« Il y a plusieurs demeures dans la maison de mon Père ». Le baptistère, l’autel, les chapelles latérales, les stalles des choristes, l’espace des fidèles, les cheminements du pèlerinage, la crypte, les tombeaux, l’oratoire, la réserve eucharistique, le revestiaire... composent cette « église en action », où les actes des uns et des autres, les paroles, prononcées, cantillées, chantées, les dramaturgies dévotionnelles et les regards d’adoration prennent force et donnent sens.

L’église est donc une et multiple, un lieu et des lieux, à l’image du Dieu unique en trois personnes : le Père, qui est la parole donnée, le Fils qui est la parole faite chair, l’Esprit qui est le logos, parole organisatrice. La liturgie, propre au tout et aux parties, est cette « parole » vivante qui donne consubstantialité aux différents lieux de l’édifice dans l’unité architecturale de l’église. Une parole toujours active dans un présent de répétition. Les barrières n’y font rien, et en tout premier lieu le jubé qui laisse voir la perspective de l’autel et entendre les voix du célébrant et des choristes.

In Locis competentibus. Le mobilier, de la grille à l’autel, les objets du culte, du crucifix à la châsse, la vaisselle liturgique, les œuvres d’art, du vitrail au retable, tout ce qui appartient à chaque lieu compose avec lui, par-delà les pertes, les ajouts et les renouvellements, un ensemble signifiant. Celui-ci touche les hommes d’hier comme les chercheurs d’aujourd’hui dans une expérience sensible – visuelle, auditive, olfactive, gustative et tactile.

Les auteurs du présent volume questionnent les lieux, les images, les objets et les acteurs, pour mettre en lumière dans quels réseaux de significations, de présences et d’échanges se manifeste l’efficacité des espaces, des dispositifs liturgiques et des œuvres d’art, pour faire de l’église un lieu de performances.

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Sous la direction de Stéphanie-Diane DAUSSY avec la collaboration de Nicolas REVEYRON Préface de Herbert KESSLER
L’ÉGLISE, LIEU DE PERFORMANCES
_In Locis competentibus_

Sous la direction de STÉPHANIE-DIANE DAUSSY
Avec la collaboration de NICOLAS REVEYRON

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Introduction

Human communication is the act of successfully transmitting a message between two agents, the sender and the receiver, both of them using the rules of a common code. The process is accurate and complete when the sender encodes the message as a signal, sends it through a channel to the receiver, who decrypts the signal, extracts the information and performs an interpretation.

The signals might be of a different kind including those of verbal and non verbal language. Among the latter are body movements, gestures, postures and facial expressions, all of them being some of the resources most used by humans when exteriorizing feelings. On the other side, the channels through which the communication is established are also of various kinds. As far as emotions are concerned, art has played a definitive role throughout the history of mankind, becoming one of the universal communication channels. Pictures and visual depictions have thus been used by humans across time and space to express their inner thoughts, passions and feelings. Further on, embodied emotions have also served as an excellent channel to provoke a particular reaction, response and behaviour in potential beholders.

This paper aims to deepen into this emotional communication process established between patrons, material authors, pictures and spectators. Issues thus related to the agency, performativity, efficiency and power of images will be discussed.

The study proposes to consider historical, cultural and other contextual factors together with empirical data from the cognitive sciences in order to assess the reaction and empathetic understanding of visual imagery.

Here, a specific time and aspect will be under research: the embodiment of emotions in a funerary context during the Middle Ages. The election of this issue responds to very precise reasons: the moment of human death and later funerary rituals is one of the contexts where emotions and corporeal sensations are expressed most dramatically. Human beings have been used to mourning their dead from time immemorial and worldwide.

Mourners have exteriorized their inner pain and sorrow through a series of gestures and well-defined attitudes, which range from self-contained behaviour to the most violent ones, among which are scratching their faces or tearing their clothes, physical pain thus serving to exteriorize inner pain. And in parallel to its development in real life, these gestures were transferred to the artistic, literary and poetic universes.

This certainly applies to the Western Middle Ages, when the presence of both the death and the dead was engrossing and ubiquitous in daily life. During this period, this kind of behaviour, above all the most dramatic and excessive, were condemned by the Catholic Church, as they contradicted the hope in the resurrection and the belief in the life in the hereafter. This censorship through the writings of theologians and church fathers had nevertheless no definitive application in the practices and rituals developed by medieval society. Moreover, the Middle Ages, commonly

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L’Église en action.

known as “the civilization of gestures,” are characterized by the development of great performances in the moments of agony and death, the transporting of the body of the deceased to the church, the celebration of the funeral and the subsequent transfer to the tomb.

