Ethnopolitical identity and international communication according to the French historical writings of the 10th – 12th centuries

The Middle Ages can be described as a period when most of the existing nations and states of modern Europe were born. This process went hand by hand with the emergence of reciprocal stereotypes of perception of different peoples and ethnic groups. Many of these stereotypes continued to exist in later times, some of them persist till our days. This makes my subject of research relevant from the point of view of intercultural problems of contemporary Europe.

The perception of aliens was only in part the product of literary tradition. Basically it was the result of real-life contacts between members of different ethnic, regional and religious groups and was closely connected with mundane conflicts and pragmatic interests. I'm trying to study both long-termed literary traditions and everyday forms of intercultural communication and their interaction.

Chronological and geographical limits of the study.

The choice of the period from the mid-10th to the mid 12th centuries is motivated by two different reasons.

First, this is a very special period in the history of Europe. By mid 10th c. the last wave of barbaric invasions (Normans, Hungarians and Arabs) calmed down and continental Europe entered into a phase of more peaceful development when international contacts of different level became more regular and stable. It was also the period when Europe's old borders were swiftly and spectacularly expanded thanks to the almost simultaneous integration of several "new" peoples into the Christian oecumena. In general, it was the beginning of the period of stable and rapid economical and cultural growth. By the end of the 12th c. political centralisation is on the way in France, the reign of Philip August being the evident watershed.

Second, as explained below, this period is much less studied from the chosen point of view than both the preceding and the following.

Sources.

My sources are basically historical narratives: chronicles (among them those by Richer of Reims, Dudo of Saint-Quentin, Ademar of Chabannes, Raoul Glaber, the anonymous chronicle of Nantes, Hugo de Flavigny, Sigebert of Gembloux), annals, historical "monographs", biographies (of Robert the Pious by Helgaud de Fleury, of Louis the Fat by Sugerius, the autobiography of Guibert of Nogent, etc.), also hagiographical texts, treatises, itineraries, treatises, correspondence. Occasionally I make use of legislative acts and documents.

Historiography.

Despite increased interest for the issues of identity and the image of the other in contemporary historiography[1] hardly any comprehensive study is available of the mentioned set of problems for the whole Europe of the chosen period or for the Romanic world or for France in particular. Much better studied is the Carolingian period, on the other hand the period of the Crusades (at least the narratives of the Crusades themselves and the contacts of Western Europeans with the Moslem and Orthodox East).

The image of the other is studied mostly in the context of interaction of Western Christendom with the world of Islam[2], also in the context of the history of Jewish communities in Europe. Considerably less attractive for modern scholars (at least for the chosen period) are the perceptions of the pagans, of other Christians and of other peoples, close and remote. True, some of the aspects in question are dealt with in connection with the emergence of European nations, and some good studies to this behalf have been published more or less recently, notably in Germany[3]. Some regional studies also pay attention to the problem of self-identity. Lately the scope of the problem of "the other" has been enlarged to include the perception of other types of minorities, notably heretics and deviants of other kind[4] but for the most part the questions discussed in this context are quite different from those I'm concentrating on in my dissertation.

In my dissertation I concentrate on several groups of problems.

Territorial and cultural aspect of identity.

Around 1000 AD the borders of Christian Europe widened spectacularly as Scandinavians, Hungarians, Poles and Russians accepted Christianity in the late 10th and the early 11th century. With the exception of the Polabian Slavs, the Balts, the Finns, and - a separate case - the Cumans, all European peoples by the mid-11th century were Christians and received in the eyes of the Church equal status. Marked differences of course remained between them, especially between the "old" and the "new" Christian peoples, yet it was no longer possible to treat the latter as pagans.

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[1] For example: Crossing boundaries : issues of cultural and individual identities in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance / Ed. S. McKee. Turnhout, 1999; L'étranger au Moyen Âge. Paris, 2000; *Geary P.* The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe. Princeton, 2002; Strategies of Medieval Communal Identity: Judaism, Christianity and Islam / Ed. W.J. van Bekkum, P.M. Cobb. Paris, 2004; Identité et Ethnicité: Concepts, débats historiographiques, exemples (IIIe-XIIe siècle) / Dir. V. Gazeau, P. Bauduin, Y. Modéran. Paris, 2008; Религиозные и этнические традиции в формировании национальных идентичностей в Европе. Средние века - Новое время» / Под ред. М.В. Дмитриева. М., 2008.

[2] For example: *Iogna-Prat D.* Ordonner et exclure. Cluny et la société chrétienne face à l'hérésie, au judaïsme et à l'Islam (1000-1150). Paris, 2000; *Sénac Ph., Guichard P.* Les relations des pays d'Islam avec le monde latin: milieu Xe - milieu XIIIe siècle. Paris, 2000; *Sénac Ph.* L'Occident médiéval face à l'Islam : l'image de l'autre. Paris, 2000; *Flori J.* La Guerre Sainte. La formation de l'idée de Croisade dans l'occident chrétien. Paris, 2001.

[3] Aspekte der Nationenbildung im Mittelalter / ed. Beumann H., Schröder W. Sigmaringen, 1978, Beiträge zur Bildung der Französischen Nation im Früh- und Hochmittelalter / ed. Beumann H. Sigmaringen, 1983. *Schneidmüller B.* Nomen Patriae. Die Entstehung Frankreichs in der politisch-geographischen Terminologie (10.-13. Jahrhundert). Sigmaringen, 1987.

