

January - March 2015

# *Spirit + Life*



*Journal of Franciscan Culture*  
*Issued by the Franciscan Friars (OFM Malta)*

# 111





Quarterly journal of  
Franciscan culture published  
since April 1986.

Layout:  
John Abela ofm  
Computer Setting:  
Raymond Camilleri ofm

Available at:  
<http://www.i-tau.com>

All original material is  
Copyright © TAU Franciscan  
Communications 2015

## Contents

- Editorial ..... 2
- Francis of Assisi and his  
original approach to Islam . 4
- Malik al-Kamil and the  
christian effort to regain  
Jerusalem..... 14
- The first Franciscan Friary  
in Jerusalem ..... 17
- New biography of St. Francis  
discovered ..... 20
- Quote ..... 23

# 111

## EDITORIAL

# FRIARS MINOR IN OUR TIMES

The next General Chapter of the Order of Friars Minor, to be celebrated in Assisi from 10 May to 7 June, has chosen as its inspirational theme the expression: “Friars Minor in our times.” The aim is that of making the Order reflect on its original calling of faithfulness to the Gospel, and to translate its inspirational values in its mission in the world and in the Church today.

How can a religious Order that is over 806 years old be relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Indeed, we are witnessing a deep crisis in consecrated religious life in the Church. On the one hand the Church has dedicated much energy to the renewal of religious life ever since Vatican Council II, and the documents it has produced in order to give a solid theological and spiritual foundation to religious life are well known within Catholic circles. Even the Order of Friars Minor has produced tons of documents of a great inspirational value that have been consulted and quoted by other religious families. On the other hand religious life has not flourished in the way it was supposed to do so after Vatican II.

The problems besetting religious life are many and varied. Religious orders, and in a special way the Franciscan Order, are facing an acute shortage of vocations. The Order of Friars Minor has shrunk to almost half its size in these last fifty years. The end result is that there is a fast aging process in almost all the provinces of the Order. Many religious families, including the Franciscan Order, have seen hundreds, if not thousands, of their members leave some years after beginning ministry, or even in their mid-forties and fifties. Many have left with a sense of delusion if not also with bitterness. Religious life has been challenged by new lay movements, which advocate ways of life and apostolate that do not necessarily call for a lifelong commitment. One very noteworthy fact, especially in the case of the Franciscan family, has been the proliferation of new Franciscan communities outside the large established Orders. Some might regard this a phenomenon of the richness of the gifts of the Spirit in the Church. I personally regard it as one of the reasons of a deep crisis of religious life, since these new families want to live a way of life that is certainly more radical than that of the established Orders, but at the same time want to be independent of the controls and traditions of the original Franciscan Order.

One sad factor in religious life and in the Franciscan Order is certainly the deep crisis of faith of some of its members. Community life in fraternity has undergone a deep crisis. Whole fraternities rarely pray together, hardly ever meet for a community meal or recreation. A sense of individualism is exasperating Franciscan life. Friars prefer to work alone, to have their own profession. Recourse to dependence upon superiors is seen to be

childish and immature. The deep crisis has also invaded the life of consecration in the religious vows of obedience, poverty and chastity. A number of religious in the Franciscan Order regard obedience as a kind of spiritual slavery. The end result is that religious superiors are discouraged and hardly anyone in his right senses wants to bear the onus of a religious superior, that is, if he is not ambitious. Unfortunately we have assisted at religious superiors who have been elected more out of ambition and favouritism than out of a genuine search for the good of the Order or of the province. The vow of poverty is often regarded as an unnecessary burden, contrary to a person's right for self-sufficiency. As we have already said, friars are preferring to take a job and learn a wage, keeping for themselves the money they receive instead of sharing it with their brothers in community. Scandals have occurred in the acquisition of property, cars, bank accounts, and so on, on the individual and on the community level. The same central direction of the Order has not been spared financial scandals of a magnitude that smacks of serious and shameful ethical behaviour on the social as well as on the religious level. The sex-abuse scandals that have been uncovered in the Church have also touched religious life and whole Franciscan provinces have had to suffer the effects of these grave crimes perpetrated by some of their members. Unfortunately there is very little urge to face the problems of alcohol, drug dependency and homosexuality that have invaded religious life in the Franciscan Order. Many feel lost and disoriented, since the crisis of fraternal life in community has led to exasperate these problems.

This bleak picture does not, in any way, diminish the many cases of good and praiseworthy examples of genuine faithfulness to the Franciscan religious calling on the part of many religious, who still live their lives of consecration in faithful joy and humility. Unfortunately the newspapers and media never mention them. They always mention the bad guys.

The Franciscan Order needs to revamp its mission in the world today. It has gone a long way in rediscovering its original calling, but maybe it is misinterpreting it. The crisis of studies in the Order is the root of this evil. The Franciscans were always at the forefront of missionary evangelisation, but they were also great scholars and theologians, as well as mystics. Unfortunately they are losing this original charism.

