while De Caro examines the role of portable objects travelling across the early modern global routes in the Christianization of Chinese households between the 16th and 17th centuries. The last two article expand the timeframe even further to the 19th and early 20th century. Tetiana Brovarets investigates – based on the case study of popular Ukrainian embroidered towels – the fascinating semantic shifts which can happen when popular oral cultures are transformed into embroidered and printed images. Finally, focusing on the case of Bohemia, Jan Galeta analyses how public festivals, and their associated visual production can shape the discourses on the emergence of a communal identity within a broader empire.

Figure 8. *West tympanum with Last Judgment.* Source: Sainte Foy, Conques, ca. 1100.

We are delighted that this issue of *Eikón Imago* brought together so many scholars, across such a variety of what they considered to be "premodern popular cultures", from wooden toys to late Antique gold glasses and popular devotional objects in Chinese missionary contexts, to the popular national traditions and festivities of early 20th-century Central Europe. We hope that this is one more step towards the fruitful dialogue of art history with this open phenomenon of "popular culture".