

In the mirror of Eusebius. The episcopal identity of Atto of Vercelli¹

Atto of Vercelli is neither one of the best known authors of the Middle Ages, nor one of the outstanding individuals of his age.² It may therefore come as something of a surprise to discuss this bishop in a volume called “Ego trouble”. Atto is generally mentioned as one of the three important literary figures of 10th century Italy, together with Liudprand of Cremona and Rather of Verona, although compared to these other two he is the least colourful bishop and author.³ His fame rests mainly on the survival of two manuscripts written in the tenth century in Vercelli, containing most of his works. Unfortunately we have almost no knowledge of his actual life. With an episcopal career spanning almost 40 years (from 924 to somewhere around 960) in an important north Italian episcopal see in the turbulence of political life in Italy in the 10th century, he must have been involved in many of the portentous political issues of his time; it is, however, hard for us to pin down exactly what his position was and how he influenced politics or in turn was influenced by political developments.⁴ An Atto acted as archchancellor of King Hugh of Italy in the years 937 to 940, but it is unsure whether this was Atto of Vercelli, or bishop Azzo of Como.⁵ That Atto was involved in political issues is clear from two of his letters. One addressed to his fellow bishops dealt with the question whether bishops should obey a royal order for handing over hostages.⁶ While most historians agree that it probably was Berengar II who issued such an order, the actual circumstances in which this may have happened, is still debated.⁷ Atto’s letter does reveal, however, that he did not hesitate to oppose a royal order. In another letter written probably around 957 to Waldo, bishop of Como, Atto defended the king as he warned this bishop not to rebel against his royal superior. Yet this letter does not seem to have had the intended effect, and Waldo was deprived of his office in 957 and fled to the Ottonian court.⁸

Other literary works of Atto show how he was involved in politics, again without informing us about the precise historical circumstances in which he wrote them. In his *De pressuris ecclesiasticis*, a work he probably wrote shortly after 943, he defended the right of clerics to be judged in a clerical court, maintained that episcopal elections should remain free of any secular interference, and he criticized the appropriation of ecclesiastical

¹ In writing this article I profited from two Utrecht MA theses: Ingrid Nijsink, *A Bishop and Four Kings. The Two Political Letters of Atto of Vercelli: Introduction and Critical Edition* (Utrecht 2002); Jarno Timmermans, *Nobis aliquid dicendum est vulgaribus. Zes preken van bisschop Atto van Vercelli († 961) in hun historische context* (Utrecht 2005).

² Although Emiliano Pasteris entitled his book on Atto: *Attone di Vercelli. Ossia il più grande vescovo e scrittore italiano del secolo X. Vita e opere* (Milano 1925), a book which I was unable to consult.

³ See, for example, Ross Balzaretto, *Men and sex in tenth-century Italy*, in: *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, ed. Dawn M. Hadley (London/New York 1999) 143–159, where the views of these three bishops are discussed in close relation to one another.

⁴ The best basic reference to his life are Suzanne F. Wemple, *Atto of Vercelli. Church, State and Christian Society in Tenth Century Italy* (Temi e Testi 27, Roma 1979) 8–21, and Joachim Bauer, *Die Schrift “De pressuris ecclesiasticis” des Bischofs Atto von Vercelli. Untersuchung und Edition* (Tübingen 1975) 1–22. For an analysis of Atto’s views on justice and the relationship between kings and bishops, see Renato Bordone, *Vescovi giudici e critici della giustizia: Attone di Vercelli*, in: *La Giustizia nell’alto Medioevo (secoli IX–XI)* (Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull’alto medioevo 44, Spoleto 1997) 457–486. The year in which Atto died is not clearly established. For an overview of political developments in Italy in this period, see Giuseppe Sergi, *The kingdom of Italy*, in: *The New Cambridge Medieval History 3: c. 900–c. 1024*, ed. Timothy Reuter (Cambridge 1999) 346–371.

⁵ Bauer, *Die Schrift “De pressuris ecclesiasticis”* 10–11; Wemple, *Atto of Vercelli* 13.

⁶ Atto of Vercelli, *Epistola I*, PL 134, 95–104.

