"EUROPE" IN LITERARY SOURCES:
A Political Ideal, and a Strategy

Carmen Di Meo
Faculteit der Letteren, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen / Faculty of Arts, University of Groningen, Department of European Languages and Culture, Groningen, The Netherlands

Abstract

In response to the growth of scholarly interest and research in the field, the present contribution tracks the work done by eminent cultural historians, like Federico Chabod (1962), in the course of the Twentieth century on the occurrences of the word "Europe" in past literary sources, starting with the Middle Ages. On the basis of a trans-historical perspective, the contribution shall draw conclusions on the historical reception of "the birth of Europe" – both as a "Corps Politique", and as a strategic concept. It is possible to extent this conceptual frame to the development of a European culture, in order to see how this idea, borne out of Medieval epics, might had contributed in good order to shape a European identity, and had exercised at the same time its "agency" under a political and military strategy, to be seen as a counterpart to the more universal idea of a "Christendom". The phenomenon here discussed is especially rooted in the birth of vernacular cultures and languages, and the discussion throughout the paper will contextually match the reading of European history made up to present times with the analysis of Early romances and novels. In doing so, a critical approach is pursued.

Keywords: Europe, Historiography, Vernacular Literature, Political Theory, Identity

1.1 Introduction

In an article appeared on the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera*, July 17th 1969, the poet Eugenio Montale shared his own opinion on the possible consequences that the forthcoming landing on the Moon by the man might have had on the traditional "poetic attractiveness" of the Moon as a source of literary inspiration. Among other reflections, Montale's response dwelled over the simple truth that, up to date, the man on earth had already made discoveries much

more important than the urge of conquering the sidereal space, starting from his impressive attempts to reconduct under his main influence the entire life of the Planet. '*His discoveries and inventions*' – writes Montale – '*have changed the face of the Earth; the world has come under his rules*' (Montale, 1969).

Lifting himself up on his knees, the man has covered the long distance that divides our origins from us, from a moment in history when not even languages existed. This contribution has much to deal with the formation of "our" identity, and of that of languages, especially the "vernaculars". To start with the first topic, let us focus on the history of our Continent getting back to its roots, and to the birth of the idea of "Europe".

In several of his academic prolusions and scholarly contributions dating back to the early 40s, the eminent historian Federico Chabod tried to sum up the history of the idea of Europe starting from its early manifestations in Medieval sources. In 1947, Chabod (1962) defined the whole issue as a historiographical problem closely linked to the challenges of present times, in terms of knowledge, inquiring "when do we started to build up a collective *European* conscience". As many others will point out later, the boundaries of Medieval 'Occidental' Christendom might have been corresponding somehow to an early circumscription of the concept of Europe, but this has to be explained way better than in simple, general trends. The distinction immediately opens up to other couples of opposing concepts, such as Roman world/barbarism, faithful/unfaithful, crusaders/Saracens, Western world/Orientalism, the majority of which have entered our collective consciousness – especially since vernacular literatures started to appear – also in the form of old legends, tales, and novels. As well as it happened with modern historiography, the idea of Europe as we know it has made a certain effort to be seen as a subject of thought on the part of Medieval authors, except for geographers, and a small group of learned people (Ortalli, 2008). In Medieval times, its use is mainly connected with the records of the military success achieved by the Franks, starting with the person of Charles Martel, Mayor of the Palace. In fact, a notorious occurrence in light of this discourse is the use of the word "European" made by an anonymous chronicler – maybe a clergyman – from VIII Century who had continued the

Historiae written by St. "Isidore" of Seville (d. 636). In the records from the battle of Poitiers (or Tours, 732), the author describes the household troops as being the *Europeans*, '*Europenses*', as they approached the Arabic encampment in order to thwart the enemies' advance, led by Abderrahman, from the Iberic peninsula (Chabod, 1962, p. 25; Ortalli, 2008, p. 3).