This applies specially to the Iberian Peninsula, where these kinds of attitudes were ubiquitous according to the numberless manifestations that can be found in historical documents, literature, chronicles and visual sources. Among the latter, the funerary iconography shows a great development of scenes with such embodied emotions. Its seems thus to be a very appropriate field to advance in the knowledge of human reactions and response when contemplating pictures.

As a case study, this paper will focus on the thirteenth-century episcopal pantheon of León Cathedral, a benchmark of European medieval sculpture for its extraordinary creativity and the emphasis given to the depiction of funerary rites and the performance of grief and sorrow. The main challenge of the paper will be to cover the whole communication process, that is: the aim of the medieval patron and his role as patron-concepteur, the materialization of the project, the embodiment of emotions through postures and facial expressions, and the later reactions of the beholders, both medieval and later ones.

**Signalling information:**

**The thirteenth-century episcopal pantheon of León Cathedral**

The gothic cathedral of León was built substituting a pre-late-Romanesque building, from which several remains are still preserved (fig. 1). One of these is the tomb of Bishop Rodrigo Alvarez († 1232), the oldest episcopal monument richly decorated in Leon and Castile, which became a model widely spread in thirteenth-century Northern Spain.

Its basic scheme is a poly-lobed arch that shelters the recumbent figure of the prelate, surrounded by an iconographic program (fig. 2). It is the oldest Iberian witness of the burial type called “enfeu”, with known prototypes in France. Its iconographic program in turn, reveals a proper Iberian heritage.

On the front of the cist sculptors carved in half-relief a scene alluding to the virtue of Charity in the form of almsgiving, while the tympanum was divided into two decorative friezes, the upper one showing the Crucifixion and the lower one the performance of funerary rites (fig. 3). Here, the officiant, as befitted the dignity of the deceased, is a bishop, who is accompanied by two acolytes and figures holding a book, an incense burner and boat. This group contrasts with a set of mourners, who express their sorrow and grief creating a more dynamic group. They adopt several postures which clearly refer to violent gestures and attitudes. As medieval images are static whereas gestures involve movement, the actions are implicitly suggested by postures and poses. Here we find four figures with their arms raised and hands on their hair, a pose that refers to the gesture of tearing their hair. The figure occupying the central position of the scene takes with his hands the ends of his garments, in an attempt to convey the gesture of tearing his
clothes, an attitude that in the Bible is associated with mourning, the expression of deep sorrow and heartfelt grief. This figure also shows a vivid facial expression, with the open mouth and the inverted line of his eyebrows turned down, two postures related to the emotion of sadness.

The dramatic emphasis sculptors give to the scene finds textual support in the inscription carved on the cist of the tomb, an epitaphium sepulcrale that clearly invites the city of León to mourn the death of the bishop:

“Sub era millesima ducentesima septuagesima et quarto octavo idus martii. Pacis iter, pietatis apex, exemplar honesti, hic Rodericus erat pontificis honor; hic cibus et potus fuit; hic et vestis egens; omnibus hic unus omnia factus erat. Ergo tuum, Le-gio, luge cecidisse patronum; aut vic aut numquam iam paritura parentem.”

When using the term luge and appealing to the city to lament the death of the deceased, the patron-concepteur added extra content to the embodied emotions of the tympanum, which are nevertheless the ones holding the greater emotional weight. It is important to highlight at this point that introducing a mourning scene with several figures performing exaggerated gestures in an
episcopal tomb supposes a great novelty in the Iberian Peninsula, since up to this moment, this kind of depictions was usually present only in the funerary monuments of kings and high-profile laymen, who used to exalt their high social condition through the depiction of large funeral processions and ceremonies in their tombs. Furthermore, its presence is clearly paradoxical as it contrasts with the constant attempts of the Iberian Church to condemn these practices in real life. It is precisely a member of this church who allowed the inclusion of such rituals in its visual and immemorial counterpart, contravening the rules of his major institution. The introduction of such a scene in the tomb of this bishop could have been due to Rodrigo Alvarez’s status as a civil authority.

Just a few decades later, this iconographic theme was actually not only included but much more developed in the tomb of Bishop Martín Rodríguez († 1242). The sculptors working on this new funerary monument maintained the structural organization of the previous late-Romanesque tomb of Rodrigo Álvarez and copied the iconographic themes of the almsgiving in the cist, the Crucifixion in the upper frieze of the tympanum and the funerary rites in the lower frieze (fig. 4).