⁷ Wemple, *Atto of Vercelli* 17, argues for 954; Julius Schultz, *Atto von Vercelli (924–961)* (Göttingen 1885) 50, sees 951 and 956 as possibilities; Rudolf Pokorny in his introduction to the edition of Atto’s episcopal capitulary thinks it refers to the period before 945/948, see *Capitula Episcoporum III* (ed. Rudolf Pokorny, MGH LL Capitula Episcoporum 3, Hannover 1995) 244, n. 11: *Bordone, Vescovi giudici* 466: “presumibilmente Berengario II”.

⁸ Wemple, *Atto of Vercelli* 18. For Waldo at the Ottonian court, see Liudprand of Cremona, *Liber de rebus gestis Ottonis magni imperatoris I* (ed. Joseph Becker, MGH SS rer. Germ. in us. schol. sep. ed. [41], Hannover/Leipzig 1915) 159. For an analysis of these letters, see Germana Gandino, *L’imperfezione della società in due lettere di Attone di Vercelli*, in: *Bolletino Storico-Bibliografico Subalpino* 86 (1988) 5–37.

property.⁹ Again this text seems to have been composed as a reaction to specific forms of secular pressure, but Atto's work does not allow us to identify the kings and magnates against whom he felt obliged to react.¹⁰ Atto's most ambitious and complex text is his *Polipticum*, a treatise written in a deliberately obscure style also used by his fellow bishops Rather of Verona and Liudprand of Cremona. These bishops were well-educated and did their best to show their command of Latin by using many abstruse terms taken from a variety of available glossaries, by looking for titles for their work based on unfamiliar words often having Greek roots (*Antapodosis*, *Phrenesis*, *Polipticum*) as well as playing with the word order by the technique of *scinderatio*.¹¹ In the *Polipticum* Atto criticized the tyranny of kings and the immoral behaviour of the magnates, but again in such a way as not to reveal any of the specific historical figures or circumstances to which he was alluding. In the opening part Atto clearly stated that he did not aim at writing a chronicle in which he would name individuals, since even the young would understand his allusions.¹²

From this brief overview it may be clear that Atto was a bishop who was clearly involved in tenth-century Italian politics and addressed many political issues in his works, but he was also one who in general refrained from explicitly defining the actual topics he was dealing with in his texts. In the *Polipticum* he might even have gone further to obscure the topics and persons he was addressing by consciously employing a difficult style, which perhaps was not only meant to enhance the reputation of the author, but also to restrict the circle of readers of this work. His Latin style proved in fact so difficult, that he felt obliged to write a second version that was more accessible by its use of a normalized grammatical style.

ATTO'S MANUSCRIPT AND EUSEBIUS

The second, more accessible, version of the *Polipticum* is included in the same, unfortunately heavily damaged manuscript, which contains the first version of the text. This manuscript, which is now being kept in the Vatican (BAV, Vat. lat. 4322), is an interesting one. It was written around the middle of the tenth century in Vercelli, that is, under the eyes and supervision of Atto, and contains a kind of 'Collected (or perhaps better 'selected') Works' of Atto. As far as I know, this is unique for early medieval authors. I know of no other author who took care that his collected works were copied in one manuscript, although his fellow bishop Rather of Verona, whose similarities to Atto go further than their literary taste and love of the literary technique of *scinderatio*, also took great care for the preservation (and sometimes destruction) of his literary works.¹³ Moreover, all titles of Atto's works in this manuscript, with the exception of his capitulary and the first version of the *Polipticum*, contain a monogramme indicating Atto's authorship.¹⁴ This monogramme may have been written by Atto himself, but even if this was not the case, it was written under his supervision and is therefore a remarkable expression of an author's identity.

⁹ Bauer, *Die Schrift "De pressuris ecclesiasticis"* 13, dates this text on the basis of the assumption that the use of the Aachen Rule for Canons (816) suggests that Atto wrote this text after the establishment of a chapter house in Vercelli of which we find the earliest trace in 943; on 179 Bauer speaks of "die wohl kurz nach 943 entstandene Schrift."

¹⁰ Bauer, *Die Schrift "De pressuris ecclesiasticis"* 24: "Es ist eine Eigenheit Attos, in *De pressuris ecclesiasticis* die konkreten historischen Bezüge hinter seiner theologischen und kirchenrechtlichen Gelehrsamkeit zurücktreten zu lassen."

¹¹ Wemple, *Atto of Vercelli*, 43; see also Claudio Leonardi, *Intellectual life*, in: *The New Cambridge Medieval History 3: c. 900–c. 1024*, ed. Timothy Reuter (Cambridge 1999) 186–211, at 206–208.