Seemingly, he had followed the footsteps of his grandfather, Charlemagne has been principally connected by the scholars to the birth of a European identity, thanks to the actual extension of his territories, and supported by the literary homages that the intellectuals called as ambassadors to his Court have been paying to him, the king of the Franks, and of the Lombards, destined to be crowned as Emperor. After the relatively easy conquest of the Lombard Kingdom of Italy in 774, in his famous *Letter to Charlemagne* (775), the Irish priest Cathwulf adduces eight reasons to prove the goodwill of God to Charlemagne, and praises him, for God himself had raised him upon the others, for the glory of Europe, '*in honorem glorie regni Europae*' (Gandino, 2007, p. 43). Similarly, in the letter written by Alcuin of York to the Northumbrian clergyman Colcu in 790, Charlemagne is praised for his achievements, and especially for the work of conversion made with regard to the Saxons and the Frisians (Garrison, 1995, p. 72), '*Nam antiqui Saxones et omnes Frisonum populi, instante rege Carolo […] ad fidem Christi conversi sunt.*' (Ussher & Elrington, 1631). In the same letter, a reference to the keeping of wealth and peace in Europe is to be found.

The sense of powerfulness, the contagious fascination emanating from the historical figure of Charlemagne is to be seen also as a by-product of the contributions wrote by his contemporaries, who were effectively fostering and sustaining his leadership all over Europe[1]. Starting with the imponent work begun by his predecessors with the emanation of the so-called *Lex Salica* (in 763-764 with the *Prologue*), time had come with him for a reunification – under his influence – not just of the several physical entities occupying the early European soil, but also of the political, and the religious administration of the former 'barbarian' populations. In fact, many Medieval sources from the VIII

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[1] A brief, but nonetheless exhaustive portrait of Charlemagne, and of his life, is given in the accounts written by Beryl Smalley in chapter five of her book (1974) dedicated to *Royal Biographies c. 800 – c. 1150*, and by Indro Montanelli (Montanelli & Gervaso, 2018, pp. 257-267).

Century, such as the notable anonymous poem *Karolus magnus et Leo Papa* from Paderborn (799), as well as other coeval documents, will preserve forever the memory of Charlemagne as '*Europae venerandus apex, pater optimus*', '*rex pater Europae*' (Bullough, 1970, p. 105; Barbero, 2000, p. 5, 127; Ortalli, 2008, p. 4), and '*dominus terrae*' (Gandino 2007, p 44, n105). Clearly, as many notable scholars have highlighted many times over the last Century, the imprinting of Charlemagne's courtly life was rooted in its sacred nature and legitimation. The presence of learned men and scholars coming especially from the English, and the Irish ecclesiastical *milieu* – as teachers to the King himself – is a distinctive trait of this strong political and earthly governmental structure, of the so-called Carolingian *Renaissance*, that restored a Holy, Latin *European* Empire over the far "Greek" Roman Empire. Accordingly, the history of the Franks was seen by contemporary chroniclers as the history of '*Gesta Dei per Francos*' (Galasso, 2017, pp. 12). Christendom and the concept of Europe are so far closely interlaced, and interdepending with each other.[2]

In his ground-breaking historiographical studies, Giuseppe Galasso (2017) has noticed the essential narrowly-oriented, and chronicling character of Medieval historical narrations (from V-VI Century), made by authors mainly inclined to compile records of the events connected to their own context of provenance, and to interpret them on the basis of a Christian philosophy of history. For instance, like Isidore before him, Bede "the Venerable" saw the official governance of Byzantium, and its *Basileus*, too far away to interest him, and he also believed that the unification by religion begun with Christianity was actually transcending the extension of the political unity of the Empire. Bede wrote an *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (up to 731), dedicated to a Northumbrian King. And so, '*the deep sense of the direction, and the inner meaning of the birth and foundation of Europe is missing*' from the historical records (Galasso, 2017, p. 10).

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[2] This specific aspect is to be seen in connection with that of a 'Frankish' narration of European history, especially developed to lead to the identification of the Franks with the biblical 'chosen' people destined to protect the Roman Church from the Pagans – as well as from the Germanic populations, and above all from the Lombards, formerly converted to Christianity in the Arian form. The viewpoint is illustrated with full detail in the contribution by Germana Gandino, 2007. The theme has been also often fully clarified by Professor Alessandro Barbero in his conferences, and in written contributions on the topic (2000).

