

know which is the right law?"—Menocchio gave a shrewd reply: "Yes sir, I believe that each person holds his faith to be right, but we do not know which is the right one. . . ." This was the theory of the advocates of tolerance, a tolerance that Menocchio extended, as had Sebastian Castellio no longer only to the three great historic religions, but to heretics as well. And just as it did for those contemporary thinkers, Menocchio's position on tolerance had a positive content: "the majesty of God has given the Holy Spirit to all, to Christians, to heretics, to Turks, and to Jews; and he considers them all dear, and they are all saved in the same manner." More than toleration in a strict sense, this was an explicit recognition of the equivalence of all faiths, in the name of a simplified religion, free of dogmatic or confessional considerations. It was something akin to that faith in the "God of nature" that Mandeville had encountered in all peoples, even among the most remote, dissimilar, and monstrous—although, as we shall see, Menocchio, in fact, rejected the idea of a God who was creator of the world.

But in Mandeville that recognition was accompanied by a firm declaration of the superiority of Christianity over the partial truths of the other religions. Thus, once again, Menocchio was going beyond his texts. His religious radicalism, even if it occasionally drew from motifs of medieval tolerance, had more in common with the sophisticated religious theories of contemporary, humanistically trained heretics.

We have seen how Menocchio read his books: isolating words and phrases, sometimes distorting them, juxtaposing different passages, firing off rapid analogies. Each time, a comparison between the texts and Menocchio's responses to them has led us to suggest a hidden key to his reading that possible relations with one heretical group or another aren't sufficient to explain. Menocchio mulled over and elaborated on his readings outside any preexistent framework. And his most extraordinary declarations originated from contact with such innocuous texts as Mandeville's *Travels* or the *Historia del Giudaico*. It was not the book as such, but the encounter between the printed page and oral culture that formed an explosive mixture in Menocchio's head.

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Let's return then to Menocchio's universe, which had appeared incomprehensible to us at the beginning. Now we can reconstruct its complex stratification. It began by departing at once from the Genesis account and its orthodox interpretation by affirming the existence of a primordial chaos: "I have said that, in my opinion, all was chaos, that is, earth, air, water, and fire were mixed together. . . ." (7 February). In a subsequent interrogation, as we saw, the vicar general interrupted Menocchio, who was talking about Mandeville's *Travels*, to ask him "if this book did not have something to say about chaos." Menocchio replied negatively, reiterating (consciously, this time) the previously mentioned interweaving of written and oral culture: "No sir, but I read about that in the *Fioretto della Bibbia*; the other things I have said about this chaos I made up in my own head."

Actually, Menocchio hadn't remembered correctly. The *Fioretto della Bibbia* doesn't exactly speak of chaos. Nevertheless, the biblical account of creation is preceded there, without any concern for coherence, by a series of chapters taken largely from the *Elucidarium* of Honorius of Autun, where metaphysics is mixed with astrology and theology with the doctrine of the four temperaments. Chapter 4 of the *Fioretto*, "How God created man out of four elements," begins: "As it is said, in the beginning God made a great substance, which had neither form nor style: and he made so much that he could take and do what he wanted with it, and he divided it and apportioned it so that he made man out of it composed of four elements. . . ." Here, as we see, a primordial confusion of elements is postulated, which, in fact, excludes creation *ex nihilo*: but chaos is not mentioned. It is probable that Menocchio took this learned term from a book that he mentioned incidentally during the second trial (but which, as we shall have occasion to say, was already known to him in 1584): the *Supplementum supplementi delle croniche* by the Augustinian hermit Jacopo Filippo Foresti. This chronicle, written at the end of the fifteenth century but deriving from foundations that were still clearly medieval, begins with the creation of the world. After citing Augustine, the patron of his order, Foresti wrote: "and it is said in the beginning God made heaven and earth: not that this already existed, but there was the potential, because afterward it is written that the heavens were made; it is as if considering the seed of a tree we were to say here is the root, the trunk, the branches, the fruits, and the leaves: it is not that they are already present, but they must grow from this. And so it is said in the beginning God made heaven and earth, really the seed of heaven and earth, since the substance of heaven and earth was still in a state of confusion; but as it was certain

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25): There may be an echo here of the *Divine Comedy* (*Purgatory*, X, 124–

... worms
born to produce the angelic butterfly,

especially when we remember that Vellutello's commentary on these verses ("Angelic, that is to say divine, created by God to fill the seats lost by the black angels who were driven from heaven. . . .") is reproduced literally in another passage of Menocchio's cosmogony: "And this God then made Adam and Eve, and people in great number to fill those seats of the expelled angels." It would be strange indeed if the occurrence of two coincidences in a single page came about by chance. But if Menocchio had read Dante—perhaps as a key to knowledge and as a master of religious and moral truths—why did precisely those verses ("worms/ born to produce the angelic butterfly") stick in his mind?

Actually, Menocchio hadn't taken his cosmogony from books: "From the most perfect substance of the world [the angels] were produced by nature, just as worms are produced from a cheese, and when they emerged received will, intellect, and memory from God as he blessed them": it seems clear from Menocchio's reply that the repeated mention of the cheese and the worms was intended to serve simply as an explanatory analogy. He used the familiar experience of maggots appearing in decomposed cheese to elucidate the birth of living things of which the first and most perfect were the angels—from chaos, that "great and crude" matter, without resorting to divine intervention. Chaos preceded the "most holy majesty," which is not further defined; from chaos came the first living beings—the angels, and God himself who was the greatest among them—by spontaneous generation, "produced by nature." Menocchio's cosmogony was basically materialistic—and tendentially scientific. The doctrine of the spontaneous generation of life from inanimate matter, fully accepted by all the intellectuals of the day (and which would hold the field until Francesco Redi's experiments disproved it more than a century later), was in fact more scientific than the doctrine of the Church concerning creation, which was based on Genesis. A Walter Raleigh in the name of "experience without art" could relate the woman who made cheese (cheese!) and the natural philosopher: they both knew that the rennet made cheese coagulate in the churn, even if they couldn't explain why.

And yet harking back to Menocchio's daily experience doesn't explain everything: in fact, it may not explain anything. A quick analogy between the coagulation of cheese and the thickening of the nebula destined to form the terrestrial globe may seem obvious to us, but it certainly wasn't for Menocchio. And there's still more. In suggesting this

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incomprehensible. This case, unlike others examined thus far, involves not only a reaction filtered through the written page, but also an irreducible residue of oral culture. The Reformation and the diffusion of printing had been necessary to permit this *different* culture to come to light. Because of the first, a simple miller had dared to think of *speaking out*, of voicing his own opinions about the Church and the world. Thanks to the second, *words* were at his disposal to express the obscure, inarticulate vision of the world that fermented within him. In the sentences or snatches of sentences wrung out of books he found the instruments to formulate and defend his ideas over the years, first with the other villagers, later even against judges armed with learning and authority.

In this manner he had experienced in his own person the historic leap of incalculable significance that separates the gesticulated, mumbled, shouted speech of oral culture from that of written culture, toneless and crystallized on the page. The first is almost an extension of the body, the second "a thing of the mind." The victory of written over oral culture has been, principally, a victory of the abstract over the empirical. In the possibility of finding release from particular situations one has the root of the connection that has always indissolubly bound writing and power. This is clear in cases such as those of Egypt and China, where for millennia priestly and bureaucratic classes monopolized hieroglyphic and ideographic writing. The invention of the alphabet, which broke this monopoly for the first time about fifteen centuries before Christ, wasn't enough, however, to make the written word accessible to everyone. Only printing made this a more concrete possibility.

Menocchio was proudly aware of the originality of his ideas: because of this he wanted to expound them to the highest religious and secular authorities. But at the same time he felt the need to master the culture of his adversaries. He understood that the written word, and the ability to master and to transmit written culture, were sources of power, so he didn't confine himself to denouncing a "betrayal of the poor" in the use of a bureaucratic (and sacerdotal) language such as Latin. The scope of his polemic was broader. "Can't you understand, the inquisitors don't want us to know what they know!" he exclaimed to a fellow villager, Daniel Iacomet, many years after the events we are recounting here. The distinction between "we" and "they" was a sharp one. "They" were the "superiors," the powerful ones—not just those at the pinnacle of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, "We" were the peasants. Almost certainly Daniel was illiterate (when he reported Menocchio's words during the second trial he didn't sign his deposition). Menocchio, instead, knew how to read and write: but he didn't think because of this that his long struggle against authority concerned him alone. The desire "to seek exalted things," which Menocchio had vaguely disavowed twelve years earlier, before the

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inquisitor at Portogruaro, continued to seem to him not only legitimate but also within everybody's reach. Instead, the pretension of priests to maintain their monopoly over a knowledge that could be bought for "2 soldi" on Venetian book sellers' stalls must have appeared to him unjustified, in fact, absurd. The idea of culture as privilege had been seriously impaired (but certainly not killed off) by the invention of printing.

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Menocchio had found in that *Fioretto della Bibbia* bought in Venice for "2 soldi" the learned terms that he used in his confessions alongside words from everyday life. Thus, in the interrogation of 12 May, we find "infant in the mother's womb," "herds," "carpenter," "bench," "workmen," "cheese," "worms"; but also "imperfect," "perfect," "substance," "matter," "will, intellect and memory." A medley of words expressing the humble and the sublime, which at first glance seems to resemble this, characterizes especially the first part of the *Fioretto*. Take as an example chapter 3, "How God cannot want evil, or receive it": "God cannot want evil or receive it because he has regulated these elements so that one does not interfere with the other, and they will remain like this as long as there shall be a world. Some say that the world will exist eternally, reasoning that when a body dies, flesh and bones will turn into that matter from which they were created. . . . We can readily see the function of nature, how it reconciles discordant things in such a fashion that it reduces all the differences to unity and combines them into one body and one substance: and also it combines them in plants and in seeds, and by the joining of male and female engenders beings according to the natural course. Jove produces other creatures, who through him engender according to their order. And therefore you see that nature is subject to God. . . ."

"Matter," "nature," "unity," "elements," "substance"; the origin of evil; the influence of the stars; the relationship between creator and creature. Examples such as these could be multiplied. Some of the key concepts and some of the most debated themes in the cultural history of antiquity and the Middle Ages reached Menocchio by way of such a poor and disorganized compilation as the *Fioretto della Bibbia*. The importance of this cannot be overemphasized. First of all, it provided Menocchio with the linguistic and conceptual tools to develop and express his view of

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We have to break through the surface of this terminology in order to release the living stream of Menocchio's deepest thoughts. What did Menocchio really mean when he spoke of God, of the most holy majesty of God, of the spirit of God, of the Holy Spirit, of the soul?