What, therefore, is the solution to the problem? How can the Order be relevant in the world today? The answers can be many and varied. I propose a simple solution. The Order needs to rediscover its original call to "monastic-conventual life". The expression is despised by many nowadays, and is considered obsolete and anachronistic. Yet the crises in our Order have crept in ever since we threw out the baby together with the bath water. What we termed as inessential and irrelevant was, in fact, the very foundation that kept our edifice standing. Taking it away has resulted in dangerous cracks to the edifice. It is only when we become aware of this that we can be aware of who we are. What we do is not so relevant. It is high time to place our house in order.

*Noel Muscat ofm*

# FRANCIS OF ASSISI AND HIS ORIGINAL APPROACH TO ISLAM

Noel Muscat ofm

The theme we are presenting is not a new one. Volumes upon volumes have been written on Saint Francis and his role as pacifier especially during the Fifth Crusade. In the summer months of 1219 Francis was in Damietta on the Nile Delta, where he witnessed the horrors and cruelty of war between the Crusades and the Muslim armies of the Sultan of Egypt Malik al-Kamil. It was during that occasion, most probably during a truce in September 1219, that Francis crossed the enemy lines and personally met and spoke with Malik al-Kamil. The historical account has been preserved by the chroniclers of the Fifth Crusade, and has been embellished by legendary elements in the medieval Franciscan Sources.

“The battle had been watched with a sad dismay by a distinguished visitor to the camp, Brother Francis of Assisi. He had come to the East believing, as many other good and unwise persons before and after him have believed, that a peace-mission can bring about peace. He now asked permission of Pelagius to go to see the Sultan. After some hesitation Pelagius agreed, and sent him under a flag of truce to Fariskur. The Moslem guards were suspicious at first but soon decided that anyone so simple, so gentle and so dirty must be mad, and treated him with the respect due to a man who had been touched by God. He was taken to the Sultan al-Kamil who was charmed by him and listened patiently to his appeal, but who was too kind and too highly civilized to allow him to give witness to his faith in an ordeal by fire; nor would he risk the acrimony that a public discussion on religion would now arouse. Francis was offered many gifts, which he refused, and was sent back with an honourable escort to the Christians.”<sup>1</sup>

The overall impression one gets upon reading many of the recent studies and papers regarding Saint Francis and his encounter with

the Sultan is that Francis was, in a certain way, the emblem of what we might call a pacifist in our contemporary world. He is presented as going to the Muslim camp unarmed and being very cordial and respectful towards the sovereign. On his part Malik al-Kamil is presented as being well disposed and hospitable towards Francis. Having presented this “human” dimension of such a cordial meeting, many authors have probably missed one important point that is underlined in continuation by the chroniclers and biographers of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, as well as by Francis himself in chapter 16 of the *Earlier Rule*, where he speaks about the brothers “going among the Saracens and other non-believers”, namely that the brothers are to “acknowledge that they are Christians”.

Our aim in this paper is twofold. First of all we shall attempt to read the Franciscan Sources that speak about Francis and his relations with Islam within the context of the medieval mentality in which Francis was brought up. Secondly, we will see, with the help of the same Sources, what kind of methodology Francis used when he dealt with Muslims, particularly with Malik al-Kamil. It is important to delve into the common mentality of the age regarding the value of the Crusade and its impact upon Christianity, in a polarised environment of mutual hatred and mistrust between Christians and Muslims. To present Francis as a pacifist who utterly shunned violence and condemned the Crusading movement as if he were an alien to his age is to do insult to historical truth. Francis was a son of his age, and his message of peace can only be understood in an authentic manner if it is contextualised in the historical environment in which he was brought up.

A genuine reading of the Franciscan Sources is also a guarantee against the temptation

to present Francis as a kind of syncretistic pacifist, who would regard Islam as just another religion on the same level as Christianity, and who never dreamt of presenting himself as a Christian before the Sultan, much less of preaching the Gospel to him. Such an approach is simply a disservice to genuine interreligious dialogue between Christians and Muslims, and is of no help for the cause of peace in a time when Islamic religious fundamentalism against Christians is rampant in the Middle East and beyond.

## *Christianity versus Islam after the fall of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem*

When Francis was a young five or six-year old boy, he would have heard his family and Assisi townsfolk speaking about the great tragedy of the loss of Jerusalem on 2 October 1187, when the Crusaders had to retreat from the city which they had conquered on 15 July 1099 and cede it to the great Saracen leader Salah ed-Din (Saladin). The battle of the Horns of Hattin in Galilee, on 4 July 1187, marked the definite blow that Saladin gave to the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem. It was simply a question of months until Jerusalem was captured. The Crusades had to retreat to some ports on the shores of Palestine, particularly in Acre, where they established the headquarters of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem.