1.2 The Quest for "Europe", and Modern Historiography

Getting back to the words written by Federico Chabod (1962), Europe has been mostly defined in negative, in opposition to what could not be considered – from a cultural viewpoint – Europe. The "Birth of Europe" as historiographical problem has started very recently in history. It is possible to distinguish at least three main components mixed up within "European" identity and culture: a) the culture of ancient Greece and Rome; b) Christianity; c) the culture of the Germanic populations invading the Roman Empire. The first studies in the field were made between 1928 and 1933, then with the rising of conflicts between the Nations towards the II World War, research will be only reprised at the end of the '40s until nowadays.

The first occurrence of the idea of "Europe" intended not as a mere geographical expression, but also as a political community of territories, is reconducted by modern historians to the writings of the Italian author Niccolo' Machiavelli (1469 – 1527). Machiavelli was a Florentine erudite that exercised also the role of diplomatic agent for the *Repubblica* among the major Italian Courts of his own time. He is renowned for the famous political treaty titled *De principatibus* (composed after 1513), best known as *The Prince*, as it was printed in Rome in 1532. As noticed by Chabod (1961), what distinguishes Machiavelli's thoughts on Europe is the total absence of the two main ideas always connected to the identity of the Continent before him, *Christianitas*, and the Empire.

In Machiavelli's opinion "Europe", as distinguished from "Asia", is a separate political entity, divided in *Principalities*, each one ruled by a Lord and by an oligarchy of barons, whose power is legitimated by their noble ancestry and blood. In Machiavelli's opinion, Europe – and not Christendom – consists of individual political entities, and in this is diverse from the Oriental provinces, in which the ruling setting is based on "despotism". Those concepts expressed by Machiavelli, would have undergo a process of divulgation very determinant for the formation of the current comprehension of the political and administrative reality, either within and outside Europe (for instance, see Juan Luis Vives' *De Europae dissidiis et bello turcico*, 1526). His ideas will be also important as a

basis for the development of the conception of political and civil freedom professed by the Illuminists in the course of the eighteenth Century. Echoes of his doctrine considering Europe as a State made of several Provinces, have been kept alive in subsequent political writings by Montesquieu (1689-1755), Voltaire (1694-1778), Frederick the Great (1712-1786). Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the "Idea of Europe", for the first time in Modern History (and from Chabod's perspective alike), is discussed also from a moral viewpoint, and not simply in terms of a geographical entity. Such a statement of a certain paradoxical nature – if the lay independence of Machiavellian political thoughts from the inference of any religious filter is considered – has possibly come out because Machiavelli was the first to use the word "State" ('*Stato*') in the modern sense, extending its influence to an entire civil Nation, based on the example of the Italian cities-state (Florence, Rome, Naples, Venice, Milan). And, in fact, proceeding on with his thorough reconstruction of the history of Europe, Chabod calls into question the image of it as a *corps politique*, as a political force functioning more or less as a human body, a system made of very interconnected, but separately working components. And the idea of the State, and of Europe as a political body is of Machiavellian import. At least, sticking to what Hannah Arendt taught to her American students in her lectures on the *History of Political Theory* (1955).

What could represent in a good way the intrinsic European character within Machiavelli explanative arguments, is the idea of sovereignty applied in the Frankish (Carolingian) kingdom, with a "Rex" surely seen as a charismatic guide to his people, but surrounded by a strong community of powerful people alike; alongside, the logical calculation of the wars of expansive manoeuvre sustains the parallel. The "modern" administration of the State – the prodrome of Europe – associated with the Carolingian *Renaissance*, is however responsible for having allowed the Roman Church to be at the basis of the legitimation for such a political dominion. Writes Hannah Arendt in her notes on Machiavelli's political know-how: '*What is the State: the French did not understand the "State", otherwise they will have never let the Church acquiring such a powerful influence*'. (Arendt, & Pansera, 2017, p. 64). It is clear that, if human life, and