However, they abandoned the Romanesque forms and accurately captured the aesthetic ideals of Gothic sculpture, showing a greater sense of expressiveness and a high-quality technique. Regarding the scene of the funerary rites, the officiant is now surrounded by a greater number of acolytes holding several liturgical objects to perform the ritual (fig. 5). The group of mourners is also bigger and is formed by six figures, five males and a female. The latter is shown with her hands on her cheeks, a posture that refers to the gesture of scratching her face; four men show their hands on their hair – the same as the mourners of the tomb of Bishop Rodrigo Álvarez – and another one covers his face with his hands – a more contained attitude. Facial expressions are also used to emphasize the expressive charge of the scene. This applies especially to the figure located at the right end of the group, which is one of the best technically achieved figures of the whole funerary monument. The male raises his head and looks up in an attitude denoting despair, his mouth is open to simulate he is shouting, with his hair in complete disarray (fig. 6).

The tombs of Bishops Rodrigo Álvarez and Martín Rodríguez did not form part of a unified.
visual program in principle, but this situation was about to change in the second half of the thirteenth-century, during the episcopacy of Bishop Martín Fernández (1254-1289). He reached the rank of bishop thanks to the support of Pope Innocent IV and, above all, King Alfonso X the Wise, against the wishes of the cathedral chapter, that had proposed another candidate.

During his prelacy, and as other prelates of great political prestige, Martín Fernández alternated his activity towards the monarchy with the task of renewing his Church, becoming an essential figure on both the political and religious scenes during this period. With respect to the religious level, he can be considered as one of the greater bishop-reformers of the thirteenth century, as he headed several projects in an attempt to improve the spiritual government and administration of the chapter, with whom he always maintained a difficult and often adversarial relationship. He promoted two synods, one in 1262/1267 and another one in 1288, from which a substantial
body of rules, inspired by the Lateran Council in April 1215 and the Second Council of Lyon in 1274, emerged. Regarding his connections with the kingship, he was very close to King Fernando III, being his notary, and to Alfonso X, who commissioned him with important tasks that demanded trust and commitment, above all one in 1263, to postulate his desire before the papal curia to rule the Holy Roman Empire.

His high political profile, his close relationship with the King and his good connections with the papacy, allowed Martín Fernández to raise funds in order to follow up on the building of the gothic cathedral in León. Moreover, scholars agree that he played a decisive role as a patron-concepteur: he participated in the issuance of figurative speeches in most of the façades, in an attempt to propagate his own ideas about church politics and the new Franciscan spirituality. Inside the new building he developed another visual project in the stained glass windows of the north side of the nave, where he displayed an iconographic programme showing his personal and political ties with King Alfonso. Finally, he also projected a great episcopal pantheon, with the aim to consolidate the episcopal power.

This project involved the reinstallation of the tombs of some of his predecessors —Manrique de Lara, Rodrigo Alvarez, Arnaldo and Nuño Alvarez — in the walls of the new Gothic cathedral. The tomb of Bishop Rodrigo Álvarez was installed in the chapel of El Carmen, located in the south side of the ambulatory. That of Martín Rodríguez in turn was not moved from the location it was already occupying in the north transept, an already important place within the temple. And precisely at the same place, but in the south transept, another episcopal tomb was installed. This one would be the one of Bishop Nuño Álvarez or the funerary monument of Martín Fernández himself, the most claimed hypothesis by scholars nowadays.

The model chosen for this tomb shows a different architectonic structure from the two aboved mentioned monuments, and is based on the incorporation of an architectural screen with three cantilever arches, which certifies the participation of masters trained in French workshops and their use of a fully Gothic language (fig. 7). However, the iconographic themes resume the
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scenes carved in the tombs for Rodrigo Álvarez and Martín Rodríguez: the funerary rites fill again the lower frieze of the tympanum and include a large group of mourners, a scene unfortunately now badly damaged due to the stone's erosion (fig. 8). The inscription accompanying the iconographic program is also in bad condition, but several words are still legible, showing a presumed connection to the mourning scene, as they describe the skills of the bishop to empathize with those who suffered:

“Beatust pauper […] hui ecle […] erat; flentibus hic flebat”

Whether this was indeed the tomb made for Martín Fernández himself or the one made for his predecessor Nuño Alvarez later relocated in the south transept as part of the episcopal pantheon commissioned by Martín Fernandez, the fact that really calls for attention is the important role these series of bishops gave to the mourning scenes, copying them once and again along several decades and including them in both the late-Romanesque and Gothic aesthetics. In the case of Martín Fernández, it is even more striking when taking into account the role he played as a great reformer and the large number of laws he enacted regarding the spiritual behavior that should govern the life of the León chapter. However, it is to be highlighted that none of the rules that emerged from the two synods promoted by him was headed to stop excessive behaviors when mourning was performed in real life funerals, even if he actually regulated on funerary matters. It calls for even more attention that in the same years King Alfonso himself legislated about the funerary practices in Las Partidas, forbidding clergics to give the sacraments to all those who performed violent gestures and excessive signs of sorrow for the dead:

“Pendra muy grande fase Sancta Eclesia a los que fazen duelos desaquisados por los muertos. Ca mando que a los quen rompiessen sus fases rasándose, quier fuesen, varones o mugieres, que no les diessen los clérigos los sacramentos, ni les recibiessen en la egleisa quando dixessen las horas, fasta que fuesen sanos de las senales que fizeran en sus caras.”