[4] *Moore R.-I.* The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe, 950-1250. Oxford, 1987.

Yet, the most interesting attempt of distinguishing between "our" and "not our" seems to be based on the recognition of Western Europe's common Roman roots. This attitude is best reflected in Raoul Glaber's notion of "Orbis romanus" which he applied basically to Gaul, Italy and Germany. Ademar of Chabanne's notion of "Occidens" seems to be broader (it definitely includes Spain) but reflects a similar sentiment. The idea that the land of the European West as opposed to the Byzantine world and, with some reservations, the world of the Northern and Eastern barbarians, constitute a certain unity was no doubt strengthened by the role of the Roman Church and by the appreciation of the Latin culture common to the West.

The sources leave no doubt that as late as the 12th c., to say nothing of the 10th and the 11th c., there was an understanding of a certain unity between the countries and peoples which formerly constituted the Carolingian empire. In this sense Germany was regarded as a closer land to France than Spain – with the obvious exception of Catalonia. Likewise Southern Italy which in some French sources figure as the land of the Greeks was much more an alien land than Northern and Central Italy. The British Isles and the lands of Central Europe were definitely considered as far away and quite different.

In these circumstances the perception of different peoples, even of smaller ethnic and regional groups, underwent important changes. From now on the emphasis was made more and more on their immanent characteristic traits, both positive and negative, and the formation of stable stereotypes entered a new phase.

We are dealing usually not with national states but with territories subject to a particular political power. These territories have relatively fixed borders and our authors have rather clear ideas about their characteristic features. Some of these territories, for example Aquitania, Normandy, the county of Toulouse, are regarded as considerable political powers, also as lands with distinctive cultural identities. However though *Francia* designated the territory between the Meuse, the Loire and the Oise with the later Ile-de-France in its centre, people living outside *Francia* even in almost independent principalities in the South were aware that they belonged to the *Regnum Francorum.* Though they usually were perceived as foreigners.

Linguistic differences are also taken into consideration. The cases of Brittany and Flanders were in this sense the most obvious but my authors make references also to the differences between the lands and peoples of the future langue d'oil and langue d'oc. It seems that Provence presented a certain problem for classification: a fief of the Empire, it was culturally close to Septimania and some other regions of the French Midi with which it was also linked by dynastic and ecclesiastical ties. In this context I study the correlation between the notions of France and of Gaul, also of France and "Hispania", important because Catalonia was a part of the French kingdom and a region very close culturally and politically to the French principalities of the South.

Religious aspect

11th century witnessed first steps towards the comprehension of the fact that three world religions – Christianity, Judaism and Islam coexist in the oecumena. The Jewish diasporas

existed in many European countries of those days so it was relatively easy to obtain some firsthand information about the Jews and their religion. On the contrary, with the exception of Spain and Sicily, direct contacts with Moslems before the age of the Crusades were scarce. In France they were a reality (rather episodic) only in the South. Yet Islam and the Moslem peoples interested the French authors of the 10th and 11th centuries much more than Judaism and the Jews. The latter were usually disliked, sometimes feared of but hardly any serious attempt to understand their religion and culture has left traces in the surviving sources. Bygone stereotypes were deemed sufficient in this case. As far as Moslems are concerned speculative discourse also dominates the scene, records of direct contacts being relatively rare. Nonetheless, some data to this effect are available. For example some Christian authors make a distinction between Saracens and Maurs having probably in mind Arabs and Berbers. Some authors report details about the "Moslem" warfare and other customs, for example the particularities of their food and dress. Though much disliked Moslems, unlike Jews, are treated with some respect.

Divisions inside the Christian community (first of all between the Western Christians and the "Greeks", also between the Western Christians and Mozarabs) played a lesser but a significant role. I'm trying to understand the importance of these differences in the general scale of distinctions between "us" and "aliens".

International relations and forms of intercultural communication.

Though sending ambassadors abroad was a very old practice dating back to Antiquity and the tribal period in the history of European barbarians, ambassadorial culture was still in the stage of formation. With the exception of interpreters (about whom very little is known) and, to a lesser extent, of specialists in foreign court ceremonies and procedures officials sent to other courts usually lacked professional training and were chosen among the most trusted and dexterous courtiers or even among appropriate merchants and pilgrims. The first surviving instructions to ambassadors are not older than the 13th century. Some of the most important diplomatic missions of those days were linked to arranging for a dynastic matrimony. Among other typical issues discussed by diplomats of the Middle Ages one should mention the liberation of hostages and of course ecclesiastical affairs.

However attention must be paid also to reports of other men (and rarely women) who happened to cross cultural borders: soldiers, merchants, missionaries, pilgrims, artists, slaves. Not less informative are descriptions of intercultural contacts within a given country, for example between Christians and local Jews. Such information could help to understand the sense of the word *foreigner* and how the stereotypes were forming. For example negative perception of the Italians by Raoul Glaber can be explained by his impressions during his travels across Italy as William of Volpiano's secretary. This kind of data is quite rare in the surviving sources but it should be analyzed diligently in order to introduce corrections in the otherwise one-sided information about official contacts between rulers. This data also helps to penetrate the everyday and common folk level of intercultural communication and thus surpass to a certain degree the limitations imposed by predominantly theoretical or literary approach reflected in the texts of theologians and official royal spokesmen.

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