the civilization start and perish on the Planet, the State is where they develop; and, if true human life is just afterlife, as professed by religion, the moral is totally changed. It is also clear that the peculiar political and institutional asset of the "italic" territories (the northern *Regnum*, Saint Peter's patrimony, the duchy of Benevento, and the central and southern roman-byzantine outposts), and later on of the trading centres and city-States, has influenced the political thought borne out from that soil. It was not a case, in fact, that Jacob Burkhardt started his *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* (1860) explaining exactly this, how and why Italy had distinguished itself from the other Occidental *European* states in being an expression of political plurality, and effectively divided partially between the Occidental, and the Mediterranean and Oriental mentality at once. In Burkhardt's conception of the State "as a work of art", resound the words written by Machiavelli centuries before: '*It is impossible to dominate with a quiet temper such ordered States as that of France*' (Machiavelli, 2005, p. 28).

Although disseminated, and maybe lost in a heap of factors, and of contradictory elements, the primeval and original identity of Europe lies in the history of those fragmentary States; in the constitution of the historical centres and municipalities that had partly marked the "modern" spirit that the Middle Ages have left to us to be preserved, and developed. A spirit that, so far, has reached our metro-*polis*.

In this general historiographical recapitulation and picturing, seen from the present perspective, of the geopolitical asset of European history, a last aspect has to be recalled. In a very recently published book by Paolo Rumiz (2019), the extraordinary expansion of the Benedictine order from the hilltops of Norcia throughout Europe, seen as a '*fundamental vehicle of Medieval civilization*' (Galasso, 2017, p. 12), fairly disputes also the general commonplaces linked to the idea of Christianity, and of the works of conversion done in Medieval times. The subtitle of the book states 'A JOURNEY AT THE ROOTS OF EUROPE', while in a newspaper article this same journey is announced as a '*research into the monasticism where Europe is born*' (Bianchi, 2019, p. 37). The idea is that of recovering a European uniqueness, not only cultural, but also spatial in this case, after the disasters caused by the earthquakes that kept shaking Italy in

the last couple of years (from August 2016). The natural catastrophe is, therefore, ideally paralleled to the devastations caused – since 410 when the Visigoths plundered Rome under the guidance of Alaric – by the Goths, and the Lombards (V-VI Century); Saint Benedict reached Montecassino in 529. Another similitude made in terms of power and influence, gives the measure of the phenomenon: '*Between a Montecassino Abbot, and a Lombard Duke there is no difference. Both of them are the absolute authorities in States more or less expanded, and equally independents.*' (Montanelli & Gervaso, 2018, p. 226). From this book, has then come out that Christianity pierced Europe not just by power, law, and investiture, but also through the characters of a "counter-culture", based on the strongest of human factors: the perceptions of the five senses, with the aid of spellbinding forces such as beauty, art, architecture, music, lyrics, food, beer, reception, and conviviality, and so of values almost totally new to the nomad barbarian tribes. The threadlike ramification of Benedictine geography appears as a pilot example of interculturality, in which *Latinitas*, and Barbarism do coexist.

1.3 "European" Epics: from *Europa* to *Roland*

Vittore Pisani had written once that to speak about a Linguistic Europe, and so of a European "type", it would rather mean talking about a European culture or a European civilization, so as to recognize the common traits as a reflection of common mental and spiritual inclinations over the differences (Pisani, 1943, p. 95). The etymology of the word Europe is not clearly detected, but scholars have been inclined to reconduct its origins to the Assyrian word for the "West", '*ereb'*, opposed to '*açu'*, the "East" (Pisani, 1943, p. 93). To paraphrase the very shareable sentence written by Indro Montanelli in his *History of Italy*, '*The story of Europe begins in China'* (Montanelli & Gervaso, 2018, p. 9), it is possible to say that the history of *Europa* begins in Asia, and precisely in Lebanon. The Latin poet Ovid[3] in his *Metamorphoseon Libri* (8 a. D.) tells the myth of Europe,

