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# IDENTITY IN THE MIDDLE AGES

APPROACHES FROM  
SOUTHWESTERN EUROPE

Edited by  
**FLOCEL SABATÉ**

**ARC** HUMANITIES PRESS



## **CARMEN MONOGRAPHS AND STUDIES**

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# FOREWORD

FLOCEL SABATÉ

LET ME BEGIN by using this foreword to explain briefly the aims and ideas that inspire the present book, both through a substantial introduction analyzing what we understand by identity in the Middle Ages, and through specific studies that deepen our knowledge of relevant aspects of a topic of great political importance today.

The “power of identity,” to use the title of the second volume of the study of “The Information Age” by sociologist Manuel Castells,<sup>1</sup> has been strongly emphasized during the last decades. Different studies have been devoted to analyze the search for identity in our plural societies, the intertwining of various types and levels of identity, the risks around identity conflicts and, in any case, the rise of identity, with its different meanings, in the articulation of current society.<sup>2</sup> Too often history has been used to justify real, recreated, or imagined identities. This is not our aim. Noticing the search for identity in individuals and collectivities throughout history, and looking for new perspectives to reach the core of precedent societies, we adopt identity as an object of analysis, that is, as a challenge to open new ways and tools for historians’ work.

Certainly, this book places identity at the centre of a project to better understand medieval society. By exploring the multiplicity of personal identities, the ways these were expressed within particular social structures (such as feudalism), and their evolution into formal expressions of collective identity (municipalities, guilds, nations, and so on) we can shed new light on the Middle Ages. A specific legacy of such developments was that by the end of the Middle Ages, a different sense of collective identities, supported by the late medieval socio-economic structure, backed in law and by theological, philosophical, and political thought, defined society. What is more, social structures coalesced across diverse elements, including language, group solidarities, and a set of assumed values.

We understand that identity occupied that central position in defining medieval society with two allied concepts: memory and ideology. The former served to ground identity, while the latter consolidated a coherent common memory and identity. For this reason, this book has two companions devoted to each of these concepts. We think that

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<sup>1</sup> Manuel Castells, *The Information Age. II The Power of Identity* (Cambridge, MA), 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Among others: Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford, 1996); Gerd Baumann, *The Multicultural Riddle* (New York, London, 1999); Mario Carretero, *Documentos de identidad. La construcción de la memoria histórica en un mundo global* (Buenos Aires, 2007); Gérard Noiriel, *À quoi sert l'identité 'nationale'* (Paris, 2007); Chatterje Partha, *La nación en tiempo heterogéneo y otros estudios subalternos* (Buenos Aires, 2008); Hermenegildo Fernandes, Isabel Castro Henriques, José de Silva Horta, Sergio Campos Matos, ed., *Nação e identidades. Portugal, os Portugueses e os Outros* (Lisbon, 2009); Francesco Remotti, *L'ossessione identitaria* (Bari, 2010); Diego Bermejo, ed., *La identidad en sociedades plurales* (Barcelona, 2011); Zygmunt Bauman, *Oltre le nazioni. L'Europa tra sovranità e solidarietà* (Bari, 2012); Francesco Remotti, *Contro l'identità* (Bari, 2012).

this is a good path for approaching an understanding of the values and interpretative axes that informed the thinking of women and men in the Middle Ages. This holistic vision requires interdisciplinary approaches, as opposed to academic compartmentalization of history, art history, and the study of languages and literatures.

With this in mind, we present a work structured in a particular way, beginning with a long introductory chapter (by **Flocel Sabaté**) on medieval identity. This introduction does not aim to map out identity in its entirety, but rather to provide insights into key aspects of the medieval understandings of identity. It frames ensuing discussions by exploring the various ways in which individuals affirmed their notion of identity, always involving the individual's relation to a group with which they felt solidarity. A sense of one's own identity involves notions of otherness, and therefore involves both external perceptions and an internal sensibility, and relates to ideas concerning "representativity" (the conditions of a representation, from the French word *représentativité*). In the Middle Ages, this generated various discourses and cultural displays in order to support particular identities, which generated specific collectively-held memories and descriptions of teleological destiny, associated with particular societies and territories.

Having established an overview of identity in the Middle Ages, the introduction is followed by twenty-one focused chapters by leading researchers which delve deeper into specific fields. They share a concern for illuminating medieval thought, focusing on concrete cases, and prioritizing examples from southern Europe, a region with a large amount of documentation, but which to date has occupied a relatively minor position in the overall spread of research into the Middle Ages. We acknowledge this emphasis in the title of this book, *Identity in the Middle Ages: Approaches from Southwestern Europe*, which is offered as a means of enriching study of the Middle Ages.