¹² Atto of Vercelli, *Polipticum quod appellatur perpendiculum*, version B (ed. Georg Goetz, *Abhandlungen der Philologisch-historischen Klasse der Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften 37, 2*, Leipzig 1922) 28; see Wemple, *Atto of Vercelli* 84.

¹³ See for example München, BSB clm 6340, a ms. written in Verona under Rather's supervision and containing his works composed in the years 961–968 in Verona; see *Die Briefe des Bischofs Rather von Verona* (ed. Fritz Weigle, *MGH Briefe der deutschen Kaiserzeit 1*, Weimar 1949) 2; for Rather see Peter Reid, *The Complete Works of Rather of Verona* (*Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 76*, Binghamton 1991), with a very useful introduction; see also the contribution of Irene van Renswoude in this volume, who was so kind to discuss Rather's literary legacy with me and who suggested that, like Atto, Rather took care to collect his literary works in specific manuscripts written under his supervision.

¹⁴ Monogrammes are to be found on fol. 4r (beginning of the sermons), fol. 18r (beginning of the epistolae), fol. 49r (beginning of the second version of the *Polipticum*, monogramme only partly legible because of damage to the ms), fol. 83v (*De pressuris*). The capitulary beginning on fol. 69r clearly has no monogramme, but monogrammes seem to be used in this text to mark additions composed by Atto himself in contrast to the texts he adopted from other sources, see Atto of Vercelli, *Episcopal Capitulary* (ed. Rudolf Pokorny, *MGH LL Capitula Episcoporum 3*, Hannover 1995) 234–304, at 257. There could have been monogrammes on ff. 30r and 35r (beginning of preface *polipticum*), but since the ms. is heavily damaged this is no longer to be verified.

The Vatican manuscript should therefore be regarded as a remarkable manifestation of an author for its publication of Atto's 'selected works' authenticated by his monogramme. This manuscript is as such a testimony to Atto's identity, but we may possibly take this even further. The manuscript opens with a text relating aspects of the life of Eusebius, the famous fourth-century bishop of Vercelli. Unfortunately, as I said before, the Vatican manuscript is heavily damaged by moisture. This was already the case in the seventeenth century when on behalf of Cardinal Bona, a copy of parts of the manuscript was made for Dom Luc d'Achéry. The text on Eusebius is particularly heavily damaged and unfortunately it was not held to be of particular importance in the seventeenth century and was therefore not included in the copy made for d'Achéry. It is clear, however, that it relates to episodes in Eusebius's life and the fact that after every line the formula '*exaudi nos*' is to be found, suggest some liturgical use of this particular text. At first sight this text dealing with Eusebius looks like an oddity in the manuscript containing works of Atto, but I will argue that Eusebius was of exceptional importance to Atto and to his self-image.

Eusebius was one of orthodoxy's champions in the fourth-century controversy over Arianism. He had opposed the Arian emperor Constantius at the council of Milan in 355 and subsequently was forced to go into exile to Palestine, Cappadocia and Egypt. Jerome included him in his *De viris illustribus* and Ambrose praised him as the first bishop to live a monastic life with his fellow clerics at Vercelli.¹⁵ We know some of his letters and apparently a cult was quickly established, a cult which was supra-local, since in the sixth century we have evidence from Gaul that Eusebius was venerated and known as a champion of orthodoxy. Gregory of Tours refers to him in the same breath with Hilary of Poitiers as defenders of the true faith, while Eusebius's relics preserved by his mother protected the house from a fire.¹⁶ It is striking though that no early *Vita Eusebii* exists. The earliest *vita* we have, which has recently been investigated as a historical and a literary text by Nick Everett, has been dated to a period from the seventh to the ninth century.¹⁷ Yet there still is no reliable edition of this text, nor has a secure date of its composition been established. Because all manuscripts seem to stem from the tenth century or later, it is therefore perfectly possible that this *Vita* was composed only in the tenth century. So the *Life of Eusebius* could even have been written during Atto's lifetime in Vercelli.¹⁸ Whether the text on Eusebius at the beginning of the Vatican manuscript was also composed by Atto himself, is hard to establish, but the fact that it is included in this codex containing Atto's literary heritage suggests at least that it was regarded as closely related to Atto himself.¹⁹