The attempt to regain Jerusalem continued to be enkindled in the minds and hearts of Christians in Europe. That is why other Crusades were organised, but without any success. Pope Gregory VIII encouraged Emperor Frederick I, King Philippe II of France, and King Richard I (The Lionheart) of England to go on the third Crusade, but it was only King Richard who made some successes, but fell short of capturing Jerusalem.

In 1202-1204, just when Francis was engaged in the petty war between Assisi and Perugia, Innocent III organised the Fourth Crusade. This was also a total failure. Not only did it not reach the Holy Land, but the Doge of Venice, Enrico Dandolo, took the opportunity to expand Venice's political interests and sacked the city of Constantinople, thus embittering relations between the Latin and the Greek Orthodox Church. The Children's Crusade of 1212 was also a great failure and a senseless initiative.

It was at this stage that Innocent III thought of organising a strong Crusading army. The history of the Fifth Crusade is important since Saint Francis took part in it. Pope Innocent III had proclaimed the Crusade in the *Bulla Quia maior* in April 1213, and also in the *Bulla Ad liberandam*, during the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, calling upon Christian princes to assemble in four years time to regain Jerusalem by first invading Egypt. He declared a truce of God and ordered that all commerce with the Levant should cease. The Crusade began to move in 1217, with the aim of attacking Damietta, on the Nile Delta. It was to be led by King Jean de Brienne, but in 1218 Cardinal Pelagius Galvan entered the scene as Papal Legate. He was adamant that Malik al-Kamil, the Sultan of Egypt, should be attacked even though the same Sultan had offered peace terms to the Crusade. When Francis arrived in Damietta in July 1219 the siege had already begun. He had left Italy in June and had landed in Acre, the Crusader stronghold in Palestine, and from there had continued his journey by sea to Damietta.<sup>2</sup>

This was the historical background in which Francis took part in the Crusade and met Sultan Malik al-Kamil. However, it is important for us to understand with what spirit Francis had embarked on this journey, and especially how Christians and Muslims regarded one another during the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. In order to help us answer this question, we have to go back to the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century and study the preaching of one of the most famous mystics and saints of the Middle-Ages, St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090 – 20 August 1153).

Bernard is renowned for having been a strong preacher in favour of the Second Crusade (1145-1149). He is also known for having written a treatise, entitled *Liber ad Milites Templi. De Laude Novae Militiae*, dedicated to Hugh of Payens († 1136), the first Grand Master of the Order of Templars, founded in 1120. A look at some of the contents of the first part of this exhortation can give us a clue as to what the mentality of Christians regarding Crusades was during the century in which Saint Francis was born.

“Go forth confidently then, you knights, and repel the foes of the cross of Christ with a stalwart heart. Know that neither death nor life can separate you from the love of God which is in Jesus Christ, and in every peril repeat, Whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. What a



glory to return in victory from such a battle! How blessed to die there as a martyr! Rejoice, brave athlete, if you live and conquer in the Lord; but glory and exult even more if you die and join your Lord. Life indeed is a fruitful thing and victory is glorious, but a holy death is more important than either. If they are blessed who die in the Lord, how much more are they who die for the Lord!

To be sure, precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his holy ones, whether they die in battle or in bed, but death in battle is more precious as it is the more glorious. How secure is life when the conscience is unsullied! How secure, I say, is life when death is anticipated without fear; or rather when it is desired with feeling and embraced with reverence! How holy and secure this knighthood and how entirely free of the double risk run by those men who fight not for Christ! Whenever you go forth, O worldly warrior, you must fear lest the bodily death of your foe should mean your own spiritual death, or lest perhaps your body and soul together should be slain by him.

But the knights of Christ may safely fight the battles of their Lord, fearing neither sin if they smite the enemy, nor danger at their own death; since to inflict death or to die for Christ is no sin, but rather, an abundant claim to glory. In the first case one gains for Christ, and in the second one gains Christ himself. The Lord freely accepts the death of the foe who has offended him, and yet more freely gives himself for the consolation of his fallen knight.

The knight of Christ, I say, may strike with confidence and die yet more confidently, for he serves Christ when he strikes, and serves himself when he falls. Neither does he bear the sword in vain, for he is God's minister, for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of the good. If he kills an evildoer, he is not a man-killer, but, if I may so put it, a killer of evil. He is evidently the avenger of Christ towards evildoers and he is rightly considered a defender of Christians. Should he be killed himself, we know that he has not perished, but has come safely into port. When he inflicts death it is to Christ's profit, and when he suffers death, it is for his own gain. The Christian glories in the death of the pagan, because Christ is glorified; while the death of the Christian gives occasion for the King to show his liberality in the rewarding of his knight. In the one case the just shall rejoice when he sees justice done, and in the other man shall say, truly there is a reward for the

just; truly it is God who judges the earth. I do not mean to say that the pagans are to be slaughtered when there is any other way to prevent them from harassing and persecuting the faithful, but only that it now seems better to destroy them than that the rod of sinners be lifted over the lot of the just, and the righteous perhaps put forth their hands unto iniquity."<sup>3</sup>