But the rule promulgated by King Alfonso was showing a clear incoherence, since he had actively participated in the funerals of his father King Fernando III – where violent gestures played an essential role within the whole set of rites, according to the Primera Crónica General, a history book written on the initiative of King Alfonso himself. Therefore, it can be assumed that the attitude of both the King and his close collaborator, the bishop Martín Fernández, was ambiguous. While the expression of emotions of pain and suffering through violent attitudes were officially condemned, the fate of daily life made these convictions become laxer.

It is time now to compile all the data provided so far and come back to the communication process. The thirteenth-century bishops of León and, ultimately Bishop Martín Fernández, had specific goals when planning the Episcopal pantheon: to give value to the prominence of the episcopal figure for both the council and the rest of the society, to emphasize his important role on both the religious and civil levels, and thus enhance his merit to be mourned in the same way as other high-profile figures of medieval society, such as the king and nobles. He thus encoded his message and sent it to the receiver through a visual channel: images where the depiction of grief and sorrow for the death of the episcopal figure played an important role. This channel implied that gestures developed
in real life lost their dynamic feature and were in turn embodied through postures and poses.

The message was sent this way to the receiver. How did he decrypt the signal and extract the task-relevant information? What kind of interpretation did he perform? Was the communication process accurate and complete? These are questions I will try to answer by carrying out a cross-disciplinary exploration, taking advantage of the knowledge produced by Neuroscience in relation to the neural processes that occur when a viewer looks at a picture and the knowledge produced by Art History and Humanities in relation to the cultural, social and historical factors that might affect visual experiences.

Decoding information: medieval viewers and their empathetic understanding

The mirror neuron system (MNS), previously discovered in macaques, was detected also in human brains in the 1990’s. According to the scientists developing research on this field, the so-called mirror neurons are located in the premotor and posterior parietal cortices and discharge both when someone does a particular action and when he observes the same action in another individual. That means that whenever we see what happens to others, we not only understand what they experience is but also often empathically share their states. This is why these mirrors neurons are also called the empathy neurons, because seeing the states of others triggers representations of corresponding states in human brain.

Research on the mirror neuron system upholds that the observation of even static images of actions activates the brain, which would mean that the observation of pictures and works of art provoke bodily responses in the beholder, something that
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Art History has been theorizing about since the nineteenth-century. Many of these attempts could be scientifically backed when accepting the mirror neurons theory. Art History would be able to better approach the embodied phenomena induced when a viewer contemplates a picture.

Applying this knowledge to the case study proposed in this paper, we would be in a better position to understand the process of decoding, extracting and performing task-relevant information achieved by medieval viewers when contemplating the scenes carved in the tombs of León cathedral. The existence of mirror neurons would imply that medieval beholders experienced an empathy for pain, which means that contemplating the images of a damaged body activated the part of the same network of brain centers that were normally activated by their own sensation of pain. Furthermore, medieval viewers would experience not only an empathy for the physical pain suffered by the depicted figures conducting those violent attitudes, but also for the bodily sensations of sorrow and grief. Beholders’s brains were thus activated for both the inner and outer pain, that is the sorrow for the death of the deceased and the physical suffering when performing self-inflicted violent attitudes.

Coming back to the communication process, it would seem appropriate to suggest that it was accurate and complete. Medieval spectators decoded the message, understood the task-relevant information, performed the right interpretation and, more important, experienced a neural process which lead them to empathize with the content and meaning of the image. Further on, bringing to the discussion the inscriptions carved on the tombs, it would be today possible to know that the additional textual contributions of the funerary monuments actually obtained a real response and effect. Paraphrasing the inscription of the tomb of Rodrigo Álvarez, the inhabitants of the city of León “cried that their patron has died”. For its part, the inscription of the tomb of Martín Fernández praised his ability to empathize with those who suffered (flentibus hic flebat). In turn, medieval spectators empathized with those who mourned him while contemplating the images carved on his tomb.

On the basis of these facts, it would seem clear that Martín Fernández achieved his goal of making episcopal figures being mourned at the same level as other high-profile figures of medieval society, and therefore gave value to their role in both religious and civil contexts. The power and effectiveness of the above analyzed images would be thus clear. And to them could be added the ones which decorate still another tomb, that of Bishop Diego Ramírez de Guzmán († 1354), located in the chapel of the Virgin of Hope. Yet a century later, the patron-concepteur of his tomb chose again the structure and iconography of the tombs of Rodrigo Álvarez and Martín Rodríguez (fig. 9). It seems that a century later, the interest in choosing the same gesture language was still valid, an action that would have the same reaction and interaction on viewers.