The resulting chapters are organized into four domains representing the four parts in the book, offering, in our view, useful ways of exploring identity.

The overall concept is part of a long historiographical journey, linked particularly to the return of cultural history in the search for new perspectives with which to develop historical research. That is why we invited **Jaume Aurell** to launch this volume with an overview of this historiographical development.

Having provided the historiographical framework, we delve deeper into the function of identity in the Middle Ages through four blocks we consider axial: constructing individual identity; social identity; identity and territory; and forms of collective identity.

Constructing individual identity is, in fact, one of the vital contributions of the Middle Ages, by defining the individual elements that allow a person to define himself or herself, and this continues today. For instance, adopting a name seems crucial in the perception and assumption of individuality. **Igor Filippov** provides here a fascinating study of baptismal names and self-identification in the Early Middle Ages. **Moisés Selfa** goes on to show how names reflect a specific identity in a particular social context. **Ana Maria S. A. Rodrigues** then shows how the personal identity that one accepts is fundamentally linked to the cultural model of gender. She presents varying degrees of acceptance, by different women, of specific ideals of femininities. At the same time, the awareness of one's individuality, the struggle between individual and group, was evident for instance in twelfth-century literature, where shared memories might include autobiographical

expressions, as **Meritzell Simó** shows. The assumption of an identity means the integration of a memory, and **Maribel Fierro** shows, in Islamic society, how this implies specific religious and legal values. Society supplies models into which individuality can fit, but it can also offer space for exceptions, as in the case of eunuchs in Islamic society, as shown in the chapter by **Cristina de la Puente**.

People were never alone in the Middle Ages. They formed part of a group in which they felt integrated and protected. We therefore need to consider identity in terms of the social group. Given that the rules for social order were based on the majority religion, it was necessary to adopt specific status for minorities when Christians, Jews and Muslims shared a same space, as **John Tolan** analyzes. At the same time, social identity requires us to understand that appropriate models were generated for each social group. **Paul H. Freedman** shows us how a specific image of the peasant was created in line with the values of medieval society, and accepted by the members of that social group. At the same time, at the other social extreme, a clear chivalric identity was formulated, well enough assumed to be widely reflected in contemporary texts, as **Noel Fallows** demonstrates. And **Flocel Sabaté** sketches how the Late Middle Ages supplied the economic, ideological, and cultural framework that gave rise to a specifically bourgeois identity. Social order was achieved by combining these units of collective identity. Conversely, we see these marks of identity in social outcasts in the chapter by **Ricardo Córdoba** that concludes the second part of this volume.

Human activity takes place in a determined space, over which mutual influence is developed. Strong relations between people, territory, and identity arise almost naturally. Hence the third part of this book focuses on identity and territory at different levels: firstly, in the smaller space in which everyday life happens, as **Raquel Torres** shows when analyzing how medieval parishes supported individuals in forming a local community. We see another field for social identity within the lordships, a setting in which **José Ramon Díaz de Durana** and **Arsenio Dacosta** show us the rise and consolidation of factions (*bandos*) from lineage, with their solidarity connections. They were a powerful form of mutual identity, which became very complex and affected all relations, either with other powers or the sovereign, and determined the management of the territory and society. Another very different scenario is derived from the political will to promote identification between territory, population, and certain rulers. This led to interesting discourses in which a common identity tried to fashion a specific memory, as **Luciano Gallinari** shows for Sardinia. Also in Sardinia, **Alessandra Cioppi** presents the changes it underwent after its incorporation into the Crown of Aragon: the shaping of a specific identity through the implantation of a particular institutional model.

Finally, the Late Middle Ages furnished identities based on representativeness, so much so that it is one of the great legacies of medieval society. The rise of the urban patriciate was accompanied by the promotion of a specific identification between the ruling elite, municipal government, and city, as **Yolanda Guerrero** demonstrates. The increasing assertiveness of cities gave them a dominant position over the surrounding territory and the ability to manage their own resources, not least through taxation. **José Antonio Jara** shows us how a city could portray a unifying discourse to reinforce its dominant position, which in turn meant the generation of a shared identity. Urban

power not only assumed a representativeness with which it could address the sovereign on behalf of the municipality, but this in turn affected the profile of sovereignty itself. Thus, urban identity helped model a specific definition of the country, apart from the sovereign, and became a counterpoint in defining a duality between the country and the monarch (a distinction, as **Eloísa Ramírez** presents, in the case of Navarre, that came to be made between the Kingdom proper and the King). In this framework, the construction of an identity for citizenship needed specific rituals, festivals, and symbols. Shared urban self-expression facilitated social cohesion within a common identity, as outlined in **Paola Ventrone's** chapter. The cities then went on to strengthen an identity based on their own social cohesion and projected this over their hinterlands. As a result, urban identity could adopt a social, political, and even the sense of being a "state," as **Giorgio Chittolini** shows from cases in central and northern Italy.

