**A Wood Bone in a Body of Stone. The Wooden Column of San Millán de Suso and Pilgrims’ Sensorial Experiences in the Middle Ages.**

Surrounded by a dense forest, located on a northern Iberian mountain of the present region of La Rioja, the Mozarabic monastic church of San Millán de Suso has been preserved despite the onslaughts of time. The original construction of the church likely dates back to the 7th c., when it was built around the cave in which the Visigothic hermit Saint Emiliano (473-574 AD) lived and died. Subsequently, it underwent interventions in the 10th and 11th centuries, remaining today as an invaluable vestige of the mediaeval past. After Emiliano’s death in the 6th c., Suso evolved into a settlement for a monastic community, at the same time that became an important pilgrimage centre for those in need of the saint’s intercession.

In this proposal, I intend to focus on one of the saint’s relics preserved in Suso, which has attracted scarce scholarly attention: a wooden column embedded in the first pier (east to west) of the church’s interior arcade. According to the saint’s hagiography, Emiliano would have assisted two preoccupied builders who, in the middle of a construction process, realised that one of the wooden beams was not long enough. Through divine intervention, the saint would have made the beam grow. The present wooden column was identified within the interconnected narratives around Emiliano’s figure and Suso’s space as a leftover fragment of the beam.

Thus, the wooden column would have functioned as an architectural element, as well as a saint's relic, and ultimately, as a fundamental sensorial object. Its location within the church –in a significant coordinate between the main entrance and the cave of the saint– encouraged pilgrims to touch and tear pieces of wood from the beam. *“… y está muy socavado de puntas de cuchillos para tomar reliquias del”* (… and it is heavily fractured with knifes’ edges to extract relics from it):in these terms Prudencio de Sandoval, Benedictine monk and historian, referred to the wooden column in 1601. By Sandoval’s time, the wooden column was inside a tiled box to avoid further detriment.

The hitherto unexplored wooden column –relic– represents an ideal case-study to approach the devotional context of the Iberian Peninsula during the Middle Ages through the unconventional lens of its sensory agency, promising to deepen our understanding of the crucial bond between relics, architecture and spaces of worship.

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Post-Doctoral Research Fellow in the ERC-Starting Grant 2020 *SenSArt - The Sensuous Appeal of the Holy. Sensory Agency of Sacred Art and Somatised Spiritual Experiences in Medieval Europe (12th-15th century)*, PI: Zuleika Murat.