However, it is absolutely necessary to consider a key factor. There is no consensus in the science community about the functioning of mirror neurons, which is still somewhat contentious. P. Churchland, for example, is rather skeptical about the neuron system making us feel or repeat what we perceive in others. When pain is concerned, several scholars state that the neural activity is different depending on whether the observed recipient of pain is a loved one or a stranger. This
is why even if the theory on mirror neurons sounds actually promising and very encouraging, art historians should not become prematurely enthusiastic about what these neurons could trigger in beholders when contemplating images. Further research conducted by the cognitive sciences will no doubt clarify and enable us to better assess the extent of mirror neurons functioning.

In this sense, empirical data could be analyzed together with theoretical knowledge provided by the Humanities for a better understanding of how brains process images. Do mirror neurons merely identify distress signals and simulate them in the observer? Applying this assumption to the case study proposed in this paper, that would mean that beholders should respond to medieval mourners...
in distress in all times and places. However, is the power of a particular image eternal, one and the same throughout history? When, some decades ago, David Freedberg studied the naked Venus painted by Titian and Giorgione, he already highlighted that the reaction of a current viewer when contemplating the nude could not be the same as the one experienced by a sixteenth-century beholder, since the degree of sensuality and eroticism of the time in question does not meet the same parameters as in today's society. That means that context counts and this is actually the point when the historical, social and cultural factors might start to play a definitive role.

Is the code still in use? Current viewers and medieval visual imagery

What is the kind of reaction and interaction that the embodied emotions in medieval graves provoke in current spectators? Do those embodied emotions in medieval pictures reach current spectators in the same way they did with medieval beholders? They might not if the code used when carrying out the depiction is no longer common to both the sender and the receiver. Something might induce that the communication, although still somehow existing, is not complete and accurate according to the aims and goals of the patron-concepteur-sender.

Today, the three above-mentioned funerary monuments are still complete and located inside the Cathedral, as in medieval times. They are thus not decontextualized pieces, devoid of their original background or works of which only remains have been preserved, as it happens for example with a small fragment of a funerary monument, today located in the cloister of the cathedral, which shows a scene presided by a blessing bishop and part of a funerary cortège, or several relief remains of an alabaster tomb from the fourteenth century today preserved at the civil headquarters of the Museum of León. The other headquarters, located in the Church of san Marcos, hosts another sarcophage from the thirteenth century, which comes from the Abbey of Benevívere (Palencia, Castile). This one is better preserved, as it still retains the whole cist decorated with carved reliefs showing the funerary rituals. Its current location in the center of one of the chapels in the left aisle of the church invites to think that this religious background could help the piece to not lose its meaning completely. However, the original location has certainly changed and, as well as the other remains mentioned above, they have become decontextualized works. Therefore, the code has been broken and so, the reaction and interaction of modern-day spectators might not be the same.

But this is not the case of the three tombs that have been previously analyzed, which current location invites to think that the communication code is still in use. However, in this case it is necessary to consider a different scenario: those violent gestures and attitudes conveying grief, mourning and sorrow, that were perfomed in daily life and depicted in images during medieval and early-modern times, are no longer common in Western society's funerary rites. The religious divide and the growing secularism have much to do with this significant change, as well as the low tolerance to frustration and suffering of a society that has been raised in the welfare culture throughout the last century. To this must be added another significant fact: the discovery of mirror neurons has showed that usually, humans feel more comfortable with people who make gestures and postures similar to theirs, but feel uncomfortable or alienated from people using different gestures and postures.

These two factors must be taken into account for the case study we are dealing with. The postures depicted in the scenes were accurately deciphered by medieval observers, that is, they identified the “gestures behind the postures”, the self-inflicted pain attitudes of scratching of the faces or tearing of the hair that were performed in their everyday life and turned into poses in the images, the hands held up to the face or the hair. But nowadays beholders would not be able to accurately decipher these postures and thus would not interpret the information properly, since violent attitudes no longer form part of mourning rites in Western society. For a current viewer, the poses in the medieval tombs might not have a precise meaning, that is, he might not succeed in reading the postures in the light of the gestures they refer to and thus establish the relationship between the poses and the violent attitudes. This is why it is possible to point out that the communication code has been somehow
broken, meaning that the reaction, interpretation and neuronal process must be different.