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[3] A comprehensive study, and overview of the literary and iconographical history of the myth of Europa can be found on the website for the following digital project: http://www.iconos.it/le-metamorfosi-di-ovidio/libro-ii/giove-e-europa/, with citations from the major classics, and from

narrating that the virgin daughter to Agenor king of Tyre, and Telephassa, named *Europa*, once had naively joined a beautiful white bull for a ride. And it happened that, being that bull actually the father of all the Gods, Jupiter, he abducted her escaping via the sea (Ovid, II, 847-875, pp. 160-163). A reference to continental Europe is to be found also in the introducing of Triptolemus by Ovid, '*Europen sublimis et Asida terram*' (Ovid, V, 648, p. 324).

The present talk was inspired by some lines written in a contribution devoted to the study of literary culture in the Middle Ages written by Fritz van Oostrom (2009), stating: '*Literature had been instrumental in shaping the nation and in demonstrating and displaying the nation's identity.*' And, in addition, in all likelihood it is to the unity, and the circulation of literary models of narration, and of the several "national" epics and stories, that we must turn our eye in order to find the Medieval '*Europenses*'. In a series of seminars held the present year at Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, devoted to the theme of a shared '*Literary Culture in Premodern Europe*', this point of view had consistently been emerging from the collegial conversations, and reflections occurred between the author of the present study and her students. The challenging node of searching for the prodrome of Europe in linguistic and cultural aspects, has been that of looking at Medieval culture from a given European perspective, focusing on the very relevant expressions and elements of connections in the literary civilization of the Middle Ages, in every single "modern" Country. Starting from a careful reading, and a critical exploration of the primary and secondary sources – both textual and visual – in which germs and hints of European culture are disseminated, the history of the "birth of Europe" – from its mythical representations in the Greek pantheon to the mentions of it in Medieval chronicles – acts as a filter to the processing, and the analysing of the literatures. Particularly, the attention of the students has first turned to the operative concepts of the word "Europe", as it is perceived nowadays as a transnational political entity formed by a group of Nations cooperating on crucial

medieval and renaissance sources. For a discussion of the medieval reception of Ovid's Metamorphosis, with special regard to the Rape of Europa, see the introductory chapter to Panofksy, E. & Pedio, R. Previtali, G. (1999). *Studi di iconologia: i temi umanistici nell'arte del Rinascimento*. Torino: Einaudi, pp. 35-37.

themes – today, alike in Medieval times – such as borders and immigration regulation, trading and legislative agreements, and above all, monetary unification. Through the examination of Medieval sources in the shape of Maps as, for instance, the illustration of Europe contained in *The Liber Floridus* (1121) by Canon Lambert of Saint-Omer (Ghent, University Library, ms 92), it was noticed that, while being parts of the Carolinian Empire, recognizable kingdoms and duchies of Italy ('*Magna Grecia*' as well as '*Italia*'), France ('*Gallia*', '*Aquitania*', '*Burgundia*'), Germany ('*Germania*'), Spain ('*Hispania*') and the Low Countries ('*Flandria*'), resulted in a civil morphology, both physical and cultural, very reminiscent of the territories occupied by the Europeans also at the present time. Or, at least, looking at a "Western" Europe. What it can be interestingly pointed out here is that, to look at European identity from a literary point of view allows for a deep scrutiny of the formation of an "international" story-telling, and also on the circulation and overcoming of cultural syncretism. From an overall viewpoint, it was seen how – from the moment when the blocks of the Romance languages, and of the Anglo-Saxon dialects started to differentiating themselves in the tenth, and the twelfth Century onwards – in Medieval times literary genres and the tales of peoples echoed each other. From VI to IX Century, in the wake of Latin literature, primitive forms of medieval historiography articulated *per annum* appeared, providing the general methods for the birth of the histories of the independent barbarian kingdoms, and throwing light on the origins of the modern States after the fall of the Roman Empire, and the change of its centre from Rome to Byzantium. The Medieval annals were a '*state enterprise*' (Smalley, 1974, p. 67). The model of the lives of the illustrious Roman Caesars had surely inspired the lives of the Oriental Caesars, but had also contributed to shape, for instance, Charlemagne's historical memory. Hagiography acted as an essential paradigm for the development of a secular history, from the Popes' deeds (*Liber Pontificalis*) to the deeds of Abbots and Bishops (for instance, Paul the Deacon in his *History of Metz*, 784), down to local stories of the deeds performed by Princeps and Royals. It is possible to envisage here a nucleus for the future development of the cycles of *chansons de geste*. If, in Bede's fictional words, the Angels, the Saxons, and the Jutes descended from the Northern Gods, so does their