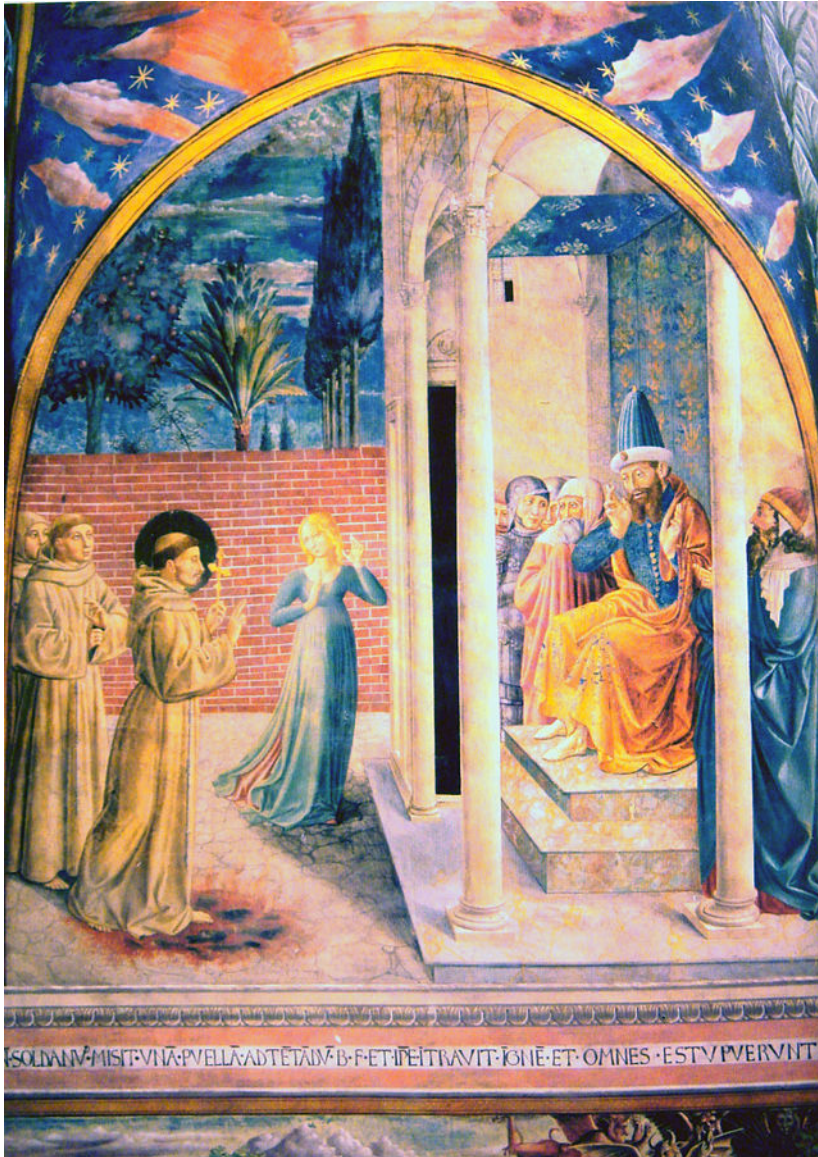
These words are important to get an idea of what crusading was all about, at least in its theoretical or idealistic aspirations. The idea of regaining the Sepulchre of the Lord and the holy city of Jerusalem was linked with the idea of holy war and martyrdom. What we now experience in our contemporary world in the case of Islamic extremists advocating martyrdom in the name of God was also present in Christianity during the Middle-Ages. Only thirty years separated the death of Saint Bernard from the birth of Saint Francis. The young Francis was brought up in this mentality. The desire to go in battle to conquer Jerusalem ran in his blood, just as it ran in the blood of all young men of his age. The quest of knighthood with its noble aspirations, coupled with the culture of courtly love, or *amour courtois*, celebrated in the songs of the troubadours who travelled all over Europe, enkindled the heart of the young Francis to take up arms in the defence of Christendom.

---

### *What was the real reason behind Francis' journey to Damietta in 1219?*

When Francis converted and became an itinerant preacher, he did not give up the same aspirations, but ennobled them to become a desire for martyrdom. The Sources give ample proof to such a fact. Thomas of Celano, the first biographer of Saint Francis, places the episode of the saint's journeys to the "lands of the Infidels" within the context of his desire to undergo martyrdom: "In the sixth year of his conversion, burning with the desire for holy martyrdom, he wished to take a ship to the region of Syria to preach the Christian faith and repentance to the Saracens and other unbelievers".<sup>4</sup>