Let's begin with the most obvious element in Menocchio's language: the abundance of metaphors. These are metaphors that introduce the words of everyday experience we have already noted—"infant in the mother's womb," "herds," "carpenter," "cheese," and so forth. Now, the images that adorn the *Fioretto della Bibbia* have an obvious and exclusive didactic purpose: namely, they illustrate with directly comprehensible examples the arguments that are to be transmitted to the reader. The function of metaphors in Menocchio's speech is different—in a sense, opposed. In his mental and linguistic world, marked as it was by the most absolute literalism, even metaphors must be taken in a rigorously literal sense. Their content, which is never accidental, allows the thread of the real and inexpressed speech of Menocchio to show through.

We might begin with God. For Menocchio, he is above all a father. The play of metaphors gives a new meaning to such a worn-out and traditional epithet. God is a father to men: "We are all children of God and of the same nature as he who was crucified." All: Christians, heretics, Turks, Jews—"they are all dear to him and they are all saved in the same way." Whether they desire it or not, they always remain children of the father: "He claims all, Turks, Jews, Christians, heretics, and all equally in the same way as a father who has several children and claims them all equally; even if there are some who do not want to be, they belong to the father." In his love the father doesn't even mind being cursed by his children: to blaspheme "only hurts oneself and not one's neighbor, just as if I have a cloak and tear it, I injure only myself and no one else, and I believe that he who does no harm to his neighbor does not commit sin; and because we are all children of God, if we do not hurt one another, as for example, if a father has several children, and one of them says 'damn my father,' the father may forgive him, but if this child breaks the head of someone else's child he cannot pardon him so easily if he does not pay:

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therefore have I said that it is not sinful to blaspheme because it does not hurt anyone."

All this is tied, as we saw, to the assertion that it is less important to love God than to love one's neighbor—a neighbor who should also be understood as concretely and literally as possible. God is a loving father but removed from the life of his children.

But besides being a father, God also seems to be the very image of authority for Menocchio. At various times he speaks of a "most high majesty," sometimes distinguished from God, sometimes identified with the "spirit of God" or with God himself. Moreover, God is compared to a "great captain" who "sent his son as an ambassador to men in this world." Or, he is compared to a gentleman: in paradise "he who will sit on those seats will want to be able to see everything, and resembles that gentleman who lays out all things to be seen." The "Lord God" is first of all, and literally, a lord: "I said that if Jesus Christ was God eternal he should not have allowed himself to be taken and crucified, and I was not certain about this article but had doubts as I have said, because it seemed a strange thing to me that a lord would allow himself to be taken in this way, and so I suspected that since he was crucified he was not God. . . ."

A lord. But the principal quality of lords is that of not having to work, because they have people to work for them. This is the case with God: "as for indulgences, I believe that they are good because if God has put a man in his place as pope to grant a pardon, that is good, because it is as if we are receiving it from God since these indulgences are given by one who is acting as his steward." But the pope isn't God's only steward. The Holy Spirit also "is like a steward of God; this Holy Spirit selected four captains, or should we say stewards, from among those angels who were created. . . ." Men were made by "the Holy Spirit through the will of God and by his ministers; it is the same as when a steward joins in the work of his agents, just so the Spirit lent a hand."

Thus God is not only a father, but a master—a landowner who doesn't soil his hands working, but assigns the wearisome tasks to his stewards. Even the latter, for that matter, "lend a hand" only rarely. The Holy Spirit, for example, made the earth, trees, animals, man, fish, and all other creatures "by means of the angels, his workers." True, Menocchio doesn't rule out (replying to a question on this subject by the inquisitors) that God could have made the world even without the assistance of the angels: "Just as someone who is building a house uses workers and helpers, but we say that he built it. Similarly, in making the world God used the angels, but we say that God made it. And just as that master carpenter in building the house could also do it by himself, but it would take longer, so God in making the world could have done it by himself,

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but over a longer period of time." God has the "power": "where there is will there must also be the power to do a thing. For example, the carpenter wants to make a bench and needs tools to do it, and if he does not have the wood, his will is useless. Thus we say about God, that in addition to will, power also is needed." But this "power" consists of operating "through skilled workers."

These recurring metaphors certainly are a response to the need of making the principal figures of religion more familiar and comprehensible by talking about them in terms of daily experience. Menocchio, who had told the inquisitor that his trades, besides that of miller, were "carpenter, sawyer, mason," compared God to a carpenter, to a mason. But a deeper content emerges from the abundance of metaphors. The "making of the world" is, once again, literally, a material act—"I believe that it is impossible to make anything without matter, and even God could not have made anything without matter"—this was manual labor. But God is a lord, and lords don't work with their hands. "Has this God himself created or produced any beings?" the inquisitors asked. "He has arranged to provide the will through which all things have been made," Menocchio replied. Even if compared to a carpenter or mason, God always had "assistants" or "laborers" in his service. Only once, carried away by his enthusiasm while inveighing against the adoration of images, did Menocchio speak of "God alone who has made the heavens and the earth." Actually, for him, God hadn't made anything, just as his "steward," the Holy Spirit also had not. It was the "workmen," the "laborers"—the angels—who had set their hands to "making the world." As for the angels, who had made them? Nature: "they were produced by nature from the most perfect substance of the world, just as worms are produced from a cheese. . . ."

Menocchio had been able to read in the *Fioretto della Bibbia* that "the angels were the first creatures to have been created in the world, and because they were created from the most noble matter that existed, they sinned in their pride and were deprived of their places." But he had also been able to read: "And so you see that nature is subject to God just as the hammer and anvil are to the smith who newly makes whatever he desires, sometimes a sword, sometimes a knife, sometimes other things: and although he makes them with the hammer and anvil, it is not the hammer that makes them, but the smith." But Menocchio couldn't accept this. His stubbornly materialistic view didn't admit the existence of God the creator. Of a God, yes—but he was a distant God, like a master who has left his fields in the hands of stewards and "laborers."

Distant—or (and it was really the same) a God who was very close, dissolved among the elements, identical with the world. "I believe that the

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eagerly wished to approach: "I said," he informed his judges at Portogruaro, "that if I had permission to go before the pope, or a king, or a prince who would listen to me, I would have a lot of things to say; and if he had me killed afterwards, I would not care." Thus the most complete presentation of Menocchio's ideas must be sought in the statements he made during the trial. But we must also try to explain how Menocchio managed to say things that were apparently contradictory to the people of Montereale.

Unfortunately, the only solution we're able to suggest is purely conjectural, namely, that Menocchio might have had indirect knowledge of Servetus's *De Trinitatis erroribus*, or had read the now lost Italian translation introduced into Italy about 1550 by Giorgio Filaretto, called *Turca* or *Turchetto*. This is certainly a risky conjecture, since we are dealing with a very complicated text, bristling with philosophical and theological terms—a book infinitely more difficult than the ones Menocchio had read. But it may just be possible to discover an almost inaudible echo of it, however feeble and disfigured, in Menocchio's utterances.

At the heart of Servetus's first work there is a vindication of Christ's full humanity—a humanity defied through the Holy Spirit. Now, in the first interrogation, Menocchio stated: "I doubted that he . . . was God, instead he must have been some prophet, some great man sent by God to preach in this world. . . ." He clarified this subsequently: "I think that he is a man like us, born of man and woman like us; and that all he had he received from man and woman: but it is quite true that God sent the Holy Spirit to elect him as his son."

But what was the Holy Spirit for Servetus? He began by listing the various meanings ascribed to this expression in Scripture: "For by Holy Spirit it means now God himself, now an angel, now the spirit of a man, a sort of instinct or divine inspiration of the mind, a mental impulse, or a breath; although sometimes a difference is marked between breath and Spirit. And some would have the Holy Spirit mean nothing other than the right understanding and reason of man." This diversity of meanings corresponds closely to what one encounters in Menocchio: "I believe . . . he is God. . . . It is that angel to whom God has given his will. . . . I believe that our Lord God gave us free will and the Holy Spirit in our body. . . . [I believe that] the spirit comes from God, and is the one, when we have to do something, who inspires us to do this or that thing or not to do it."

This discussion about terms was intended by Servetus to demonstrate the inexistence of the Holy Spirit as a person distinct from that of the Father: "As though Holy Spirit denoted not a separate thing, but an activity of God, a certain energy or inspiration of the power of God." The assumption behind this pantheism was the thesis of the living presence of

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the Spirit in man and in the whole of reality. "In speaking of the Spirit of God," Servetus wrote recalling a time when he still espoused the errors of the philosophers, "it was enough for me if I understood that the third being was in a sort of corner. But now I know, what he himself said: 'I am a God at hand, and not a God afar off; now I know that God's universal spirit fills the earth, encompasses all things, and produces virtues in every man. With the prophet I would cry out, 'O Lord, whither shalt I go from thy spirit?' since neither above nor below, is there any place without the spirit of God.' As for Menocchio he had been going around telling his fellow villagers, "What do you think God is? Everything that can be seen is God. . . ." "The sky, earth, sea, air, abyss, and hell, all is God."

Servetus had used every tool at his disposal to dismantle a philosophical and theological system that had endured for more than a millennium: Greek, Hebrew, Valla's philology and the Cabala, Tertullian's materialism and Ockham's nominalism, theology and medicine. He ended up restoring the original meaning by dint of scraping away the incrustations that had formed about the word "spirit." The difference between "spiritus," "flatus," and "ventus," seemed to him to be merely conventional, tied to linguistic usage. There was a profound analogy between "spirit" and breath: "Again, all that is made by the power of God is said to be made by his breath and inspiration; for there can be no uttering of a word without a breathing of the spirit, just as we can not utter speech without exhaling; and therefore we say the breath of the mouth and the breath of the lips. . . I say, therefore, that our spirit dwelling in us is God his very self; and that this is the Holy Spirit in us. . . . Outside man there is no Holy Spirit." This should be compared with Menocchio's "What do you imagine God to be? God is nothing else than a little breath. . . . Air is God. . . . We are gods. . . . I believe that the [Holy Spirit] is in everybody. . . . What is this Holy Spirit? . . . This Holy Spirit can't be found."

