THE MIRACLE IN PETER DAMIAN

THE FLEXIBILITY OF A CONCEPT

In her introduction to the collection *Agiografia altomedievale*, Sofia Boesch Gajano writes that “more than any other hagiographic problem, ever since the Gospel the miracle appears as an imposing and at the same time complicated reality, a sign of God but also of the devil, a manifestation of sanctity but also of its opposite”.\(^1\) This complexity is also reflected in Peter Damian’s writings, although the theme of the miracle in his production has received little attention so far.

Studies on miracles in Peter Damian\(^2\)—particularly those featured in the *exempla* that punctuate many of his writings\(^3\)—

\(^1\) Agiografia altomedievale, edited by S. Boesch Gajano, Bologna, 1976, p. 7 48. [Translation by the author]

\(^2\) J. M. Santerre, N. Stalmans, L’autonomie du miracle chez Pierre Damien, in “Scribere sanctorarum gesta”: recueil d’études d’hagiographie médiévale offert à Guy Philippart, edited by E. Renard, M. Trigalet, X. Hermant, P. Bertrand, Turnhout, 2005, p. 711-715; see note 9 in O. Capitani, *Simonia ed ecclesiologia in S. Pier Damiani*, in Immunità vescovili ed ecclesiologia in età “pregregoriana” e “gregoriana”. L’atto alla “restaurazione”, Spoleto, 1966 (revised version Torino, 1973), where Capitani stresses “the autonomous persistence of the grace of the Spirit” in Peter Damian’s thought, even when channeled by simonists, which manifests itself in those “facts” that are so essential to “popular” devotion, namely, “miracles”. We should keep in mind that, as far as miracles are concerned, Peter Damian makes no distinction between unworthy priests and simonists. Thus, the exempla in the *Liber Gratissimus* also concern simonists. On miracles as “popular” culture, see F. Graus, *Die Gewalt bei den Anfängen des Feudalismus und die Gefangenenbefreiung der merowingerischen Hagiographie*, in *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, (1961), p. 61-156, where the scarce influence of folklore on hagiography is stressed. Hagiology was far from being an expression of the “people”, although its intended audience is indeed the “people” at all social levels. The reason for the presence of pseudo-popular motifs—or adaptations of motifs of popular origin, or again social motifs, such as a saint’s charitable doings to help the poor and victims of injustice—is that the institutions where hagiographies were produced intended them to serve as propaganda for religious cult. These institutions were bishoprics and monasteries, with their organization, their economic resources, and

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