In 943, that is during Atto's episcopacy, we hear for the first time of the canons of St. Eusebius in a charter by which the kings Hugh and Lothar donated land to their ecclesiastical institution.²⁰ This suggests that the chapter house in Vercelli devoted to Eusebius was probably founded by Atto himself.²¹ This would corroborate the notion that a *Life of Eusebius* was composed in Vercelli in this period. It would also explain the fact that the Vatican manuscripts containing Atto's works opens with a text on Eusebius. That Atto himself was highly interested in Eusebius is confirmed by the inclusion of a sermon preached on the first of August, Eusebius's feast day, in Atto's sermon collection. This is the only sermon included which has a saint as its subject, the other sermons are devoted to liturgical feasts or to particular pastoral problems. We can therefore conclude that Atto had a special relation with the patron saint of his bishopric, founding a house of canons in his favour and promoting his cult by liturgical texts.

¹⁵ Jerome, *De viris illustribus* 96 (ed. Aldo Ceresa-Gastaldo, *Gli uomini illustri/De viris illustribus*, Firenze 1988); Ambrose, *Letter LXIII*; see also Nick Everett, *Narrating the Life of Eusebius of Vercelli*, in: *Narrative and History in the Early Medieval West* (Turnhout 2006) 133–165, at 133f.

¹⁶ Gregory of Tours, *Historiae* V, 44 (ed. Bruno Krusch/Wilhelm Levison, *MGH SS rer. Merov.* 1, 1, Hannover 1951) 253; id., *Gloria confessorum III* (ed. Bruno Krusch, *MGH SS rer. Merov.* 1, 2, Hannover 1885) 744–820, at 750.

¹⁷ Everett, *Narrating the Life of Eusebius* 134.

¹⁸ Everett, *Narrating the Life of Eusebius* 136, n. 11, mentions ms. Gent, *Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit*, Ms. 244 as dating from the ninth century but Albert Derolez, *Inventaris van de handschriften van de Universiteitsbibliotheek te Gent* (Gent 1977), dated it to the tenth century, while it is not included in Bernhard Bischoff, *Katalog der festländischen Handschriften des neunten Jahrhunderts (mit Ausnahme der wisigotischen)* (Wiesbaden 1998). The *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina* regard the tenth century ms. Turin, *Biblioteca Nazionale F. III. 16* as the oldest ms.

¹⁹ Atto of Vercelli, ed. Pokorny 259, characterizes this text as "verwandt, aber nicht identisch mit Attos Sermo XVI zum gleichen Thema".

²⁰ *I diplomi di Ugo e Lotario, di Berengario e di Adalberto N° 73* (ed. Luigi Schiaparelli, *Fonti per la storia d'Italia* 38, Roma 1924) 214ff.; See Bauer, *Die Schrift "De pressuris ecclesiasticis"* 6.

²¹ Bauer, *Die Schrift "De pressuris ecclesiasticis"* 6 and 13.

ATTO AND EUSEBIUS

We may, however, go even a bit further than this and ask whether Atto took Eusebius's life as a model. Perhaps we could even imagine that Atto modelled Eusebius in light of his own experience, i.e. that he spoke about himself when preaching about the founding bishop of Vercelli. I want to pursue the latter approach here to see whether it is possible to discern Atto the bishop in his portrait of Eusebius. I realize that this is a somewhat problematic approach, but in view of Atto's restraint in naming and identifying particular historical figures in his other works it might be justified. In the *Polipticum* as well as in *De pressuris ecclesiasticis* Atto deals with particular situations and persons in cryptic terms and therefore it may be warranted to decipher his code in the case of his sermon on Eusebius. The focus will be on the Eusebius sermon, although the *Life of Eusebius* might also be revealing, if we could show that this text has been composed by Atto himself or under his influence. This, however, would require a detailed investigation of the manuscript tradition of the *Vita*, an investigation that would certainly be worthwhile, but would take us beyond the scope of this essay. The sermon on Eusebius is a text that we can be certain was composed by Atto and was used while preaching in the cathedral in Vercelli.²² Its use of rhythm and rhyme shows that it was intended to be read out in the form in which it is to be found on the parchment.²³ Since the sermon on Eusebius was preached in public by Atto it shows not only how he presented a model bishop to the audience in Vercelli but also, in my reading, how he wanted to present himself to his fellow Christians.