To be sure, the leap from the words of the Spanish physician to those of the miller of Friuli is enormous. On the other hand, we know that Servetus's writings circulated widely in sixteenth-century Italy and not only among the learned. Menocchio may provide a clue as to how these writings might have been read, understood and misunderstood. This hypothesis would permit us to resolve the discrepancy between the testimony of the people of Monteraiale and the records of the trial. It would actually appear to be more a case of intentionally choosing to operate on different levels than of a contradiction. In the rough explanations that Menocchio cast at the villagers we would be obliged to see a conscious attempt to translate the obscure Servetian ideas, as he had understood them, into something that would be comprehensible to ignorant listeners. He reserved expounding the doctrine in all its

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complexity for a different audience: the pope, a king, a prince, or, for lack of anyone better, the inquisitor of Aquileia and the mayor of Portogruaro.

We had identified, behind the books mulled over by Menocchio, a method he used in his reading; and behind this a solid stratum of oral culture, which, at least in the case of the cosmogony, we had seen rise directly to the surface. But to suggest that some of Menocchio's ideas were a distant echo of such a sophisticated text as the *De Trinitatis erroribus* doesn't mean that we have to retrace our steps. That echo, if it's real, should be considered as a translation of a learned conception, containing a powerful materialistic component, into terms of popular materialism (further simplified for his fellow villagers). God, the Holy Spirit, the soul—none exist as separate substances. Only matter imbued with divinity, the mixture of the four elements, exists. Once again we're scraping against the foundations of Menocchio's oral culture.

His was a religious materialism. A remark such as that about God—"it's a betrayal on the part of Scripture to deceive us, and if he really was God Almighty he would let himself be seen"—was simply the rejection of that God about whom priests and their books spoke to him. He saw his own God everywhere: "What is this Almighty, God?— besides earth, water, and air," he added quickly (always according to the same witness, the priest Andrea Bionima). God and man, man and the world seemed to him interwoven in a web of revelatory relationships: "I believe that [men] are made of earth, but however, of the most beautiful metal that can be found and this is why one sees man desiring these metals and above all gold. We are composed of the four elements, participate in the seven planets. So one partakes more of one planet than another and is more mercurial and more jovial, depending under which sign he is born." In this view of a reality pervaded by the divine, even priestly benedictions were acceptable because "the devil is accustomed to enter things and poison them," and "the holy water of the priest drives away the devil" — even if, he added, "I believe that all water has been blessed by God," and "if a layman knew the words they would be worth as much as [those] of the priest, because God has given his power (virtù) equally to all and not to one more than another." This, in short, was peasant religion that had very little in common with that preached by the priest from his pulpit. Certainly, Menocchio went to confession (outside the village, however), received communion, and, undoubtedly, had his children baptized. And

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yet, he rejected divine creation, the incarnation, and redemption. He denied the efficacy of the sacraments for salvation and affirmed that to love one's neighbor was more important than to love God. He believed that the entire world was God. But there was one flaw in this so thoroughly coherent complex of ideas: the soul.

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Let's return to the identification of God with the world. "We say," Menocchio had exclaimed, "that man is made in the image and likeness of God, and in man there is air, fire, earth, and water, and it follows from this that air, earth, fire, and water are God." The *Fioretto della Bibbia* was the source for this assertion. He had borrowed from it—making one decisive change in the process—the ancient concept of the correspondence between man and world, microcosm and macrocosm: "and therefore man and woman who were the last to be made were made of earth and of base matter, so that they should ascend to heaven not in arrogance but in humility; inasmuch as the earth is a base element that is stomped upon all day long, and in the midst of other elements, which are joined and bound together and surrounded in the same way as an egg where you see the yolk in the middle of the egg, and which has albumen about it and the shell outside it; and the elements are similarly together in the world. The yolk corresponds to the earth, the albumen to the air, the thin tissue that is between the albumen and the shell to the water, the shell to the fire: and they are joined together in this way, so that cold and heat, dry and moist may work on each other. And our bodies are made out of and composed of these elements: by our flesh and bone we mean earth, by blood we mean water, by breathing air, and by heat fire. Our bodies are composed of these four elements. Our body is subject to the things of this world, but the soul is subject only to God, because it is made in his image and composed of more noble matter than the body. . . ." It was a refusal, then, to admit the existence of an immaterial principle in man—the soul—distinct from the body and from its operations that had led Menocchio to identify not only man with the world, but the world with God. "When man dies he is like an animal, like a fly," he used to repeat to the villagers, perhaps echoing, more or less knowingly, the verses in Ecclesiastes, "and . . . when man dies his soul and everything else about him also dies."

However, at the beginning of the trial Menocchio denied ever having said anything of the kind. He was trying, without much success, to be cautious and follow the advice of his old friend, the vicar of Polcenigo.

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And to the question "What is your belief concerning the souls of faithful Christians?" he had answered: "I said that our souls return to the majesty of God who deals with them as he pleases, depending on how they have acted, assigning paradise to the good and hell to the bad and purgatory to some." He thought he had found cover in the orthodox doctrine of the Church (a doctrine that he didn't share in the least). Actually, he had plunged himself into a terrible labyrinth.

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In the subsequent interrogation (16 February) the vicar general began with a request for clarification concerning "the majesty of God." This led up to a direct attack: "You say that our souls return to the majesty of God, and you have already stated that God is nothing other than air, earth, fire, and water: how then can these souls return to the majesty of God?" The contradiction was indeed real; Menocchio didn't know how to reply: "It's true I said that air, earth, fire, and water are God, and I cannot deny what I said; and as for souls, these came from the spirit of God, and therefore they must return to the spirit of God." Pressing on, the vicar general inquired: "Are the spirit of God and God the same thing? And is this spirit of God incorporated in these four elements?"

"I don't know," Menocchio said. He remained silent for a moment. He may have been tired. Or perhaps he didn't know what "incorporated" meant. Finally, he replied: "I believe that we men all have a spirit from God, which if we do good is cheerful, and if we do evil, that spirit is angry."

"Do you mean that this spirit of God is the one born from that chaos?"

"I don't know."
"Confess the truth," the vicar general began again, unrelenting, "and resolve this question; namely, if you believe that souls return to the majesty of God, and that God is air, water, earth, and fire, how then do they return to the majesty of God?"

"I believe that our spirit, which is the soul, returns to God since he gave it."

How stubborn this peasant was! Fortified by all his patience and all his logic, the vicar general, Giambattista Maro, doctor of canon and civil law, again urged him to reflect and state the truth.

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"I said," Menocchio then replied, "that all things in the world are God, and as for myself I believe that our souls revert into all the things of the world and receive benefits, as it pleases God." He was silent momentarily. "These souls are like those angels depicted with God whom he keeps by him, according to their merits, and some who were evil he disperses about the world."

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And so the interrogation closed on yet another of Menocchio's many contradictions. After making an assertion that, for lack of a better term, we can describe as pantheistic ("all things in the world are God")—a statement that obviously denied the possibility of individual survival ("I believe . . . that our souls revert into all the things of the world . . .")—Menocchio probably was seized by a doubt. Fear or uncertainty silenced him briefly. Then, from the depths of his memory there had flashed before him a picture that he must have seen in a church, perhaps in some country chapel: God surrounded by a chorus of angels. Was this what the vicar general wanted?

But the vicar general was asking for something very different from a fleeting allusion to the traditional image of paradise—accompanied, moreover, by an echo of the popular belief, pre-Christian in origin, that the souls of the dead are "dispersed about the world." In the subsequent interrogation he immediately put Menocchio on the spot, listing for him his previous denials of the soul's immortality: "so, tell the truth and speak more openly than you did in the preceding examination." At this point Menocchio made an unexpected statement that contradicted what he had said in the first two interrogations. He admitted having spoken of the immortality of the soul with certain friends (Giuliano Stefanut, Melchiorre Gerbas, Francesco Fasseta), but he clarified: "I said these very words, that when the body dies the soul dies but the spirit remains."

Up to that point Menocchio had ignored this distinction: in fact, he had spoken explicitly of "our spirit, which is the soul." Now, in the face of the vicar's astonished query, "whether he believed that there are a body, soul, and spirit in man, and that these things are distinguished from one another, and that the soul is one thing and the spirit another," Menocchio replied: "Yes sir, I do believe that the soul is one thing and the spirit another. The spirit comes from God, and is the one, when we have to do

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something, who inspires us to do this or that thing or not to do it." The soul, or better still (as he explained in the course of the trial) souls, are nothing else than the various operations of the mind, and perish with the body: "I will tell you there are in man intellect, memory, will, thought, belief, faith, and hope. These seven things God gave to man, and they are like souls through which works are to be done, and this is what I meant saying when the body dies the soul dies." The spirit instead "is separated from man, has the same will as man, and sustains and governs this man"; after death it returns to God. This is the good spirit: "I believe," Menocchio explained, "that all men in this world can be tempted, because our heart has two parts, one bright, and the other dark; in the dark one there is the evil spirit, and in the bright one the good spirit."

Two spirits, seven souls, and a body composed of four elements: how had such an abstruse and complicated anthropology cropped up in Menocchio's head?

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As in the case of the relationship between the body and the four elements, the enumeration of the various "souls" could also be found in the *Fioretto della Bibbia*: "And it is true that the soul has as many names in the body as it has functions there. So, when the soul animates the body, it is called substance; when it desires, it is called the heart; when the body breathes, it is called spirit; when it comprehends and feels, it can be called judgment; when it imagines and thinks, it can be called imagination or memory; therefore, intelligence is located in the highest reaches of the soul, where we receive reason and knowledge, since we are in the image of God. . . ." This is a sequence that corresponds to Menocchio's only in part; but the similarities are unquestionable. The chief difference is the presence of the spirit among the names of the soul—traced back etymologically, moreover, to the bodily act of breathing. Where then did Menocchio's distinction between a mortal soul and an immortal spirit originate?