Nevertheless, even if a beholder nowadays would be able to decrypt the signal transmitted by the medieval sender centuries ago and extract accurately the information, that is, read the postures and turn them into the gestures they refer to, he might not perform a successfully complete interpretation as he has not the same cultural, social and religious background. Another example can be suggested in order to support this idea. Without leaving the funerary context, reference might be made to the Bayeux embroidery, which shows a very appropriate scene to discuss this issue. It is the image depicting King Edward in his death bed. In an upper chamber King Edward is in his bed talking to his faithful followers, as the inscription also tells us: *Hic Edwardus rex in lecto alloquitur fideles*. He shows the posture of the hand held open addressed to his followers, who adopt the same pose. While contemplating the scene, medieval beholders were able to decode the information and know that this posture referred to the usual dynamic gestures that were made in the Middle Ages, used to accompany the speech or during a conversation. But further on, medieval spectators might know, imagine or decipher what kind of conversation the set of figures were having. The funerary context, the king being the deceased, the cultural and social background invited beholders to think that King Edward was talking about his succession, the election between the two pretenders to the English crown, Harold and Guillaume from Normandy. However, only those current viewers who have a deep knowledge of medieval culture and society could come to perform such an interpretation and, even though, their own different social and cultural background could influence their neural process and empathetic understanding of the medieval image.

Another issue can still be approached: as mentioned above, such medieval funerary rituals and practices are not longer usual in Western society, above all the performance of violent gestures and attitudes of self-inflicted pain. But they are in turn present in other worldwide societies and cultures. For example, among the Baruya (Melanesia, New Guinea), men and women use to score their foreheads with a knife or flint and make their blood flow on their face. Geographically closer to the Western world are North-African countries of the Mediterranean basin, where Muslims still mourn and grieve by performing rituals very similar to those described for the Western medieval society.

However, in both cases we are dealing with a historical, cultural, spatial, chronological and religious environment which is completely different. So the question is: What would be the reaction of an spectator from New Guinea or North Africa at the sight of the carved thirteenth-century scenes in León Cathedral? Coming back again to the communication process, it is possible that the signals transmitted centuries ago by a Christian sender could be accurately deciphered and interpreted by these nowadays out-of-the-culture beholders, but what would happen when they decode the message and extract the information? What kind of response would mirror neurons have? Furthermore, is it possible to draw a parallel between the effectiveness of gesture and image in the medieval viewer and these modern viewers, for whom the image responds to an existing concrete reality? In other words, is the neural process of these spectators of other cultures closer to the medieval beholders neural response than the reaction provoked in a viewer who is heir of the same culture but not a performer of these customs, practices and rituals?

From the point of view of current western beholders, what would be their neural response when contemplating the thirteenth-century scenes if they knew or had previously watched a North African muslim funeral or a Baruya ritual, either in person or recorded? Could their knowledge of other cultures allow them to reach a different empathetic understanding of the medieval image?

**Final Thoughts**

There is no doubt that cross-disciplinary approaches lead to better results when conducting research. In this study, I have tried to use empirical data from the neuroscience and theoretical knowledge from the humanities in an attempt to advance in the understanding of the spectator’s response, reaction and interaction when contemplating medieval
images. Cognitive sciences provide interesting data on mirror neurons and the responses they dictate on viewers. But the historical, social and cultural context might also determine, condition and contaminate that neural process. In this paper have been highlighted the following cultural and temporal interferences: the visual deterioration of the object itself; its loss of context regarding its original location; the change in cultural values of the object; and finally the way in which emotions are publically manifested today.

However, those interferences do not mean that images lose their iconic efficiency and empathetic capacity. Their power simply mutates and so the reactions and responses experienced by observers. In the case of the León tombs, the once religious and ritual medieval depictions may now play another role, which might have nothing to do with piety and religious virtues, or at least, not only with it. In turn, they have now become works of art, being valued, studied and considered by society. This may affect the neural mechanisms: current beholders could experience astonishment for the violence of gestures, curiosity about their cultural significance, or delight for the technical quality of the carving. Further on, these images have also become touristic attractions, being able to beckon to visitors and thus developing a new powerful efficacy, the economical one.

Finally, it seems a difficult challenge to get a fruitful dialogue between cognitive science and cultural analysis, but it is also an encouraging one. There is work to do. Let's do it.

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Notes

1. * This study has been carried out in the framework of the research project «El patronazgo artístico regio en el territorio castellano-leonés. El papel del clero (1055-1200)», funded by the Spanish Ministry of Education and Science, and coordinated by Prof. Maria V. Herráez Ortega (Project reference HAR 2010-19480).

There is a plethora of definitions of the term and concept of communication, since it is an issue approached and studied by a large set of disciplines and sciences, those including linguistics; psychology; biology, anthropology and etology; and engineering and computing. Two of the most latest innovative approaches have been: SHANNON C. E., «A Mathematical Theory of Communication», Mobile Computing and Communications Review, 5, 1, 2001, p. 3-55. SCOTT-PHILIPS C., «Defining Biological Communication», Journal of Evolutionary Biology, 21, 2, 2008, p. 387-395.