In his sermon Atto stresses the conflict between Eusebius and the Roman emperor Constans II. Constans is a most cruel emperor (*crudelissimus imperator*), a pernicious fraud of the catholic faith (*perniciosus supplantator catholicae fidei*) and a malignant tyrant (*improbus tyrannus*). He convened ecclesiastical councils to put pressure on bishops, tried to deceive them and did not refrain from exiling bishops. All this could be said to be true to a certain extent of Constans II, but in his *Polipticum* Atto describes secular rulers in similar terms as tyrants.²⁴ Furthermore we have already discussed the fact that Berengar II demanded hostages from his bishops in order to guarantee their loyalty and that Waldo bishop of Como had to go into exile to escape royal anger. Atto stressed that the powerful drive away the less powerful, who in turn should flee the powerful.²⁵ Atto, therefore, seems to have had some experience with tyrannical rulers, such as the Constans he described in this sermon. There are even some indications that Atto may at some point have been forced to live in exile himself. In his *De pressuris* Atto refers to the dangers of ecclesiastical property being confiscated after a bishop's death or during a period in exile.²⁶ While this shows that he was familiar with bishops being forced into exile, this does not necessarily show that Atto himself had such experience. It is remarkable, though, that he wrote letters to his congregation, addressed to all the faithful in his diocese (*cunctis fidelibus in nostra parochia*) just like Eusebius had done from exile.²⁷ Such letters were clearly meant to be read to the faithful by the local clergy, as Germana Gandino suggests. In view of what Atto wrote about exile, however, we should not exclude the possibility that Atto wrote some of these letters from a place of exile.²⁸ Atto preached about Eusebius as a *bonus pastor* who constantly cared for the well-being of his flock and visited them from far away places by the means of letters to strengthen their perseverance in the catholic faith. Did he – by speaking of Eusebius – mean to remind his audience of a period of exile he had gone through himself?

The letters written to his congregation bring us to another interesting parallel. Atto stressed the fact that when Eusebius came to Vercelli he found the town deeply infected by heresy. When the local community saw that Eusebius came as a defender of the true faith and an opponent of heresy, they denied him the right to enter St. Mary's church in Vercelli and turned to the emperor for support. Atto's letters, sermons and the episcopal

²² For the text, see PL 34, 853–855.

²³ Germana Gandino, *Cultura dotta e cultura folklorica a Vercelli nel X secolo*, in: *Bollettino storico-bibliografico subalpino* 90 (1992) 252–279, at 264: "Il sermone in onore di sant'Eusebio vescovo e patrono di Vercelli è senz'altro uno dei più rilevanti della raccolta attoniana per la presenza di stilemi che danno effetti di forte ritmicità: vi è soprattutto costante uso di assonanze e omoteleuti, e anche di vere e proprie rime, che servono a fissarlo facilmente nelle memoria."

²⁴ Atto of Vercelli, *Polipticum* 11 and 14, ed. Goetz 20 and 23.

²⁵ Atto of Vercelli, *Letter to Waldo*, PL 134, 99B: *majores minores expellant, minores ipsos majores fugiant*.

²⁶ Bauer, *Die Schrift "De pressuris ecclesiasticis"* 87; Bordone, *Vescovi giudici* 461.

²⁷ Atto of Vercelli, *Epistolae* Nr. 3, 4 and 11, PL 134, 104–106 and 120–124.

²⁸ Gandino, *Cultura dotta* 262. Rather of Verona also addresses letters to the clerics of his diocese but always in the context of a conflict. Unfortunately the greeting formulas in Rather's letters are lacking, see *Die Briefe des Bischofs Rather von Verona* N° 25 and 28, ed. Weigle, 124 and 156f.