The distinction had reached him through a long and complicated process. We must go back to the discussions on the problem of the immortality of the soul that began in Averroist circles during the first decades of the sixteenth century, especially among the faculty of the University of Padua, who had been influenced by the thought of Pietro Pomponazzi. Philosophers and physicians openly asserted that at the

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death of the body, the individual soul—distinguished from the active intellect postulated by Averroes—also perished. Elaborating upon these themes in a religious context, the Franciscan Girolamo Calaneo (who had studied at Padua and was later condemned to life imprisonment for heresy) maintained that after death the souls of the saved slept until Judgment Day. Probably following in his footsteps the ex-Franciscan Paolo Ricci, later better known as Camillo Renato, restated the doctrine of the sleep of the soul, distinguishing between the *anima*, condemned to perish with the body, and the *animus*, destined to be revived at the end of time. Through the direct influence of Renato, an exile in the Valltellina, this doctrine was adopted, although not without some opposition, by Venetian Anabaptists, who “believed that the soul (*anima*) was life and that although man died this *spirit* that sustained life in man went into God, and life went into the earth and no longer knew either good or evil, but slept until the day of Judgment when our Lord would revive all men”—except for the wicked, for whom there is no future life of any kind, since there is “no other hell besides the grave.”

From professors at the University of Padua to a miller in the Friuli: this chain of influences and contacts is indeed peculiar, although historically plausible because we know, very probably, who constituted its final link—the priest of Polcenigo, Giovanni Daniele Melchiori, Menocchio’s childhood friend. In 1579–80, a few years before Menocchio’s trial, he too had been prosecuted for heresy by the tribunal of the Inquisition in Concordia and had been found to be “lightly suspect.” The accusations made against him by his parishioners were many and varied: from that of being a “whoremonger and ruffian” to that of treating sacred things (for example, the consecrated hosts) without respect. But it’s another point that interests us: a statement allegedly made by Melchiori in the village square that “we go to paradise only on Judgment Day.” At his trial Melchiori denied having said this but he admitted having spoken of the difference between physical and spiritual death on the basis of what he had read in a book entitled *Discorsi predicabili* by “a priest of Fano” whose name he didn’t remember. And to his inquisitors, with great self-confidence, he unburdened himself of a true and proper sermon: “I remember having said, speaking of bodily and spiritual death, that there are two kinds of death, each very different from the other. Although bodily death is common to all, spiritual death is only for the wicked; bodily death deprives us of life, spiritual death deprives us of life and grace; bodily death deprives us of friends, spiritual death of saints and angels; bodily death deprives us of earthly goods, spiritual death of celestial goods; bodily death deprives us of earthly gain, spiritual death deprives us of every merit of Jesus Christ our savior; bodily death

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deprives us of the terrestrial kingdom, spiritual death of the celestial kingdom; bodily death deprives us of sensibility, spiritual death deprives us of sensibility and intellect; bodily death deprives us of this physical motion, and spiritual death immobilizes us like stone; bodily death causes the body to stink, spiritual death causes the soul to stink; bodily death gives the body to the earth, spiritual death the soul to hell; the death of the wicked is called terrible, as we read in David's Psalm '*mors peccatorum pessima*', the death of the good is called precious as we read in the same [source] '*pretiosa in conspectu Domini mors sanctorum eius*'; the death of the wicked is called death, the death of the good is called sleep, as we read in St. John the Evangelist, '*Lazarus amicus noster dormit*', and in another place '*non est mortua puella sed dormit*'; the wicked fear death and would rather not die, the good do not fear death but say, with St. Paul, '*cupio dissolvi et esse cum Christo*'. And this is the difference between the bodily death and the spiritual death about which I reasoned and preached: and if I have fallen into error, I am ready to recant and be corrected."

Even if he didn't have the book at hand, Melchiori remembered its contents perfectly—to the letter, in fact. He had read these things in the 34th discourse of the *Discorsi predicabili per documento del viver christiano*, a widely circulated manual for preachers compiled by the Augustinian hermit (not priest) Sebastiano Ammiani of Fano. But in that calculated play of innocent rhetorical contrasts Melchiori had isolated the very phrase that lent itself to a heretical interpretation: "the death of the wicked is called death, the death of the good is called sleep." Undoubtedly, he was aware of the implications of these words, since he had gone so far as to say that "we go to Paradise only on Judgment Day." The inquisitors instead revealed themselves to be much less aware and informed. With what heresy should Melchiori's ideas be connected? Their accusation that he had adhered "*ad perfidiam, impiam, eroniam, falsam et pravam hereticorum sectam... nempe Armentorum, nec non Valdensium et Ioannis Vicleff*" reflected this bewilderment. It would seem that the Anabaptist implications of the doctrine of the sleep of the soul were not apparent to the inquisitors of Concordia. Faced with theses that were suspect but of obscure origin they dug century-old definitions out of their manuals of controversy. The same thing occurred in Menocchio's case, as we shall see.

There is no mention of the distinction between mortal "soul" and immortal "spirit" in Melchiori's trial. Nevertheless, this was the basic assumption in his argument that souls slept until Judgment Day. This distinction must have reached Menocchio through the vicar of Polcenigo.

"I believe that our spirit, which is the soul, returns to God who gave it to us," Menocchio had said on 16 February (second interrogation). "When the body dies the soul also dies but the spirit remains," he corrected himself on 22 February (third interrogation). The morning of 1 May (sixth interrogation) he seemed to return to the original position: "soul and spirit are one thing."

He had been interrogated about Christ: "What was the Son: man, angel or God?" "A man," Menocchio had replied, "but the spirit was in him." Later, he added: "The soul of Christ either was one of those angels made in times past, or it was newly made by the Holy Spirit from the four elements, or from nature herself. Things cannot be done well except in threes, and therefore since God had given knowledge, will, and power to the Holy Spirit, he gave them also to Christ, so that later they could be a comfort to one another. . . . When there are two who cannot agree in an opinion, if there is a third, when two of the three agree, the third goes along; and therefore the Father has given will and knowledge and power to Christ because he has to judge. . . ."

The morning was almost over; the interrogation would be interrupted shortly for dinner and adjourned until the afternoon of the same day. Menocchio was talking on and on, mixing proverbs with recollections from the *Fioretto della Bibbia*, intoxicated by his own words. He was probably also tired. He had spent part of the winter and spring in prison and must have been looking forward impatiently to the conclusion of a trial that had already dragged on almost three months. And yet, to be questioned and listened to so attentively by such learned monks (there was even a notary to take down his replies) must have been a heady experience for someone who previously had only enjoyed a public made up almost exclusively of semiliterate peasants and artisans. His audience wasn't the popes, kings, and princes before whom he had dreamed of speaking—but, it was something. Menocchio was repeating things he had already said, adding new ones, omitting others, and contradicting himself. Christ was "a man like us, born of man and woman like us . . . but it is quite true that God had sent the Holy Spirit to elect him as his son. . . . After God had appointed him to be a prophet and had given him great wisdom and sent the Holy Spirit to him, I believe he performed miracles. . . . I believe he has a spirit like ours, because soul and spirit are the same thing." But what did it mean to say that soul and spirit are the same thing? "Earlier you said," interrupted the inquisitor, "that when the body dies the soul dies; therefore we should like to know if the soul of Christ also perished when he died." Menocchio hesitated, listed the seven souls

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given to man by God: intellect, memory. . . . During the afternoon's interrogation the judges persisted: did the intellect, memory, and will of Christ perish with the death of his body? "Yes my lords because up above, there is no need for their operations." Well then, had Menocchio dropped his idea of the survival of the spirit, identifying it with the soul destined to perish with the body? No, because a little later, while speaking of Judgment Day, he stated that "the seats were filled with celestial spirits but they will be refilled with the most select and intelligent terrestrial spirits," among which will be Christ's, "because the spirit of his son Christ is terrestrial." Now what?

It seems impossible—perhaps pointless—to try to make sense out of this muddle of words. And yet there was a real contradiction behind the verbal contradictions into which Menocchio had locked himself.

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He couldn't help but imagine an otherworldly life. He was certain that at death man reverted to the elements of which he was composed. But an irrepressible yearning drove him to picture some sort of survival after death. For this reason the abstruse contrast between mortal "soul" and immortal "spirit" had become fixed in his head. Thus the vicar general's clever question—"earlier you affirmed that God is nothing other than air, earth, fire, and water: how then do these souls return to the majesty of God?"—had silenced Menocchio who was always so ready to reply, argue, and ramble on. Certainly, the resurrection of the flesh seemed absurd and untenable to him: "No sir, I do not believe that we can be resurrected with the body on Judgment Day. It seems impossible to me, because if we should be resurrected, bodies would fill up heaven and earth: and the majesty of God will see our bodies with the intellect, no differently than when we, shutting our eyes and wanting to make something, put it in our mind and intellect, and thus see it with that intellect." As for hell, it seemed a priestly invention to him: "Preaching that men should live in peace pleases me but in preaching about hell, Paul says one thing. Peter another, so that I think it is a business, an invention of men who know more than others. I have read in the Bible," he added, trying to get the point across that the real hell was here on this earth, "that David made the Psalms while he was being pursued by Saul." But afterwards, contradicting himself, Menocchio admitted the validity of indulgences ("I think they are good") and of prayers for the dead

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(“because God gives such a one a small advantage and enlightens him a little more”). Above all, he daydreamed about paradise: “I believe it is a place that surrounds the entire world, and from it one sees all the things in the world, even the fish in the sea; and for those who are in that place it is like being at a feast. . . .” Paradise is a feast—the end of work, the negation of daily toil. “Intellect, memory, will, thought, belief, faith, and hope,” in other words, “the seven things . . . given by God to man, in the manner of a carpenter who wants to work—a carpenter with an ax and saw, wood and other tools—so God has given something to man to do his work,” but in paradise all these are useless: “up above, there is no need for operations.” In paradise matter becomes pliable, transparent: “with our bodily eyes we cannot see everything, but with the eyes of the mind all things will be transfixed, mountains, walls, and everything. . . .”

“It is like being at a feast,” Menocchio’s peasant paradise probably took more from the Mohammedan (rather than the Christian) hereafter about which he had read in Mandeville’s lively description: “paradise is a gentle place where one finds every kind of fruit in every season and rivers forever flowing with milk, honey, wine, and sweet water, and . . . there are beautiful and lordly houses befitting the merit of each, decorated with precious stones, gold, and silver. Each person will have maidens and make use of them and will find them always more beautiful. . . .” In any case, to the inquisitors who asked Menocchio “do you believe in an earthly paradise?” he replied with obvious sarcasm: “I believe that the earthly paradise is where there are gentlemen who have many possessions and live without working.”

Besides fantasizing about paradise Menocchio also desired a “new world”: “my mind was lofty” he said to the inquisitor, “and wished for a new world and way of life, because the Church did not act properly, and because there should not be so much pomp.” What did Menocchio mean by these words?