Julian of Speyer similarly states: "Blessed Francis, burning with a most ardent longing for martyrdom, in the sixth year of his conversion, wished to set out to the region of Syria to announce



there the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Saracens ... he did not abandon the desire for martyrdom until at last, in the thirteenth year of his conversion, he crossed over to Syria.”<sup>5</sup>

In *The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul*, 30, Thomas of Celano likewise states that: “When the Christian army was besieging Damietta, the holy man of God was there with his companions, since they had crossed the sea in their fervour for martyrdom.” However, he also adds: “When the holy man heard that our forces were preparing for war, on the day of battle he grieved deeply.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, although Francis went to Damietta with fervour to attain martyrdom, he did not intend to do so by joining a battle. This is the first time that the Sources explicitly state that Francis was contrary to a holy war against Islam, at least he did not approve of attacking the Saracen army, which inflicted a heavy loss upon the Christians on 29 August 1219. This element is very important, because it shows that, although

Francis did not pronounce himself against the Crusade in itself, deep down he did not approve of the belligerent methods of the Crusades, and preferred to meet death as a martyr by proclaiming the Gospel rather than by wielding the sword. Francis, however, did not despise the Crusading army. Indeed, Celano states: “Compassion for them drove the holy man, no less than regret, for what they had done overwhelmed them. He wept especially for the Spaniards: he could see their boldness in battle had left only a few of them alive.”

It is Saint Bonaventure who is the most explicit among the biographers when it comes to place Francis’ visit to the Sultan within the context of his desire for martyrdom. Indeed, in the *Major Legend of Saint Francis*, Bonaventure places the event in chapter 9, entitled: “The ardour of charity and the desire for martyrdom.” Bonaventure states: “In the fervent fire of his charity [Francis] strove to emulate the glorious triumph of the holy martyrs in whom the flame of love could not be extinguished, nor courage weakened. Set on fire, therefore, by that perfect charity which drives out fear, he desired to offer to the Lord his own life as a living sacrifice in the flames

of martyrdom so that he might repay Christ, who died for us, and inspire others to divine love.”<sup>7</sup>

One has to keep in mind, of course, that Bonaventure is a hagiographer, and follows the rules of classical writings on the saints. The virtue of charity is linked to the desire of martyrdom in such a way that, for Bonaventure, it seems that the theological aspect of martyrdom is more important than the historical value of such an assertion. However, one cannot discard the historical value of the quest for martyrdom, which Bonaventure underlines in the three episodes of Francis’ missionary expeditions, in 1212 when he tried to go to Syria and ended up on the Dalmatian coast, in 1213 when he tried to go to Morocco but fell ill in Spain, and finally in 1219, when he went to Damietta. In this last instance Bonaventure presents Francis as a true Crusader in the spiritual sense: “But Francis, the intrepid knight of Christ, hoping to be able to achieve his purpose, decided to make the journey, not terrified by the fear of



death, but rather drawn by desire for it.”<sup>8</sup>

Bonaventure’s account is highly apologetic in nature. He describes how Francis and his companion Illuminato of Rieti were insulted and savagely treated by the Saracen guards before they were led to the Sultan’s tent, and how Francis tried to convince the Sultan by theological arguments, explicitly challenging his priests and calling for his conversion, to the point that he offered himself to the ordeal by fire. These elements would henceforth dominate the later accounts of Francis’ visit to the Sultan, particularly in the case of the *Actus Beati Francisci et sociorum eius* 27 and the *Fioretti* 24, where we even arrive at seeing Francis promise the Sultan that he would send him two friars to baptise him before his death.

At this point we have to return to the original question of this section: what was the real reason behind Francis’ journey to Damietta in 1219? According to the Franciscan Sources we have seen that the reason was his quest for martyrdom. This could very well have been the case, since the ideal of the Crusades was also that of offering one’s life to defend Christ’s cross against the Saracens, and to regain the Holy Sepulchre lost to Infidel hands after the fall of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem. We have, however, seen how the biographers were more interested in the theological meaning of martyrdom rather than in its true historical achievement. According to them, Francis did all he could to provoke the Saracens and their Sultan to kill him for his faith, but did not succeed. At the same time, we come to know that Francis did not approve of the cruelty of war on the part of the Crusades against the Saracens. Thus, we are left with a dilemma. What was the true reason behind Francis’ visit to Sultan Malik al-Kamil, if he could not convert him to Christianity, could not suffer martyrdom, and could not stop the war between the Crusades the Muslim army?