These are the various lines of enquiry on the theme of identity in the Middle Ages that have occupied the work of the Consolidated Medieval Studies Research Group "Space, Power and Culture," based at the University of Lleida, especially through the research project *Identity, Memory and Ideology in the Middle Ages* (HAR2009–08598/HIST) financed by the Spanish government, to link the study of identity, memory, and ideology in the Middle Ages. It was a challenge taken up from an earlier project: *Historical Memory: Images of the Middle Ages. The Real World and Recreated Space* (BHA2003–00523). Both projects aimed to advance new perspectives on the study of the Middle Ages. Close collaboration with the Institute for Research into Identities and Society (IRIS), based at the University of Lleida between 2009 and 2013, worked towards the same objective. The work of its research team and numerous wider scholarly meetings held at Lleida helped to consolidate these objectives. This was also made possible with the support of various complementary projects financed by the Spanish Ministry of Research: *Identities* (HAR2008–02766–E/HIST); *Sacred Voices* (FFI2008–03031–E/FILO); *Identities: A Definition* (HAR2010–10915–E/HIST); *Identities: Definition and Context: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (HAR2010–10803–E/HIST); and *Hybrid Identities: An Interdisciplinary Vision of the Social World* (HAR2011–13084–E).

Thanks to these projects, various co-authored books on the subject of identity in the Middle Ages have appeared, bringing together the work of leading researchers from varied fields of study related to the Middle Ages.<sup>3</sup> This book builds on prior studies and is, to a large extent, a culmination of the work done previously. In producing, selecting, revising, and bringing to fruition the final texts in this volume, the research projects financed by the Spanish government *Feelings, Emotion, and Expressivity* (HAR-2016-

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**3** Publications involving the present volume editor include: Flocel Sabaté, ed., *Identitats* (Lleida, 2012); Flocel Sabaté and Christian Guilleré, eds., *Morphologie urbaine et identité sociale dans la ville médiévale hispanique* (incorrectly published as *Morphologie et identité sociale dans la ville médiévale hispanique*) (Chambéry, 2012); Flocel Sabaté, ed., *L'Edat Mitjana: món real i espai imaginat* (Catarroja, 2012); Xavier Terrado and Flocel Sabaté, eds., *Les veus del sagrat* (Lleida, 2014); Flocel Sabaté, ed., *Identities on the Move* (Bern, 2014); Flocel Sabaté, ed., *Hybrid Identities* (Bern, 2014); Flocel Sabaté, ed., *Perverse Identities: Identities in Conflict* (Bern, 2015); Flocel Sabaté, ed., *Conditioned Identities: Wished-for and Unwished-for Identities* (Bern, 2015); and Flocel Sabaté, ed., *Medieval Urban Identity: Health, Economy and Regulation* (Newcastle, 2015).

75028-P) and *Power Experienced in the Late Middle Ages: Perception, Representativeness and Expressiveness in the Management and Reception of Power* (PID2019-104085GB-I00), the ICREA–Academia award to Flocel Sabaté (2016–2020), and supported by Arc Humanities Press’s peer review and pre-press processes, have all been instrumental, for which we are sincerely grateful. We hope that this volume, together with *Ideology in the Middle Ages: Approaches from Southwestern Europe* and *Memory in the Middle Ages: Approaches from Southwestern Europe* will illuminate in new depth the links between identity, ideology, and memory in the Middle Ages and open new pathways to how we interrogate and understand the Middle Ages.<sup>4</sup>

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**4** Translations into English are generally provided as close to the original text as possible, and the original text and edited source is provided in the notes. We follow the press’s practice as a worldwide publisher in retaining native forms as far as possible. Abbreviations to sources from the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* (hereafter MGH) follow the guidelines of the *Deutsches Archiv* journal: [www.mgh.de/fileadmin/Downloads/pdf/DA-Siglenverzeichnis.pdf](http://www.mgh.de/fileadmin/Downloads/pdf/DA-Siglenverzeichnis.pdf).