In societies founded on oral tradition, the memory of the community involuntarily tends to mask and reabsorb changes. To the relative flexibility of material life there corresponds an accentuated immobility of the image of the past. Things have always been like this; the world is what it is. Only in periods of acute social change does an image emerge, generally a mythical one, of a different and better past—a model of

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perfection in the light of which the present appears to be a deterioration, a degeneration. "When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?" The struggle to transform the social order then becomes a conscious attempt to return to this mythical past.

Even Menocchio contrasted the rich and corrupt Church he saw with the poverty and purity of a mythical primitive Church: "I wish that [the Church] were governed lovingly as it was when it was founded by our Lord Jesus Christ . . . now there are pompous Masses, and the Lord Jesus Christ does not want pomp." But unlike the majority of the other villagers, he had the ability to read, and it had given him the chance to acquire a view of the past that went beyond this summary antithesis. The *Fioretto della Bibbia* to some extent, but especially Foresti's *Supplementum supplementi delle croniche*, in fact offered an analytical account of human events that went from the creation of the world to the present, mixing sacred and profane history, mythology and theology, descriptions of battles and of countries, lists of princes and philosophers, of heretics and artists. We lack specific information about Menocchio's reactions to these texts. Certainly, they didn't leave him "troubled" as had Mandeville's *Travels*. The crisis of ethnocentricity in the sixteenth century (and for a long time afterward) came about through geography, however fantastic, not through history. Nevertheless, an almost imperceptible trail perhaps may allow us to understand something of the mood in which Menocchio read Foresti's chronicle.

The *Supplementum* was translated into the vernacular and reprinted both before and after the death of its author (1520). Menocchio must have had a posthumous translation that had been brought up to date by an unknown hand to include events close to his own time. Thus, he read the pages dedicated to the schism of "Martin known as Luther monk of the order of hermits of St. Augustine" by the anonymous editor—most likely one of Foresti's brother-members in the Augustinian order. The tone of these pages was singularly benevolent, although it turned into a clear-cut condemnation at the end: "The reason why he [Luther] broke out in such iniquity," wrote the unknown editor, "would appear to have been the supreme pontiff (although in *rei veritate* that is not so) but was rather certain malignant and evil men who, under guise of sanctity, performed enormous and excessive things." These men were the Franciscans, to whom first Julius II and later Leo X entrusted the preaching of indulgences. "And because ignorance is the mother of all error, and the habit of wealth had perhaps unduly inflamed the hearts of these friars toward the acquisition of money, these Observant monks erupted into great madness and became the cause of grave scandal to the people because of the follies they uttered while preaching these indulgences. And among other



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parts of Christianity, they spread widely in Germany. When they said some folly and certain men (of upright conscience and doctrine) sought to reprove them, the monks instantly declared these men excommunicated. Among them was this Martin Luther, who was a truly learned and literate man. . . . The causes of the schism, then, for the anonymous writer, were the "follies" of the rival order, which, when confronted by Luther's righteous reaction, had him excommunicated. "After which the aforesaid Martin Luther, who was of quite noble blood and was held in great esteem among all people, publicly began to preach against these indulgences, saying they were false and unjust. As a result he had everything turned upside down in very short order. And because the larger part of almost all wealth was in the hands of the clergy and there was ill will between the spiritual and temporal estates, he easily found a following among the latter and started a schism within the Catholic Church. And seeing that he was getting great support, he separated himself completely from the Roman Church and created a new sect and a new way of life through his various and diverse opinions and imaginings. And this is how it came about that a large number of those countries rebelled against the Catholic Church and do not render it obedience in anything. . . ."

"He created a new sect and a new way of life"; "I wished for a new world and way of life, because the Church did not act properly, and because there should not be so much pomp." The instant Menocchio uttered his aspirations for a reformation in religion (later we'll speak of his allusion to a "new world") dictated to him by his "lofty mind," he was echoing, knowingly or not, the portrayal of Luther that he had read in Foresti's chronicle. Certainly he wasn't repeating the religious ideas—on which, for that matter, the chronicle didn't dwell since it limited itself to condemning the "new kind of doctrine" that Luther had proposed. But, more than anything else, he couldn't be satisfied with the anonymous writer's cautious and perhaps ambiguous conclusion: "And in this way he has befuddled the ignorant populace; and those of knowledge and learning, hearing about the evil doings of the ecclesiastical state, join him, without considering that this proposition is not valid: clerics and ecclesiastics lead a low life, therefore the Church of Rome is not good. Because even if they do lead a low life, the Church of Rome is, nevertheless, good and perfect; and even if Christians are of low life, the Christian faith is, nevertheless, good and perfect." To Menocchio, as to Caravia, the "law and commandments of the Church" seemed to be "all a business" designed to enrich priests: for him the moral renewal of the clergy and a profound reformation in doctrine went hand-in-hand. By the unforeseen vehicle of Foresti's chronicle, Luther was being presented to

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trouble understanding the difference between them: "This one . . . is suspected of heresy, but he is not the same as Domenego," someone had said, speaking about Melchiorre. And another had remarked, "he says things one would expect from a madman, and also he gets drunk." Even the vicar general readily understood that he had before him a man of a very different stamp than the miller. "When you were saying that God does not exist did you really believe in your heart that there was no God?" he asked kindly. And Melchiorre promptly replied: "No father, because I believe that there is God in heaven and on earth, and that he can have me die any time he wishes; and I uttered those words because they had been taught to me by Menocchio." A few light penances were imposed on Melchiorre and they let him go. This was Menocchio's only follower in Montreale—at least, the only confessed follower.

Apparently, Menocchio hadn't wanted to confide even in his wife and children: "God forbid that they should have had such opinions." Despite all his ties to the village, he must have felt very much alone: "That night," he admitted, "when the father inquisitor told me 'Come away tomorrow to Maniago' I was almost beside myself, and I wanted to go out and cause some harm . . . I wanted to kill priests and set fire to churches and do something crazy; but because of my two little children, I restrained myself. . . ." This outburst of powerless desperation speaks eloquently about his isolation. In the face of the injustice afflicting him, his only reaction was one that he had suppressed instantly, that of individual violence: to revenge himself on his persecutors, lash out against the symbols of the oppression, and become an outlaw. A generation before, the peasants had set fire to the castles of the Friulian nobility. But times had changed.

Only the dream of a "new world" now remained to him. These are words that the passing of time have dulled, like coins that have passed through too many hands. Let's try to recapture their original meaning.

Menocchio didn't believe that the world had been created by God. In addition, he explicitly rejected original sin, declaring that man "begins to sin when he first takes his mother's milk, after he leaves the womb." And to him, Christ was simply a man. Consistently, then, any notion of religious millenarism was alien to him. He never alluded to the Second

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Coming in the course of his confessions. The "new world" for which he longed was thus an exclusively human reality, attainable by human means.

However, we tend to take for granted the banal metaphorical use of an expression that, when Menocchio used it, still retained all its original force. It was really a powerful metaphor on a metaphor. At the beginning of the century a letter had been printed under the name of Amerigo Vesputci directed to Lorenzo di Pietro de' Medici and entitled precisely *Mundus novus*. Giuliano di Bartolomeo del Giocondo, who translated the letter from Italian into Latin, explained the significance of the title in the preface: "A few days ago I wrote to you in detail about my return from those new regions . . . which it is appropriate to call a new world since there was no knowledge of them among our ancestors, and is a completely new thing to all listeners." These weren't the Indies, then, as Columbus had thought, and not even some new lands, but actually a new world unknown up to that time. *Licet appellare* [which it is appropriate to call] . . .; the metaphor was very new and he was almost offering an excuse to the reader. Taken in this sense the term began to circulate widely until it entered into everyday use. But Menocchio, as we saw, employed it differently, applying it not to a new continent but to a new society yet to be established.

We don't know who was first responsible for this shift. At any rate, the image of a radical and rapid transformation of society was behind it. In a letter that Erasmus wrote to Martin Bucer in 1527, he spoke bitterly of the violent turn taken by the Lutheran Reformation. He observed that, first, the assent of princes and bishops should have been sought, and any kind of seditious activity avoided; moreover, a number of things, among them the Mass, should have been "changed without disorder." There are people today, he concluded, who no longer accept anything that has to do with tradition (*"quod receptum est"*), as if a new world could be brought into being virtually instantaneously (*"quasi subito novus mundus condidisset"*). A slow and gradual transformation on the one hand, a rapid and violent upheaval (revolutionary, we'd call it) on the other: the contrast was distinct. But nothing having to do with geography was suggested by Erasmus with the expression "*novus mundus*"; the emphasis was rather on the term "*condere*" used to indicate the foundation of cities.

The shift of the metaphor "new world" from a geographical to a social context is, however, explicit in utopian literature at various levels. Let's take the *Capitolo, qual narra tutto l'essere d'un mondo nuovo, trovato nel mar Oceano, cosa bella, et dilettevole* (A chapter that narrates everything about a new world, discovered in the Ocean sea, a beautiful and enjoyable account), which appeared anonymously in Modena about the middle of the sixteenth

century. It is one of many variations on the old theme of the land of Cockaigne (referred to specifically in the *Bégola contra la Bizarria*, which precedes it, rather than in the *Capitolo*) located in this account among the lands discovered beyond the Ocean:

Anew a beautiful place has been discovered
By sailors in the Ocean Sea
Which had never before been seen, and never heard about . . .

The description follows the usual motifs of this grandiose peasant utopia:

A mountain of grated cheese
Is seen standing alone in the middle of the plain,
A kettle has been brought to its summit . . .
A river of milk gushes forth from a cave
And goes flowing through the town
Its embankments are made of ricotta . . .
The king of the place is called Bugalosso,
They have made him king because he is the laziest,
Like a haystack he is big and fat . . .
And from his arse manna comes forth
And when he spits, out come marzipans,
Instead of lice, he has fish in his head.

But this "new world" isn't only the land of abundance: it's also a place without the constraint of social institutions. There is no family, because total sexual liberty prevails there:

Neither skirts nor cloaks are needed there,
Nor shirts, nor pants at any time:
They all go naked, modest maids and stable boys.
There is neither heat nor cold at any time,
Everybody sees and touches the other as much as he desires:
Oh, what a happy life, oh what a good time . . .
There it does not worry us to have many children,
To mind them, as it does among us here,
And when it rains, it rains ravioli.
Nor about their girls and marrying them off
Is there any worry, since they go as booty,
Everyone satisfies his own appetites.