An interesting answer is offered by the Franciscan scholar Pacifico Sella in a paper in Italian, entitled “Francesco, l’Islam, l’Oriente.”<sup>9</sup> The scholar underlines the fact that it is better to take a look at independent sources. He quotes two very important ones regarding the episode of Damietta, namely *The Chronicle of Ernoul*, and the epitaph of a certain Muslim councillor of Malik al-Kamil, by the name of Fakhr ad-din al-Farisi, who wrote that he had witnessed the meeting of a certain anonymous *rahib* (monk) with the Sultan.<sup>10</sup>

Ernoul states that Francis went to the

Cardinal Legate Pelagius in order to ask permission to pass over to the Saracen camp. The Cardinal was not willing to give Francis permission, but at the end yielded to his request, with the words: “Sirs, I do not know what is in your hearts or in your thoughts, whether these be good or evil, but if you do go, see that your heart and your thoughts are always turned to the Lord God.” The chronicler continues: “They responded that they only wanted to go [to the Sultan] to accomplish a great good which they longed to carry to its conclusion. Then the cardinal said it was indeed good for them to go if they wished, but that they were not to let anyone think that he had sent them.”

These expressions do not tell us a lot, but we can understand them within the historical context in which they were uttered. Nearly half a century ago the scholar Giulio Basetti-Sani had studied a papal *Bulla* by Pope Honorius III, entitled *Cum carissimi* (24 July 1217), which on the eve of the Fifth Crusade threatened with excommunication those Christians who would venture to Jerusalem and pay money to the Saracens in order to be able to enter and pray in the Holy Sepulchre.<sup>11</sup> What was the “great good” that Francis intended to accomplish during his visit to Sultan Malik al-Kamil in the month-old truce of September 1219? Was it really that of suffering martyrdom or converting the Sultan? According to Sella the true reason was much more practical. Francis wanted to be able to acquire the possibility for Christians to be able to visit the Holy Sepulchre. He knew that there was a papal prohibition, and therefore presented himself before Cardinal Pelagius to ask for permission to go to the Sultan. Pelagius yielded to his request but stopped short of giving his personal approval, precisely because he sensed that maybe Francis wanted to acquire a special privilege to go to Jerusalem. If this was the case, Francis was acting in the most normal way that any Christian and Crusader would have acted in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. He was willing to risk his life (to suffer martyrdom), but not primarily in order to convert the Sultan to the Christian faith (as the biographers say), but rather to be able to go and pray at the Holy Sepulchre.

It is not possible, at this present stage, to conclude as to whether Francis really arrived in Jerusalem after his encounter with the Sultan. Most scholars are contrary to this assertion and historical facts show that Francis had to return to Italy soon after September 1219. The only witness in favour



of a visit to of the Saint to Jerusalem is Angelo Clareno, who writes in 1325, one hundred years after the death of Francis: “On the third attempt, after Francis had suffered many reproaches, fetters, floggings, and labours, he was led to the Sultan of Babylon by the providence of Christ. Standing in front of the Sultan, completely on fire with the Holy Spirit, he preached to him Christ Jesus and the faithfulness of his gospel with such power, life, and effectiveness, that the Sultan and all of those who were present were astounded. Because of the power of the words that Christ had spoken through Francis, the Sultan, converted to mildness, against the decree of his impious law, freely heard Francis’s words, and on the spot invited Francis to stay in his land longer. Finally, the sultan ordered that Francis and his brothers should be able to visit the sepulchre of Christ in Jerusalem without paying any tribute.”<sup>12</sup>

If Francis truly succeeded in gaining the famous *signaculum* from the Sultan, as the *Actus-Fioretti* state, a kind of *laissez-passer* to travel freely in his realms, then he would have avoided the papal excommunication. Unfortunately we do not know whether Francis actually made it to the Holy Sepulchre. One thing is certain, however, that the real motive behind his wanting to go to the Sultan was precisely that of gaining permission to pray in Jerusalem. In this endeavour Francis was a son of his age. He was a true Crusader at heart, not in the sense that he wanted to fight and kill the Saracens in order to regain Jerusalem, but in the sense that he risked his life (his desire for martyrdom) in order to be able to have friendly relations with the enemies of Christianity with the hope of realising his new dream of knighthood for his spiritual family. What Francis did was simply a revolution of the idea of chivalry and Crusading in the Middle-Ages.

---

### *Francis of Assisi and his original approach to Islam: Chapter 16 of the Earlier Rule*

The experience of Francis in Damietta was instrumental in his view of the way in which the friars had to give witness to the Gospel in Saracen lands. *The Earlier Rule*, approved by the Chapter of 1221 but never confirmed by the Pope, and hence known as the *Regula non bullata*, is

the first Rule of a religious Order in the history of Christianity that devotes a chapter to the theme of the evangelisation of the Saracens and other nonbelievers. In many ways it is not only new, but original. Francis writes:

“As for the brothers who go, they can live spiritually among the Saracens and nonbelievers in two ways. One way is not to engage in arguments or disputes but to be subject *to every human creature for God’s sake* (1Pt 2:13) and to acknowledge that they are Christians. The other way is to announce the Word of God, when they see it pleases the Lord, in order that they may believe in almighty God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Creator of all, the Son, the Redeemer and Saviour, and be baptised and become Christians.”<sup>13</sup>

It is highly likely that this chapter was written as a direct result of Francis’ encounter with the Sultan and his experience of dialogue with Islam. The contents of the chapter again show how Francis was a son of his age regarding the way he viewed relations with the Saracens, and yet also how he was an innovator regarding the style and methods he advocated to his friars who went as missionaries among Muslims.