literature, as well as that of the Germans. Characters such as Siegfried (Sigurd), Attila the Hun, and the Burgundian chieftain Gundahar (Gunther) can be found also mentioned in the Icelandic-Scandinavian *Poetic Edda,* (Copenhagen, *Codex Regius*, late IX Century). The epic of the Nibelungen (*Nibelungenlied*) retains something of the metric lyric forms employed by the Norse chanters, the so-called Skálds (active from 872 to 1300) in their *kenningars*. Magic, the monstrous, and the pagan attitude of the Nordic pantheon is also present in the battles of *Beôwulf* (about VIII, X Century). The display of *prosopopeia* acted by natural living beings and objects in the approximately hundred *Riddles* collected in the Exeter Book (Exeter, Cathedral Library, ms 3501, X Century) resounds in the elegiac tone of the account of Christ's Passion, given by the Cross itself, in *The Dream of the Rood* (Vercelli, Biblioteca Capitolare, ms CXVII, X Century). It is, exactly, in an early version of a *Riddle* scratched on the borders of a page in an ancient Mozarabic prayer book (Verona, Biblioteca Capitolare, Codex LXXXIX, f. 3 recto), that the prodromes of Italian language are to be found, a material testimony that connects the Hispanic March, Visigothic language, Latin, and the vernacular in the history between VII and IX Century. It is not only notorious that the Greek and Latin epic matters have inspired the earliest compositions of novels in the old French languages (*Roman d'Alexandre*, *Roman d'Eneas*, *Roman de Troie*), but also that the Old English legends, and the historiographical sources regarding the Bretons and the Normans would have later vitally nourished the French epos in its earliest phase (Wace's *Roman de Brut*, c. 1155, and Marie de France's *Lais*), creating a space for the configuration of the Arthurian cycle. And, speaking of courtesy, chivalry, and love ideals, how not to think of the Trouvères, Troubadours and Trobairitz, whose spirits, styles, and subjects will in every other native poetry in Europe: the Italian, made by the "*Rimatori*" (rhymers) from Sicily and Tuscany, the Galician-Portuguese, played by *Trovadores* and "*xograres*", the German, sung by the Minnesänger.

The first model for a French epic written in the Old literary French language is the *Chanson de Roland* (XI Century). Its influence on European soil was widespread, and vulgar translations of the poem exist in the other languages. The original manuscript version of the *Chanson de Roland* is lost, and the oldest

known copy of the text survives in the *Manuscript O* (ms 1624) of the Bodleian Library, Oxford (XII Century). While this version consisting of 3998 decasyllable verses is distributed in "laisses" with assonance, two groups of a rhymed version of the *Chanson de Roland* are known under the name of *Roncevaux*. A battle was lost on the 15th of August 778 by the Frankish rearguard against a Basque contingent in the course of the Spanish campaign, attempted by Charlemagne to re-establish order in the Muslims provinces over the Pyrenees. Since Medieval times, the event has become, on a symbolical level, the most famous representation and celebration of the virtuous work of the paladins of Christianity, especially in the person of the National hero *Rollant* – Charlemagne's adored nephew and "heart", in the poem. The deads at Roncevaux were seen as Saints martyrs; diversely from the others, Roland had not found his death in the enemies' hands. He was wounded by the Saracens, but not indeed mortally slain by one of them. While he dies, Angels from heaven descend to him to bring his soul up to the heights of the Paradise, and this emphasises the parallels between his character and that of a Saint.