There is no property, because there is no need to work, and everything is in common:

Everyone has what he wants in every way,
And who should ever dare speak about working
They would hang him, so that the heavens couldn't save him . . .
There are no peasants or villains in that place,
Everyone is rich, everyone has what his heart desires,
Because table-tops are laden with goods . . .
Neither fields nor land are divided.

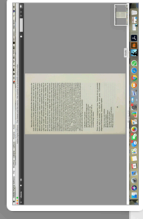
Come, poor things, let us sing
 That hope has at last arrived . . .
 After darkness comes the light,
 After evil comes the good,
 Our guide and leader, Abundance,
 Comes to lead us away from misery,
 And brings with herself grain aplenty:
 This alone is what sustains us,
 The beautiful and good white bread.

This poetical contrast provides us a counterpoise in the real world to the exaggerated fantasies about the land of Cockaigne. Opposite the "varied and strange roots" of the times of famine, "the beautiful and good white bread" eaten in company in times of plenty, is a "feast." "It is like being at a feast," Menocchio had said about paradise: a feast without end, free from the periodic alternation of "darkness and light," of famine and abundance, of Lent and Carnival. The land of Cockaigne beyond the ocean was also a single enormous feast. Who knows how much Menocchio's longed-for "new world" resembled it?

In any case, his words momentarily bring to the surface the deeply rooted *popular* origins of the utopias, both of the scholarly and popular varieties, which all too often have been considered to be purely literary exercises. Perhaps that image of a "new world" had a core that was ancient and tied to mythical tales of a remote age of prosperity. In other words, it didn't break the cyclical view of human history, typical of an age that had seen the establishment of the myths of renaissance, *reformation*, and of the New Jerusalem. None of this can be ruled out. But the fact remains that the image of a more just society was consciously projected into a noneschatological future. It wasn't the Son of Man high up in the clouds, but men like Menocchio—the peasants of Montreale, whom he had vainly tried to convince—who through their struggles, would have to be the bearers of this "new world."

The interrogations ended on the 12th of May. Menocchio was conducted back to his cell. A few days passed. Finally, on the 17th, he refused the services of a lawyer, which had been offered him, and submitted a long letter to his judges in which he asked to be forgiven for his past errors—the letter that his son had asked him to write three months before, in vain.

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with all my heart.' Similarly, I had been speaking with my brothers and spiritual fathers and they accused me, sold me as it were to the most reverend father inquisitor, and he had me brought to this Holy Office and put in prison. But I do not blame them, because it was the will of God. Although I do not know if they are spiritual brothers or fathers, however, I pardon them all who were the cause of it, so that God may forgive me just as I forgive them. There are four reasons why God wanted me to be taken to this Holy Office: first, to confess my errors; second, to do penance for my sins; third, to free me from the false spirit; fourth, to give an example to my children and to all my spiritual brothers so that they would not fall into these errors. Therefore, if I thought and believed and said and worked against the commandments of God and of the Holy Church, I am sad and sorrowful, repentant and unhappy. So I say *'mea culpa, mea maxima culpa'*, and for the remission of all my sins I ask forgiveness and mercy of the most Holy Trinity, Father and Son and Holy Spirit, and next of the glorious Virgin Mary and of all the saints in paradise, and also of your most holy and most reverend and most illustrious justice, so that you will want to pardon me and have mercy on me. And so I beg you in the name of the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ that you should not want to sentence me either in anger or in justice, but rather with love and with charity and with mercy. You know that our Lord Jesus Christ was merciful and forgiving, and is and always will be forgiving to Mary Magdalen who was a sinner, to St. Peter who denied him, to the thief who stole, to the Jews who crucified him, and to St. Thomas who would not believe until he had seen and touched. And so I firmly believe that he will forgive me and will have mercy on me. I have done penance in a dark prison one hundred and four days, in shame and disgrace and with the ruin and desperation of my house and my children. Therefore, I beg you for love of our Lord Jesus Christ and of his glorious mother the Virgin Mary that you repay it in charity and in mercy and not be the cause of separating me from the company of my children whom God gave to me for my happiness and my comfort. And so I promise never again to fall into these errors, but instead to be obedient to all my superiors and to my spiritual fathers in everything they will command me to do, and nothing else. I await your most holy, revered, and illustrious sentence with its lesson to live as a Christian, so that I may teach my children to be true Christians. These have been the causes of my errors: first, I believed in the two commandments love God and love your neighbor, and that this was enough; second, because I read that book of Mandeville about many kinds of races and different laws, which sorely troubled me; third, my mind and thought were making me know things that were improper; fourth, the false spirit was always tormenting me teaching me what was false and was not the truth; fifth, the

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disagreement that existed between me and the parish priest; sixth, that I worked and exhausted myself and became weak and because of this I could not obey the commandments of God and of the holy Church in all things. And so I make my defense with a plea for pardon and mercy, and not anger or justice, and I ask of our Lord Jesus Christ and of you mercy and forgiveness and not anger or justice. And do not pay attention to my falseness and ignorance."

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The appearance itself of the pages on which Menocchio had written, with the letters set side by side, almost without ligatures (as is usually done by "ultramontanes, women, and the aged" according to a contemporary writing manual), clearly demonstrates that their writer didn't have great familiarity with the pen. We get a very different first impression from the flowing and nervous writing of don Curzio Cellina, notary of Montereale, who seems to have been among Menocchio's accusers at the time of the second trial.

Menocchio surely had not gone beyond an elementary level of schooling: learning to write must have cost him an enormous effort—a physical effort as well, from the evidence of certain marks that give the impression of having been cut in wood rather than written on paper. He obviously found reading much easier. Although he had been confined "in a dark prison one hundred and four days," certainly without books at his disposal, he had dug out of his memory details, absorbed slowly and over a long period, of the story of Joseph, which he had read in the Bible and in the *Fioritto*. To this familiarity with the written page we owe the singular features of his letter to the inquisitors.

The following passages can be distinguished in it: 1) Menocchio states that he had always lived as a good Christian, although he recognizes that he has violated the commandments of God and of the Church; 2) he declares that the origin of this contradiction is in the "false spirit" that led him to believe and say what was false—portrayed by him, however, as an "opinion," not as the truth; 3) he compares himself to Joseph; 4) he gives four reasons why God had wanted him to be imprisoned; 5) he compares the judges to the merciful Christ; 6) he begs forgiveness of the judges; 7) he lists the six causes of his own errors. To this ordered external structure corresponds, internally, a language packed with symmetry, alliteration, and such rhetorical devices as

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anaphora or *derivatio*. It suffices to look at the first sentence: "I am a baptized Christian, and have always lived in a Christian way and have always performed the works of a Christian . . ." and have *always* lived . . . and *always* . . ." et sempre matina et sera io son segnato col segno de la santa croze . . ." (and always, morning and night, I crossed myself with the sign of the holy cross . . .). Of course, Menocchio was being rhetorical unknowingly, just as he wasn't aware that the first four "causes" that he mentioned were final, and the other six efficient, causes. Nevertheless, the wealth of alliteration and rhetorical figures in his letter wasn't accidental, but rather imposed by the necessity of finding a language capable of impressing itself on the memory easily. Before being set down as marks on the page, those words had certainly been thought over carefully, but from the start they had been conceived as written words. Menocchio's "spoken language," to the extent we can speculate about it from the transcripts of the interrogations recorded by notaries of the Holy Office, differed if only because it abounded in metaphors, which are totally lacking in the letter to the inquisitors.

The (established) association between Menocchio and Joseph and the (hoped for) one between the judges and Christ, is not, in fact, metaphorical. Scripture furnishes a network of *exempla* to which existing reality conforms or should conform. But it's the formula of the *exemplum* itself that causes the hidden content of the letter to emerge, independently of Menocchio's intentions. Menocchio considers himself a sort of Joseph, not only because he is an innocent victim, but also because he is capable of revealing truths unknown to anyone. The people, such as the priest of Montereale who had accused him and had him imprisoned, can be compared to Joseph's brothers, involved in God's inscrutable designs. But the protagonist is he, Menocchio-Joseph. It is he who forgives the evil brothers, who actually are the blind instruments of a superior will. This parallelism belied in advance the pleas for mercy with which the letter closes. Even Menocchio noticed the incongruity: "although I do not know if they are brothers or spiritual fathers," he added, attempting to reestablish a relationship of filial reverence that his various assumptions, in fact, denied. Nevertheless, he refrained from following blindly the advice of his son who had counseled him, through the priest, to promise "complete obedience to Holy Church." While recognizing his own errors, on the one hand Menocchio put them into a providential perspective, and on the other explained them with reasons that, with the exception of the mention of "the false spirit," didn't concede much from the inquisitors' point of view. These reasons in all likelihood were listed according to an order of decreasing importance. First of all, there were two textual citations, one implicit, the other explicit: to a Scriptural passage (Matthew

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be kept out of reach of such dangerous doctrines at any price. This was followed by a detailed refutation of Menocchio's ideas. With a completely rhetorical crescendo, altogether unusual in an inquisitorial trial, the judges stressed the audacity and obstinacy of the offender: "thus pertinacious in these heresies," "you persevered with an obdurate heart," "audaciously you denied," "you mutilated . . . with profane and impious words," "with diabolical mind you affirmed," "you did not keep holy fasting unbroken," "did we not find that you raged even against holy sermons?" "you damned . . . with your profane judgement," "the evil spirit led you to that which you have dared to affirm," "you strove with your polluted mouth," "you contrived this most wicked thing," "and you denied that there remained nothing unpolluted and not contaminated by you . . ." "you were accustomed to say . . . twisting with your malicious tongue," "finally you raged," "you served up poison," "and things not testified but heard by all were execrable," "and your malicious and perverse spirit was not content with all this . . . but raised horns, and like one of the giants (*gigantes*) you commenced to battle against the most holy ineffable Trinity," "the heavens were greatly troubled, all were distressed and listeners trembled at the inhuman and horrible things that were uttered by that profane mouth of yours about Jesus Christ the Son of God." "There's no doubt that the judges were trying to express a very real sentiment with this exaggerated literary verbiage: their astonishment and horror in the face of an unheard of mass of heresies, which in their eyes must have appeared as nothing less than hell spilling over.