statute he composed all show that Atto was eager to correct and reform the local clergy and laity, in other words to redraw the boundaries of licit and illicit forms of religious behaviour.²⁹ Atto's episcopal capitulary, which contains the fullest program of ecclesiastical reform, cannot be dated precisely, but it makes more sense to suppose that it originates from early in his episcopate, when as a new bishop he was trying to make his mark on the community, than to suppose that he wrote such a work late in his career.³⁰ Atto addressed heretical views when he condemned those who believed that the Holy Ghost derived only from the Father and not the Son, the Filioque-debate.³¹ Apart from these explicit references to heretical views, Atto also addressed other issues which one might regard as heretical, such as honouring the Friday instead of the Sunday.³² Atto furthermore issued a whole program of church reform in his diocese by his preaching, his letters to the faithful and his capitulary, one of the later examples of this genre. He preached, for example, about the celebration of the Kalends of January in his diocese, criticizing cultural practices on the first of January and the first of March as well as observing particular astrological constellations.³³ His capitulary, which adopts many decisions from the capitulary of Theodulf of Orleans as well as from some collections of canon law which were available in Vercelli in the tenth century – such as the *Collectio Anselmo dedicata*, or the *Hadriana aucta* – deals extensively with the proper behaviour of clerics, their celibacy, the proper rituals for baptism and the like. It also deals with lay forms of behaviour, such as the festivities on the first of January or the ban on celebrating a wedding or a birthday during Lent.³⁴ It is often supposed that these texts date from early in Atto's reign, although hard proof for this assumption is lacking. One can, however, imagine a young bishop coming from outside the bishopric – Atto probably came from Milan – taking matters in hand in his new diocese and getting in conflict with the local clergy and population. This could have been regarded by Atto as a parallel with Eusebius finding a town infected by heresy at the time of his first arrival in Vercelli. One can further imagine that the fact that the local people turned to the emperor in Eusebius's case, also found a parallel in Atto's case. The problems Rather of Verona had with the local clergy shows that a bishop from outside the local community coming to the bishopric with reforming aspirations could run into serious trouble.³⁵ We do not know how far Atto succeeded in his ambitious programme to redraw religious boundaries within the local community in Vercelli, but it is hard to believe that he did not encounter serious opposition from clerical and aristocratic groups, perhaps also from the king himself.

If this interpretation is correct, then it is interesting to see that Atto chose to present his criticism of existing forms of religious beliefs in terms of heresy instead of paganism, as had been typical during the Carolingian reforms. Such a change in frame of reference is intriguing, particularly in view of later developments, when during the Gregorian reforms heresy rather than paganism or superstition seems to have become the key factor in criticizing opponents. In this respect Atto can therefore be seen as a forerunner of the Gregorian reforms in his emphasis on heresy when redrawing the boundaries of Christian behaviour. In his episcopal capitulary heresy is mentioned in this context only once, while the idea of paganism is also present.³⁶ This may be the result of Atto's extensive borrowing from the ninth-century episcopal capitulary of Theodulf of Orléans, but could also be explained by the fact that his capitulary was composed much earlier than his sermon on Eusebius.³⁷

Atto has been regarded as a forerunner of the Gregorian reform movement.³⁸ It is hard to imagine, of course, that he was able to foresee the new developments in Church and society that were to take place in the eleventh

²⁹ Mayke de Jong, *The state of the church: ecclesia and early medieval state formation*, in: *Der frühmittelalterliche Staat – Europäische Perspektiven*, ed. Walter Pohl/Veronika Wieser (*Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters* 16, Wien 2009) 241–254.

³⁰ Atto of Vercelli, *Episcopal Capitulary*, ed. Pokorny 245: “Für begründete Vermutungen über einen engeren Entstehungszeitraum des Kapitulars innerhalb von Attos Pontifikat fehlt es an Anhaltspunkten.”

³¹ Atto of Vercelli, *Sermo XI*, PL 134, 847; see Germana Gandino, *L'imperfezione della società* 13f.

³² Atto of Vercelli, *Epistola 4*, PL 134, 105f.; Gandino, *L'imperfezione della società* 14f.

³³ Atto of Vercelli, *Sermo 3*, PL 134, 835–838.

³⁴ Atto of Vercelli, ed. Pokorny 243–304.

³⁵ See Irene van Renswoude in this volume; for Verona see Maureen Miller, *The Formation of a Medieval Church. Ecclesiastical Change in Verona, 950–1150* (Ithaca 1993); for the conflict between Rather and the clergy in Verona see Jeroen Laemers, *Conflict en caritas. De argumentatie van bisschop Rather van Verona in zijn strijd met het domkapittel, 961–968*, in: *Millennium* 16 (2002) 99–113.

³⁶ *Capitulare 70 and 79* (ed. Rudolf Pokorny, *MGH LL Capitula episcoporum* 3, Hannover 1995) 290 and 293.

³⁷ For Atto's extensive use of the capitulary of Theodulf of Orléans, see Atto of Vercelli, ed. Pokorny 251 and 256.