3. A. Damasio argues that there is a clear difference between emotions and feelings. The term feeling should be reserved for mental and private experience, while the term emotion should be used to designate the set of
answers, many of which are publicly observable. Emotions are actions or movements that occur on the face, the voice, or in specific behaviors. Feelings, in turn, are necessarily invisible to the public, just as is the case of mental images. For a discussion on emotions, feelings and background feelings, see Damasio A., The Feeling of What Happens. Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness, New York, Harcourt Brace, 1999. Id., Looking for Spinoza. Joy, Sorrow and the Feeling Brain, New York, Hartcourt Brace, 2003.


7. As J.-C. Schmitt points out, during the Middle Ages the dead were in the center of life in the same way as the churchyard was in the middle of the village. This was due to two main facts: the first one of a demographic nature, since the harsh living conditions provoked a very low life expectancy. The second one is related to Christianism, understood as both a religious and social system. Death was at the very heart of Christian thought and played an important role in religious practices and rituals, but it also contributed to founding the power of the Church within medieval society. See Schmitt J.-C., « Une horde de revenants en vahit l’Église », in Vivre au Moyen Âge, Paris, Tallandier, 1988, p. 63-69. Id., « La mort dans le Moyen Âge chrétien », in La mort et ses au-delà..., op. cit., p. 179-202. On the importance of death in the Middle Ages, see also Ariès P., L’Homme devant la mort, Paris, éd. du Seuil, 1977. Le Goiff J., La naissance du purgatoire, Paris, Gallimard, 1981, Vovelle M., La mort en Occident de 1300 à nos jours, Paris, Gallimard, 1983. Paxton F., Christianizing Death: The Making of a Ritual Process in Early Medieval Europe, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1990. Geary P. J., Phantoms of Remembrance. Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1994, p. 51-60.


10. The Iberian Peninsula seems to have been a special case in comparison with other European territories, especially in what funerary sculpture is concerned and above all in Castile and León. The depiction of expressions of mourning and sorrow in funerary sculpture started to play a definitive role in the twelve-century and continued to be developed, acquiring a great sense of narrative and expressiveness throughout the thirteenth century. The theme was persistent during the fourteenth-century, when large funeral performances were still common in real life, but it lost its force throughout the fifteenth century, when heraldic decorations were gaining increasing importance. On this matter, see Labande-Mailfert Y., « La douleur et la mort dans l’art des xve et xve siècles », in Études d’Ico-


14. Sadness is one of the facial expressions universally recognized, along with happiness, surprise and anger. Moreover, the emotion categories of happy and sad are similarly distinct across cultures, while other emotions could be associated with culture-specific concepts based on the distinct moral, social and political ideologies that underlie every culture. See JACk R. E., «Culture and Facial Expressions…», op. cit., p. 25-26.

15. «The eighth day of March in the year 1232. Way of peace, apex of piety, example of honesty, this Rodrigo was the pontifical glory: he was food, drink and clothing for the needy; he became one for everyone on all occasions. So Leon, cry that your patron has died; for scarcely, if ever, you’re going to give birth to one similar». On this inscription, see MARTÍN LÓPEZ M. E., Las inscripciones de la catedral de León (s. IX-XI), León, Corpus Inscriptionum Hispaniae Mediaevalium, 2014, p. 143-144.

16. The term luge in Latin, as well as old-castilian llores, llantos or plantos (crying) needs to be understood as the way to verbalize and refer to a whole set of funerary practices of strong emotional imprint that people executed. Crying, sign of an anthropological code of the expression of grief and pain that has a universal value, was imposed in medieval Castile as the semantic kernel and figurative matrix of the pain for the death of others. It acted as a binder of the whole repertoire of mourning practices, gestures and attitudes. See MUÑoz FERNÁNDEZ A., «Llanto, palabras y gesto…», op. cit., p. 112.

17. Addressing the reader to ask him to mourn and pray for the dead was a very common literary resource used across Medieval Europe. See FAVREAU R., «Fonctions des inscriptions au Moyen Âge», in Études d’Épigraphie Médiévale, Limoges, Presses universitaires de Limoges, 1995, p. 164-165. In the Iberian Peninsula and from previous times it can be recorded the inscription carved in the tomb of one of the children of Alfonso VIII, today located in the aisle of Saint Catherine in the church of the Monastery of Las Huelgas in Burgos (1189) and the epitaphium sepulcrale of the abbot Diego in the Monastery of Carracedo in León (1155). See CAVERO DOMÍNGUEZ G., «La memoria frente al olvido: Los epitafios de los abades monásticos y la construcción de una

18. Kings and nobles wanted to highlight the importance of their lineage and thus magnified the tomb through the pomp and pageantry of the funerary celebrations, as the tombs of Queen Blanca of Navarra in Nájera, Count Ramón Berenguer III in Santa María de Ripoll, the late-Romanesque royal tombs of the pantheon of Las Huelgas (Burgos) or the tomb of the noble Egas Moniz (Paço de Sousa, Portugal) show. See Miguélez Cavero A., «La matérialisation artistique de la douleur…», op. cit., p. 163-178.