But "unheard of" isn't quite exact. Unquestionably, these inquisitors had held innumerable trials in the Friuli involving Lutherans, witches, *benandanti*, blasphemers, even Anabaptists, without ever encountering anything like this. Only with regard to Menocchio's remark that for confession it sufficed to tell one's sins to God, did they recall the similar teaching of the "heretics," namely, the followers of the Reformation. For the rest, they sought occasional analogies and precedents from a more distant past, falling back on their own theological and philosophical education. Thus, Menocchio's reference to chaos was connected with the doctrines of an unnamed ancient thinker: "You brought again to light and firmly asserted as true that elsewhere censured opinion of an ancient philosopher that there was an eternal chaos from which everything of this world originated." The statement that "God is author of good but does not do evil, but the devil is author of evil and does not do good," was traced to the Manichean heresy: "finally, you resurrected the opinion of the Manichees about the twofold generation of good and evil . . ." Similarly, the notion of the equivalence of all religions was identified with Origen's doctrine of apocatastasis: "You brought again to light Origen's heresy that all peoples would be saved, Jews, Turks, pagans, Christians, and all

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infidels, since the Holy Spirit has been given equally to them all. . . .” Several of Menocchio’s assertions not only appeared heretical to the judges, but even opposed to natural reason. This was the case, for example, with the idea that “when we are in the mother’s womb we are just like nothing, dead flesh,” or the other about the non-existence of God: “Regarding the creation of the soul, you went against not only the holy Church, but also all philosophers. . . . That on which all agree, and which no one has ever dared to deny, you dared when you foolishly said ‘God does not exist.’”

In Foresti’s *Supplementum supplementi delle croniche*, Menocchio could have encountered fleeting references to the teachings of Origen and the Manichees. But to look upon them as precedents for Menocchio’s own ideas was obviously a mistake. The sentence confirmed the gulf, evident throughout the trial, separating Menocchio’s cultural world from the inquisitors’.

The duty of the latter was to compel the offender to reenter the Church. Menocchio was condemned to publicly abjure all his heresies, to fulfill various salutary penances, to wear forever a penitential garment, the *habito*, decorated with a cross, and to spend the rest of his life in prison at the expense of his children (“we solemnly condemn you to be confined between two walls, where you will remain for the entire duration of your life”).

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Menocchio languished in the prison at Concordia for almost two years. On the 18th of January 1586 his son Zianmuto, in the name of his brothers and his mother, presented a petition to Bishop Matteo Sanudo and Fra Evangelista Paleo, inquisitor of Aquileia and Concordia at that time. Menocchio himself had written it:

“Although I, poor Domenego Scandella prisoner, have on other occasions beseeched the Holy Office of the Inquisition to ask if I might be worthy of pardon, to permit me to do more penance for my error, now compelled by my extreme need I return to implore you to consider that more than two years have passed since I was taken from my home and condemned to such a cruel prison. I do not know why I did not die because of the foulness of the air, deprived of being able to see my dear wife due to the distance from here, burdened with family, with children who because of their poverty will be forced to abandon me, so that I will

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necessarily have to die. Therefore, I, repentant and grieving over my great sin, beg forgiveness, first from our Lord God, and then from this holy Tribunal, and ask them for the gift of my release. I offer proper guarantee that I will live in the teachings of the Holy Roman Church, and also that I will do whatever penance shall be imposed on me by this Holy Office, and I pray to Our Lord for their every happiness."

The assistance of a lawyer can be seen behind the stereotyped expressions of humility, purged of the customary provincialisms (for example, "Chiesa" is used instead of "Gesù"). Menocchio had expressed himself very differently two years before when he had taken pen in hand to write his defense. But this time the bishop and the inquisitor decided to exercise the mercy that they had refused in the past. First of all they summoned the jailer, Giovan Battista de' Parvi. He informed them that the prison in which Menocchio was confined was "strong and secure," barricaded by three "strong and safe" doors, so that no "other prison stronger or more severe than it can be found in the city of Concordia."

Menocchio had never left it, except to recite his abjuration, candle in hand, at the entrance of the cathedral of the city on the day sentence was passed and on the day of the fair of St. Stephen, and also to attend Mass and receive communion (but usually he had received it in prison). He had fasted many Fridays "except when he was so violently ill that it was thought he would die." Menocchio interrupted his fasting after his illness, "but many times on the eve of other holy days, many times he told me, 'Tomorrow bring me only some bread, because I want to fast, and don't bring me meat or anything else fat.'" "Many times," the jailer added, "I quietly went up to the door of his cell to hear what he was doing or saying, and I heard him praying." Other times Menocchio had been seen reading a book that had been brought to him by a priest, or "an *Officio of the Madonna* containing the seven psalms and other prayers"; also he had always resigned himself to God, and recognized that he was suffering for his sins and errors, and that God had helped him, because he didn't believe he could survive fifteen days suffering as he did in prison, and yet he had come this far." He had talked to the jailer frequently "about those follies of his that he had believed in previously, saying that he knew well that they really had been follies, but he had never adhered to them so that he really firmly believed them, but that it was through temptation of the devil that such extravagant thoughts had come into his head." In conclusion, he seemed to be sincerely repentant, even though (the jailer cautiously observed) "the hearts of men are not so easily known except by God." Then the bishop and the inquisitor had Menocchio summoned. He

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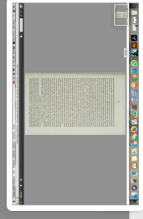
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wept and pleaded. Prostrate on the ground he humbly asked forgiveness: "I am deeply repentant that I have offended my Lord God, and I wish now that I had not said the follies that I said, into which I stupidly fell blinded by the devil and not understanding myself what he told me. . . . Not only have I not regretted doing the penance that was imposed upon me and to be in that prison, but I felt such a great happiness, and God comforted me always while I was praying to his Divine Majesty, that I felt I was in paradise." If it hadn't been for his wife and children, he exclaimed clasping his hands and raising his eyes to heaven, he would have wanted to remain in prison the rest of his life to expiate his offenses against Christ. But he was "very poor"; he had to support his wife, seven children, and a number of grandchildren with two mills and two rented fields. His prison, "harsh, earthen, dark, and humid," had ruined his health completely: "I lay four months without getting out of bed, and this year I had swollen legs, and I also became puffy in the face, as you can see, and I almost lost my hearing, and became weak and almost beside myself." "And truly," the notary of the Holy Office recorded, "while he was saying this, he was very pale in appearance, and an invalid in his body, and in a poor way."

The bishop of Concordia and the inquisitor of the Friuli recognized the signs of an authentic conversion in all this. They immediately summoned the mayor of Portogruaro and a few local nobles (among whom was the future historian of the Friuli, Giovan Francesco Palladio degli Olivi) and commuted his sentence. They assigned the village of Montereale to Menocchio as his perpetual prison with instructions not to leave it. He was expressly forbidden to speak of or to mention his dangerous ideas. He had to confess regularly, and wear over his clothing the *habito* with the painted cross, the sign of his infamy. A friend of his, Daniele de Biasio, made himself a bondsman guaranteeing to pay 200 ducats in case the sentence was violated. Menocchio returned to Montereale, broken in body and spirit.

He resumed his place in the community. Despite his troubles with the Holy Office, the defamatory condemnation, and prison, in 1590 he was reappointed administrator (*cameraro*) for the church of Santa Maria in Montereale. The new priest, Giovanni Daniele Melchiori, Menocchio's childhood friend, must have had a hand in the appointment. (We shall see later what had become of the previous priest, Odorico

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Vorai, who had denounced Menocchio to the Holy Office.) Apparently no one found it scandalous that a heretic, a heresiarch in fact, should administer the funds of the parish; and, for that matter, as we recall, even the priest had had dealings with the Inquisition.

The position of *camerario* was frequently entrusted to millers, perhaps because they were in a position to advance the money needed to administer the parish. In any case, the *camerari* tended to make good their expenditures by delaying to turn over the tithes collected from the faithful. In 1593, when Matteo Sanudo, Bishop of Concordia, came to Montereale in the course of a visitation of the entire diocese, he examined the account books that had been kept by *camerari* for the seven previous years. It emerged that among the debtors there was Domenico Scandella, our Menocchio, owing 200 lire—the largest single debt after one of Bernardo Corneto. This was a common phenomenon, one regularly deplored in pastoral visitations in the Friuli during this period. The bishop (who probably didn't connect the name Scandella with the man whom he had condemned nine years before) now attempted to introduce a more rigorous and accurate administration. He disapproved of "the lack of order observed in the keeping of accounts, although good instructions had been given about this on the last visit. If they had been followed, there is no doubt that the affairs of the church would have fared much better"; he ordered that a "large book" should be purchased in which the priest, under threat of suspension from divine services (*ad divinis*), was to register from year to year the income collected "lot by lot, and respectively for those who paid, for the distribution of the grain day by day, for the expenses of the church, and, finally, for the settlement with the *camerari*"; the latter were to note their income in a "register (*vuocetta*) from which afterwards it was to be transferred into the book." The debtors among the *camerari* were ordered to settle their accounts "under penalty of being deprived entry into the church and of ecclesiastical burial in case of death"; within six months the priest was to bring the accounts for the year 1592 to Portogruaro, or face a fine and—once again—suspension *ad divinis*. We don't know if Menocchio actually ended up paying his debt. He may have, since in the next pastoral visitation, carried out by Bishop Sanudo himself in 1599–1600, Montereale *camerari* who were in debt turned up only for the years 1592 onwards.

There is evidence from this same period (1595) that confirms Menocchio's unimpaired prestige among his fellow citizens. "A small difficulty" had arisen between Count Giovan Francesco di Montereale and one of his tenants, Basiano de Martin, over two pieces of land and a farmhouse. At the count's request, two assessors were appointed to

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appraise the improvements made to the dwelling by the previous tenants. Piero della Zuanna was chosen to represent the count, Menocchio, the tenant. The case was a difficult one since one of the parties was none other than the local lord. But obviously there was confidence in Menocchio, in his ability to reason and argue.