Francis states that the friars were allowed to live among the Muslims by giving them a double witness of spiritual life. In this way he recognised the spiritual value of Islam as a religion, and indeed he had experienced Muslim hospitality on the part of the Sultan precisely because he had behaved in a “spiritual” way, particularly in his courageous witness of poverty when he politely refused the gifts that Sultan Malik al-Kamil offered to him. Maybe this witness struck the Sultan in a particular manner.

The spiritual witness of the friars was to consist, first and foremost, in their brotherly love and mutual respect. Francis exhorts them to avoid all kinds of disagreement, and quotes 1Peter 2:13 commanding the brothers to be subject to every human creature for God’s sake. So he is clearly telling the friars that they were to conduct themselves as subjects to the Muslim institutions in Saracen lands, just as they would do under Christian leaders at home. Moreover, he uses the word *subditi*, literally meaning “under the finger” of someone. Let us remember that, this perfect passive participle of *subdo* (to lay under, to subdue), is applied by Francis to the friars’ obedience to the Pope and the Roman Church in the *Later Rule*.<sup>14</sup> In other words, Francis is advocating the highest form

of respect and reverence to all human persons, to whichever religion they belong to, in this case, to Muslims.

There is, however, one other element that is sadly discarded by a good number of studies that deal with Francis' encounter with the Sultan.<sup>15</sup> The same verse that speaks about the witness of mutual charity and sense of humble obedience to all persons, including Muslims, on the part of the friars, also commands the same friars to "acknowledge that they are Christians." With all due respect to the English translators of this phrase, the Latin original does not use the verb *agnoscantur* (acknowledge), but *confiteantur* (profess) *se esse christianos* (that they are Christians). To acknowledge oneself as Christian in a non-Christian environment entails being aware of one's status and behaviour as a Christian, but here Francis is going further. He is telling the friars that they must profess (publicly acknowledge and state) that they are Christians. In other words, Francis wanted his friars to present themselves publicly as Christians who profess their faith in Christ, even in the midst of Saracens and other nonbelievers.

It is obvious that Francis was well aware of the danger of professing the Christian faith in certain cases, particularly during a time in which fundamentalist elements were present in both

Christian and Muslim circles. Until a few years or maybe decades ago we were led to believe that religious fundamentalism was a thing of the past. Recent events have shown otherwise. Not only, we are now aware that it was a mistaken vision of history on our part when we imagined that the Crusaders were fundamentalist warriors fighting against Islam in order to invade its lands and conquer them by the sword. Some authors have also portrayed the Church in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries as having instigated violent hatred against Muslims (and also against Jews in Europe) with the institution of the Crusades. As a consequence they have presented figures like Saint Francis as having been radically anti-institutional and prophetic to the point of admitting a certain kind of syncretism of belief in their dealings with other religions. Respect and love for the human person, of whatever belief he or she may be, has nothing to do with hiding one's identity as a Christian. Francis was no exception. He was, first and foremost, a Christian, even in the midst of the Saracens, and he publicly professed his faith, even though he was aware of the danger of martyrdom.

In fact, in the same chapter, Francis then presents the second dimension of the Christian witness of the friars in Saracen lands, namely that of genuine discernment of the will of God regarding



*Domenico Ghirlandaio, The Trial by Fire in front of the Sultan (1482)*



the Christian duty of proclaiming the Gospel and calling to the faith in Christ all nations. The ultimate aim of this work of evangelisation is that of calling all persons of good will to receive baptism and become Christians. In simple terms, it means that the friars are called to convert Saracens and other nonbelievers to Christianity. This assertion might sound irritable and offensive towards other religions, but it does state an evangelical truth, namely that the proclamation of the Gospel is not an option, but a duty, and that converting persons to the Christian faith is incumbent upon the very foundation of being a Christian. If one presumes that this interpretation of Francis' intentions is too fundamentalist in its views, it is probable that one has entirely forgotten his Christian calling. Francis did not commit this serious mistake. He took his Christian calling very seriously, as indeed did the majority of Christians during his age, even the Crusaders themselves. The only difference between Francis and belligerent Christianity was not the ideal to be reached, but the method to use in order to bring it about.