21. The tomb was also provided with an inscription recording the bishop’s virtues of nobility, integrity and honesty, but it did not challenge the city of León to mourn his death: “Prima Zamorensi Martimum ponfa-cavit et legionensis sedes potestare vocavit quod ibi tanta fuit. Domino faciente potestas et honestas. Era M CC LXXX et QT XVII KLS februarii”. However, the literary resource was revived some years later and included in the inscription carved in the tomb of a treasurer of the cathedral, Petrus Iohannis, dead in 1253: “† Larga manus, probitas, decus urbis, Petre Iohannis, hic sacrissa iacens cunctis memorabilis annis omnibus aptus eras. Té semper Legio flebit; quen sua facta probant, nullus repro-

bale valebit. Christe, pius veniam eis ibi dando piam” [Petrus Iohannis, treasurer you were, resting here you will serve as an example of prodigality and righteousness, and also honor of the city, just as you were during your whole life. León will always remember you with tears because someone who is credited by his works will not be reprobated by anyone]. See Martín López M. E., Las inscripciones…, op. cit., p. 145, 148.


26. Boto Varela G., «Sobre reyes y tumbas en la catedral de León. Discursos visuales de poder político y


28. As M. V. Herráez has proved, the tomb was located in that place since at least 1250, when it is mentioned in a documental record, the will of canon Juan Cibrián. See Ruiz Asencio J. M., Colección documental del archivo de la catedral de León, VIII (1230-1269), León, Centro de Estudios e Investigación San Isidoro, 1993, p. 166-170, doc. 2096. Herráez Ortega M. V., «La catedral gótica de León…», op. cit., p. 191.


30. It should be taken into account that Bishop Martín Fernández stipulated in his will that he wanted to be buried in the tomb he had commissioned to do in the choir and documental records indeed confirm that the choir was actually surrounded by tombs at least in 1286. See Ruiz Asencio J. M. and Martín Fuertes J. A., Colección documental de la catedral de León IX (1269-1300), León, Centro de Estudios e Investigación San Isidoro, 1994, p. 348-349. Valdés Fernández M., Herráez Ortega M. V., Cosmen Alonso C., Campos Sánchez-Bordona et alii, Una historia arquitectónica…, op. cit., p. 64, n. 106. If the theory of most researchers is true and his tomb is the one currently located in the south transept, there are two possibilities as to what could have come to happen: his tomb was installed in the choir and later transferred to the transept or his will was not followed to the letter and his funerary monument was installed in a place that still holds from the very first moment.


32. «He was good with the poor […] Sympathized with those who suffered.» On this inscription, see Martín López M. E., Las inscripciones…, op. cit., p. 153.

33. He for example stipulated that no one should be buried inside the nave of his new cathedral, except for kings and bishops. See García y García A. (ed.), Synodicum Hispanicum…, op. cit., p. 252.

34. Las Partidas, I, Título IV, Ley XLII.


40. CHURCHLAND P., Braintrust: What Neuroscience Tells Us about Morality, Princeton, University Press, 2012, esp. p. 135-154, where she discusses the state of the art of mirror neurons research.


42. «Modern beholders may no longer find the Venus of Urbino especially arousing, not only because they have seen so many reproductions of it and many others like it, but because sexual imagery can now go so much further». See FREEDBERG D., The Power of the Images…, op. cit., p. 177.

43. This small fragment has been identified as forming part of the tomb of Bishop Manrique de Lara († 1205) or Nuño Alvarez. See FRANCO MATA A., Escultura gótica en León…, op. cit., p. 382. SÁNCHEZ AIMEJEIRAS R., Investigaciones iconográficas sobre la escultura funeraria del siglo XIII en la catedral de León, Santiago de Compostela, Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad, 1993, p. 39-40. If the attribution to Manrique de Lara is the right one, it should be taken into account that he was a member of the House of Lara, the highest Castilian nobility and very close the monarchy. See CAVERO DOMÍNGUEZ G., «El episcopado de la iglesia de León (1087-1205)», in Escritos dedicados a José María Fernández Catón, DÍAZ Y DÍAZ M. C. (coord.), León, Centro de Estudios San Isidoro, 2004, p. 199-226, esp. 223. It is actually his status of noble that could have influence the decision to include such a mourning scene in his tomb, and thus becoming the starting point of a series of episcopal tombs with this kind of visual programm first in León cathedral.