³⁸ Wemple, *Atto of Vercelli* 129–134; Bordone, *Vescovi giudici* 459; See also Balzaretti, *Men and sex in tenth-century Italy* 153: “Atto's views on clerical celibacy and concubinage developed over the next twenty years, eventually coming close to the severe

century.³⁹ Nevertheless, it is striking that Atto chose to stress the visionary qualities of Eusebius of Vercelli, who as he tells his audience in his sermon, was able to predict his future death. Eusebius warned his congregation that after his death they would suffer heavily and admonished them to bear their sufferings with patience. It might be that Atto was alluding here to his own possible demise in a foreseeable future. The *Polipticum* demonstrates that he did not regard his own time in a favourable light. The text, moreover, could be read as a form of prophecy in describing the abuses of the world as a prelude to its end. The stress on Eusebius's prophesying qualities may also be related to the false prophets Atto denounced in one of his letters.⁴⁰

There is one striking omission in Atto's sermon on his saintly predecessor. This is the fact that Eusebius is well-known as one of the first bishops who regulated life for the clerics attached to his episcopal see according to a monastic model.⁴¹ It is possible that Atto just did not see the significance of this development, used as he probably was to the phenomenon of a cathedral clergy living a communal life. Possibly, however, Atto did not mention Eusebius's relations with his cathedral clergy because of the careful balance that sometimes existed between the cathedral chapter and a bishop coming from elsewhere. In nearby Verona, Bishop Rather had run into trouble with the cathedral chapter, which saw itself as the guardian of the local ecclesiastical tradition.⁴² As Atto also came to Vercelli with a radical programme of reform, it is hard to imagine that he did not encounter opposition from the side of the cathedral chapter. His episcopal capitulary contains many regulations which concern the proper behaviour of the clergy and one can easily imagine that the proud members of Vercelli's cathedral chapter who saw themselves as the defenders of ecclesiastical tradition, had problems following their bishop's directions. That Atto did not want to remind his audience, which included members of the cathedral chapter, of those problems, may explain the fact that he did not mention Eusebius's achievements in this field, although it is also possible that he just did not know about it or did not recognize their importance.

CONCLUSION

Preaching about his predecessor Eusebius, whose cult he seems to have favoured in several respects, Atto may have presented to his audience not only a model bishop who confronted local religious customs which he regarded as unorthodox but also a bishop who defied both local opposition and opposition from the ruler himself in order to reach his goals, the *correctio* of Christianity. Such a bishop might suffer exile and prison, but never ceased to care about the well-being of his flock, writing letters of instruction to teach and criticize – and to discipline? – the Christians entrusted in his care even while exiled. This certainly was a bishop with whom Atto could identify.⁴³ How far Atto depicted his own life when preaching about Eusebius remains a conjecture, but there are certain parallels which seem to suggest that when delivering his homily about Eusebius, Atto was in fact also speaking about himself. He clearly subscribed to the goal of reforming the local Christian community and probably encountered local opposition when trying to reach this goal. It also seems probable that local opponents in their struggle with the bishop sought support in other regions, possibly also from counts and kings. That Atto, like Eusebius spent some time in exile cannot be proven, but there are indications that he might have done so. If my reading of this sermon is correct, on the feast of patron saint, Atto, therefore, not only reminded the population of Vercelli of the origin of its Christian community, but also about the early days of his own period in office as bishop. At this point Atto presented Eusebius, and in a way also himself, as a focal point for the local community and its identity. We can conclude therefore by saying that despite all the trouble that his ego had caused, Atto manifested himself – in the mirror of Eusebius – as a rallying point for local communal identity and pride.

approach of some eleventh-century reformers.”

³⁹ For a short and elegant introduction to these developments see Kathleen G. Cushing, *Reform and Papacy in the Eleventh Century. Spirituality and Social Change* (Manchester 2005).

⁴⁰ Atto of Vercelli, *Epistola* 3, PL 134, 104f.

⁴¹ Claudia Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity. The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London 2005) 150; Joseph T. Lienhard, *Patristic sermons on Eusebius of Vercelli and their relation to his monasticism*, in: *Revue Bénédictine* 87 (1977) 164–172.

⁴² Miller, *Formation of a Medieval Church* 45; Laemers, *Conflict en caritas* 101.

⁴³ On the importance of models for medieval conceptions of the individual, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Did the twelfth century discover the individual?*, in: *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 31 (1980) 1–17.