'*E Franceis crient: «Charlemagne, aidez!»*', so says the Song. And, in fact, even though "*Li quens Rollant*" and his fellows paladins are seen as the main characters in the legend, they are projections of the only one who – regardless the actual defeat of which the impact has been so anachronistically enlarged – has protected the Christian communities in premodern Europe, "the Emperor". It is indeed possible to stress the inner meaning of this national French epos, and to conclude that it might be also seen as a sort of 'European' epos, if a broader sense is attached to the quintessential nature of the word "Frank". The Franks descend from a confederation of Germanic tribes at first settled closely upon Rhine, and soon become the strongest over the other Barbarian populations encountered in their progressive moves towards South, in Gaul, where they later coexisted and mixed with the local Romans speaking Latin. So, the Franks were not only the secondary incarnation of the biblical 'chosen' people, but also the 'free' people, as their name reminds. In light of this, if possibly, the actual influence of their national epics in a general reconsideration of the historiographical traces of the idea of Europe can be seen as crucial. In the

Middle Dutch translation of the *Song of Roland* (*Roelantslied*), for instance, on the whole true to the French text, there is an interesting substitution of *li Franceis* (the French) with *die kerstenen* (the Christians). '*In other words*' – comments van Oostrom – '*on foreign soil the "national" French epic poem was elevated to the more universal and recognizable level of an epic relating to the whole of Christendom.*' (van Oostrom, 2009, p. 21). Or, in other words, on its own soil the "national" French epic poem was elevated to the more universal and recognizable level of an epic relating to the whole of a European – cultural, as also religious – identity. That is, in the end, the intellectual ideal connected to the total administrative and educational reform of the "Frankish State", as similarly as what happened with the work of letters done under the influence of King Alfred of Wessex (d. 899) in the British territories, for the rescue of a common *Latinitas* at the service of the development of a "high" vernacular culture.

1.4 Conclusions: on European mentality, stereotypes, and identity

The present effort done in interpreting the literary origins of premodern Europe, seen as simultaneously in accord with the historiographical reading of the birth of its political unity, puts an essential focus on the cultural representation of the "European traits", as well as on the presence of "stereotypes" born to present, and to distinguish the various "European" people. In fact, ideas of distinctions and stereotypes do not configure themselves only in relation to the couples of opposing concepts already presented in the course of this paper[4], but do also appear at the heart of Occidental Europe. It happens, for instance, with the

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[4] In light of this, it is interesting to draw here attention to the account given by Prof. Barbero, in his book on the history of the Ottoman Empire (2015), about the rise of the exotic ideas of "Orientalism" in early Europe, somehow already consolidated in the first half of the *Cinquecento*. Getting back to the writings of a writer already mentioned in this paper, and fundamental for the discourse here made, the author analyses the dual horror and fascination caused by the "Turkish" menace on the European (Occidental) mentality, as it was clearly addressed also by Machiavelli, and the historian Francesco Guicciardini (1483 – 1540). Also, at the end of this book, an open solution is left, in order to stimulate the reader's own conclusions about the legitimate place of the whole Ottoman history within European history, which could be also fairly connected to the sentence by Indro Montanelli here quoted, about the commencement of the European history in China. In a way, the history of the Mongolian, and of the Ottoman Empire help the understanding of the cultural origins, and history of Europe, as it is seen nowadays.