The same year, Menocchio and his son Stefano rented a new mill in a locality called "beneath the hedges above" ("*de sotto le siege, de sopra*"). The rental was for a period of nine years: the lessees bound themselves to a yearly payment of 4 bushels of wheat, 10 of rye, 2 of oats, 2 of millet, 2 of buckwheat, and, in addition, a pig weighing 150 pounds. A clause specified that the equivalent should be paid in cash (at the rate of 6 soldi per pound) if the animal's weight should be below or above the one stipulated. Furthermore, there was a provision for "gifts": a brace of capons and half a length of linen. The latter was a token tribute since the mill was used for the fulling of cloth. The two lessees received the mill in consignment equipped with two "good and serviceable" asses, a wheel ("*leviera*"), and six fulling machines; and they obligated themselves to return the establishment "improved rather than deteriorated" to the owners, who were guardians of the heirs of Pietro de Macris. The previous tenant, Florito di Benedetto, who had become insolvent, promised to pay the back rent to them within five years; and, at his request, Menocchio and Stefano offered themselves as guarantors of this arrangement.

All this suggests that the financial situation of the two Scandellias must have been fairly solid at this time. Menocchio was participating fully in the life of his community. In 1595, he was the bearer of a message from the provincial governor of the *Friulia* to the mayor, as well as being chosen one of fourteen representatives, including the mayor, from the "neighborhood" of Montereale entrusted with the selection of assessors.

Some time later, however, Menocchio must have found himself in difficulty following the death of the son (probably Ziamuto) who had been supporting him. He tried to provide for himself by working at other occupations: school teacher and guitar player at festivals. It became more urgent than ever to rid himself of the stigma of the *habitué* and the prohibition against leaving Montereale that had been imposed upon him by the sentence. So he went to Udine to the new inquisitor, fra Giovan Battista da Perugia, asking to be released from both obligations. He received a negative response regarding the *habitué*, "because," the inquisitor explained in a letter to the bishop of Concordia dated 26 January 1597, "a dispensation on this matter should not be granted

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lightly"; however, he was granted permission to "freely . . . do business anywhere, except in suspected places, so that in some way he may alleviate his own poverty and that of his family."

Little by little the consequences of the old trial were being erased. But, meanwhile, unknown to Menocchio, the Holy Office had begun to renew its interest in him.

During the carnival of the previous year, Menocchio had left Montebelluna to go to Udine, with the inquisitor's permission. In the public square at the hour of Vespers he met a certain Lunardo Simon and began to chat with him. The two knew one another because Lunardo made the rounds of festivals playing his violin while Menocchio, as was mentioned, did the same with the guitar. Some time later, after learning of a bull against heretics, Lunardo wrote to the inquisitor's vicar, fra Gerolamo Astico, to report this conversation; afterwards, orally, with only a few variations, he confirmed the substance of the letter. The exchange in the square had gone more or less like this:

MENOCCHIO: "I hear that you want to become a monk: is it true?"
LUNARDO: "Isn't that a good story?"
MENOCCHIO: "No, because it is a beggarly thing."
LUNARDO (twisting the pun): "Do I need to become a monk to be a beggar?"
MENOCCHIO: "Of the many saints, hermits, and others who have led holy lives, we don't know where they've ended up."
LUNARDO: "The Lord God doesn't want us to know these secrets now."
MENOCCHIO: "If I were a Turk, I wouldn't want to become a Christian, but I am a Christian, and I don't want to become a Turk at all."
LUNARDO: "*Beati qui non viderunt, et crediderunt.*"
MENOCCHIO: "I don't believe if I don't see. But I do believe that God is the father of the whole world, and can do and undo."
LUNARDO: "Turks and Jews also believe this, but they don't believe that he was born of the Virgin Mary."
MENOCCHIO: "What does it mean, when Christ was on the cross, and the Jews said to him, 'If you are the Christ descend from the cross,' that he did not descend?"
LUNARDO: "That was so not to show obedience to the Jews."
MENOCCHIO: "It was because Christ wasn't able to."

LUNARDO: "So then, you don't believe in the Gospels?"
 MENCOCCHIO: "No, I don't. Who do you think makes these Gospels if not the priests and monks, who have nothing better to do? They think up these things and write them down one after another."
 Then Lunardo had objected that "neither priests nor monks made the Gospels; instead they were made long ago." And he had gone on his way, judging his companion to be a "heretical person."
 God, father, and master who can "do and undo"; a human Christ; the Gospels produced by idle priests and monks; the equality of religions. So, despite the trial, the defamatory abjuration, imprisonment, the sensational show of repentance, Menocchio had resumed his old ideas, which, clearly, he had never renounced in his heart. But about him Lunardo Simon knew only his name ("a certain Menocchio, miller of Montereale"); and despite the rumor that he was relapsed and had formerly been condemned by the Holy Office "as a Lutheran," the denunciation wasn't acted on. Only two years later, on 28 October 1598, either accidentally or as a result of a systematic review of the existing records, did the inquisitors suspect that Menocchio and Domenico Scandella were, in fact, one and the same person. Then the machinery of the Holy Office was set again in motion. Fra Gerolamo Asteo, who in the meantime had become inquisitor general of the Friuli, began to collect new information concerning Menocchio. It emerged that don Odorico Yorai, whose accusation of Menocchio many years before had resulted in the latter's incarceration, had paid dearly for this act: "he has been persecuted by Menocchio's relatives and driven from Montereale." As for Menocchio "it has been and is still believed that he holds the same false opinions as before." At this point the inquisitor went to Montereale and questioned the new priest, don Giovan Daniele Melchiori. The latter reported that Menocchio had stopped wearing the *habitillo* and was traveling outside the confines of the town, violating the decrees of the Holy Office (which, as we saw, was only partly true). However, he did go to confession and receive communion several times a year: "as for me, I consider him to be a Christian and an honorable man," he concluded. He didn't know what the inhabitants of the village thought of Menocchio. But after having made and signed these statements, Melchiori backtracked: obviously, he feared he might have gone too far. After the words "I consider him to be a Christian and an honorable man" he asked that "as far as one can judge externally," be added.

Don Curzio Cellina, chaplain of Saint Rocco and the village notary, was more explicit. "I consider him to be a Christian because I have seen that he goes to confession and takes communion," he affirmed. But don Cellina saw the former restlessness showing through Menocchio's

The dock contains the following icons from left to right: a smiley face, a globe, a rocket, a calendar showing 'NOV 4', a document, a mail icon with a '1' notification, a speech bubble icon with a '1' notification, a calendar icon with a '1' notification, a bar chart, a pie chart, a magnifying glass over a document, a book icon, a Chrome icon, a WhatsApp icon, a person icon, a document icon, a PDF icon, and a trash can.

seeming act of submission: "This Menocchio has certain humors so that when he sees the moon or stars or other planets and hears thunder or something, he immediately wants to give his opinion on what has just happened. In the end he submits to the opinion of the majority saying that the whole world knows more than he alone. And I believe that this humor of his is wicked, but that he submits to the opinions of others out of fear." So, condemnation and imprisonment by the Holy Office had left a deep mark on him. Menocchio, it seemed, no longer dared—at least in the village—to speak with the insolent license of former days. But not even fear had succeeded in stifling his intellectual freedom: "he immediately wants to give his opinion." What was new, instead, was the bitter and ironic sense of his isolation: "he submits to the opinion of the majority saying that the whole world knows more than he alone."

It was mostly an inner isolation. Don Cellina himself observed: "I see him associating with many and I believe he is everybody's friend." As for himself, he declared that he felt "for this Menocchio neither a close friendship nor enmity; but I love him as a Christian and I deal with him as I do with others, when I have some task for him." Externally, as we saw, Menocchio had been fully reintegrated into the life of the village: for a second time he had been named *camarero* of the parish; with his son he had rented a third mill. But, despite all this, he felt he was an outsider—perhaps also as a consequence of the financial difficulties of the later years. The *habitué* was the tangible symbol of this exclusion. Menocchio was obsessed by it. "I know," Cellina said, "that for a long time he had a garment with a cross on it that the Holy Office had given him, and he wore it secretly under his clothing." Menocchio had told him that "he wanted to go and visit the Holy Office to obtain permission not to wear it, because he used to say that as a result of his having that garment with the cross men did not want to associate and speak with him." Of course, he was deceiving himself about this—he associated with everyone, he was friendly with everybody in the village. But the impossibility of expressing his own opinions, as in the past, weighed upon him. "When he was heard talking about the moon and the stars," Cellina observed, "he was told to be silent." Cellina couldn't remember precisely what he had been saying on this subject, not even when the inquisitor suggested that perhaps Menocchio was attributing to planets the power of coercing men's free will. At any rate, he emphatically denied that Menocchio was talking "in jest": "I think that he was speaking seriously and that he has some bad tendencies."

The investigations of the Holy Office broke off once again. It's not difficult to understand why: after all, the heresiarch miller had been reduced to silence and external conformity; he no longer represented a

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And yet, the conversation reported by Lunardo suggests that Menocchio's outward obedience to the rites and sacraments of the Church disguised a stubborn loyalty to his old ideas. At about the same time, a certain Simon, a converted Jew who wandered about subsisting on charity, turned up in Montereale and was given shelter by Menocchio. The two talked about religious questions all through the night. Menocchio said "enormous things concerning the faith": that the Gospels had been written by priests and monks "because they have nothing better to do," and that the Madonna before marrying St. Joseph "had borne two other creatures, and because of this St. Joseph did not want to accept her as his bride." Basically, these were the same subjects that he had brought up with Lunardo on the square at Udine: an attack against the parasitism of the clergy, the rejection of the Gospel, the denial of Christ's divinity. In addition to this, however, that night he had also talked of a "most beautiful book," which unfortunately he had lost, and which Simon "judged was the Koran."

It may have been Menocchio's rejection of the central dogmas of Christianity—and principally that of the Trinity—that had led him, like other heretics of this period, to turn with curiosity to the Koran. Unfortunately, Simon's identification isn't definite, and in any case we don't know what Menocchio took from that mysterious "most beautiful book." Certainly, he was convinced that eventually his heresy would be discovered: "he knew that he would die because of it," he had confided to Simon. But he didn't want to flee since a man who had stood as godfather with him, Daniele de Blasio, had offered surety for him with the Holy Office fifteen years before: "otherwise he would have fled to Geneva." So he had decided to stay in Montereale. He was already looking ahead to the end: "at his death, some Lutherans will learn of it, and will come to collect the ashes."

Who knows what "Lutherans" Menocchio had in mind? Perhaps a group with which he had maintained clandestine ties—or some individual he might have met many years before and who had then dropped out of sight. The aura of martyrdom in which Menocchio envisioned his own

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