cultural distance negatively drawn between the Welshmen and the Arthurian courtly knights portrayed in *Perceval*, the *Bildungsroman* written by Chrétien de Troyes for the Count Philip of Alsace in about 1185. But then, besides the actual presence of such sorts of conventional prejudices, in Medieval works of letter and historiography, authors and copyists have been anyway able of sketching and transmitting the contours of a geographical entity that now and then drifted away from the physical and cultural limits of the heartland of a Christendom. In addition to the specific reading here proposed of the French *Song of Roland*, it might, in fact, be useful to think of another epic matter, in order to get at the very heart of the tales of European origins and identity, somehow possibly "mystified" in their later reception. The National "Iberic" hero, called in Arabic fashion the *Cid*, meaning "Sir", while being a typical chivalric hero, and valorous warrior celebrated through the subsequent epochs as a paladin of the Spanish *Reconquista*, was practically a free commander at the service, on occurrence, of the Christians, as well as of the Moorish Spanish reigns. The poem *Cantar de mio Cid*, is based on the literary and poetic remake of the latest phases of the life of the "Cid *Campeador*" Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar (1044/49-1099), a courtly knight to Sancho II of Castille (1065-1072), and to Alfonso VI of León and Castille (1065-1109). The literary history sung in the poem refers to historical facts happened after the exile of Rodrigo Díaz, commanded by King Alfonso VI in 1081. Alike many other soldiers, and also Lords of his time, the Cid turned its services and protection to the Moors in Zaragoza, helping Muslim Emirs in their domestic fights against each other for the ruling over other cities, like Barcelona. Between 1093 and 1904 the Cid had taken the government of the Moorish city of Valencia, after having rescued it from an Almoravids' attempt of conquest. Under his guidance Valencia had become a Christian city, but right after his death, it passed on again to the Moors. The work was transmitted by a manuscript of the 14th Century of more than 3700 verses (ms. *Vitr/7/17*), scribed by Per Abbat (c. 1207), collected in the National Library in Madrid, Spain. In the Poem, a reflection on the actual society is made: there is no real conflict between the «Cid» and the King, but among the exponents of the noble élites (García Ordóñez, Vanigómez). Now, the status of the word "nobility", such as that of "courteousness" is particularly controversial to be defined in relation to

its acquisition by ancestry or education, and it is not the scope of the present contribution to embark upon a discussion of its possible meanings in Medieval times. The main idea that emerges from the analysis of the vernacular narrations of our common origins is that, in a few words, the necessity of a trans-historical transmission, and of the singing and celebration of the diverse battles fought by our common ancestors against an enemy now and then designated as an "other"[5], has consequently favoured a common identification of the "*Europenses*" under the same shield. At least, on a literary ground, and between the lines. The same is true also as it is perceived "from the otherness": as it is recalled by Prof. Barbero (2015), the echoes, and the memory of the Crusaders still allows for a designation of the Europeans as "the Franks" in the modern Middle East. Eventually, the true historical identity of the man – as he allegedly was, in his capacity as governor of the Breton March, the count Roland – has never counted much confronted to his literary function. Surely, to pay a closer attention to our literary roots might help us understand what the "idea of Europe" really represented in the past, and in what actually consists its identity.

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[5] There have been scholarly studies in Medieval literature and mentality that apply the perspective of the "alterity" – or, better, of the *alter ego* – to the exploration of the intrinsic possibilities of development of the social order and establishment, allegedly alluded in the novels by Chrétien de Troyes. The main hypothesis is that of uncovering, and reading the passages in which the possession of *Sovereignty* is directly contested to King Arthur by his Paladins, opening up to a new era, and to new generations. This interesting point of view is maintained in a series of essays written by Professor Andrea Fassò since 1972, and collected in the anthology published in 2003, titled *Il Sogno del Cavaliere. Chrétien de Troyes e la regalità*. Roma: Carocci (see, especially, pp. 133-135).

Figure 1. Anonymous Florentine artist, *The Rape of Europa*, front of a chest (*cassone*), tempera on wood, XV Century, Sotheby's Auction (1965) © Fototeca della Fondazione Zeri, Bologna

Acknowledgments

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Author identification

Carmen Di Meo. *Carmen Di Meo, PhD, is an Art Historian based in The Netherlands. This year, she has been teaching Literary Culture in Pre-Modern Europe at the Faculty of Arts, Rijskuniversiteit Groningen. Dr. Di Meo obtained her PhD in the History and Theory of Art at the Faculty of Humanities, University of Rome "La Sapienza" in 2017. Subsequently, she has been appointed as Joint Post-Doc Fellow at the Department of Art History in Groningen, and as Visiting Research Fellow at the Netherlandish Institute in Florence (2018-2019). She is currently developing a research project on the formation of libraries in Premodern Europe*