Francis was original in that he did not dare to take the initiative to convert Saracens and other nonbelievers according to his whims, but believed that such an endeavour depended solely upon the will of God. Moreover, he knew that this work of evangelisation was not possible through human and military power, but rather through meekness, gentleness, humility and submission to God and to human beings even unto martyrdom. His ideal of martyrdom was the same as that of the Crusaders, yet its methods were different. The Crusaders could attain to martyrdom by destroying the enemies of the Cross; Francis by submitting himself to the enemies of the Cross. In the same chapter he exhorts the friars regarding this method of martyrdom:

"Wherever they may be, let all my brothers remember that they have given themselves and abandoned their bodies to the Lord Jesus Christ. For love of Him, they must make themselves vulnerable to their enemies, both visible and invisible, because the Lord says: *Whoever loses his life because of me will save it* (Lk 9:24) in eternal life. *Blessed are they who suffer persecution for the sake of justice, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven* (Mt 5:10)."<sup>16</sup>

The paragraph goes on with many other quotations from the Gospel. It is a treatise on the

true nature of Christian martyrdom, as opposed to the fake martyrdom of Islamic or Christian fundamentalism, present during Francis' time and during our own times.

For Francis martyrdom was not a thing to glory about, but rather a grace that God would give only to those who merited it. We have an account of the martyrdom of the first Franciscan brothers in Marrakesh, Saint Berardus and companions, in Morocco, on 16 January 1220, in the *Chronicle of the 24 Ministers General of the Order of Friars Minor*, written by Arnald of Sarrant after 1269. According to the Chronicler, "when blessed Francis heard about their martyrdom, he rejoiced in his spirit and said: 'Today, I can truly say that I have five friars minor.'"<sup>17</sup>

This episode has been quoted many a time to exalt the martyrdom of these courageous brothers who went to the Muslim realms in southern Spain and in Morocco and boldly preached to the Muslims, until they were cruelly slaughtered. There is, however, another interpretation of the same fact. In his *Chronicle*, written at least 100 years earlier, in 1260, Jordan of Giano also recounts the martyrdom. But the reaction of Saint Francis to the news of their death was different this time: "When the life and history of these aforementioned martyrs were brought to Blessed Francis, hearing that he himself was praised in them and seeing that the other brothers were taking pride in the sufferings of these brothers, in as much as he held himself in the greatest contempt and despised praise and glory, he spurned the accounts and forbade them to be read, and said: 'Everyone, should glory in his own suffering and not in that of another.'"<sup>18</sup>

This attitude on the part of Francis is a clear indication that he did not search for martyrdom at all costs, but only saw it as a unique grace of God given to those who had to the courage to preach the Gospel, first by the example of their Christian witness, and afterwards by proclaiming the Word to Saracens and other nonbelievers. Indeed, as the *Later Rule* states in chapter 12, it is only "by divine inspiration" that those brothers "who wish ... to go among the Saracens and other non-believers ask permission to go from their provincial ministers."<sup>19</sup> Francis was never keen in encouraging his brothers to provoke Saracens and other non-believers to make them become martyrs of faith. For him, martyrdom was only the end result of a life spent in genuine Christian witness of fraternal love

and respect towards all creatures, and all human persons, irrespective of their religious belief.

## Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been that of answering a simple question: what prompted Francis to go and meet Sultan Malik al-Kamil in Damietta in 1219? This question lies at the root of many other questions we have asked. Was Francis brought up in the Crusading ideal? How did it influence his attitude to Muslims? How did he change his attitude from a belligerent young man keen on becoming a knight in the Crusading army to one of a Christian who gave witness to his faith in Christ through humility, poverty and submission to all persons, even to Infidels and other non-believers? How did Francis regard the Crusading ideal of martyrdom as preached by such eminent saints as Bernard of Clairvaux? Did he endorse it? If not, how did he change his attitude to martyrdom? What exactly did he ask of Cardinal Pelagius and Sultan Malik al-Kamil, the two arch-enemies of the Fifth Crusade? And what did he acquire at the end?

It is obviously presumptuous to imagine that we have answered these questions in an exhaustive way. Maybe we have created more questions than answers. Indeed, the historical documents and Franciscan Sources we have mentioned provide few clues as to what actually took place in the Sultan's tent. However, we did understand that Francis was not really looking for any success in his mission. He was not the spokesman of Christianity against Islam. He was just a simple Christian man, giving a simple but courageous Christian witness, and simply requesting that he be allowed to pray in the hallowed place of Christ's death and resurrection.

His success was not short-lived. It was to continue being alive in the Christian attitude of his sons who never ceased to live among Saracens and other nonbelievers and give genuine witness to their Christian faith. From the shores of North Africa, to the Holy Land, to the Far East, the friars Minor have written glorious pages of history of missionary activity and many suffered martyrdom for their faith. And yet this is not the true glory of the Franciscan Order. The true glory lies in our ability to imitate Francis' attitude in an intelligent

and frank way, without falling into the trap of hiding our true Christian identity in the name of a fake inter-religious dialogue that will never bear any fruit, except that of engendering syncretism and confusion in a secular world where religious extremism seems bent on conquering the minds and hearts of millions who have no clear vision of what Christianity, Islam or any other religion, are all about.

## NOTES

1 Stephen RUNCIMAN, *A History of the Crusades*. Volume III: *The Kingdom of Acre and the Later Crusades*, Cambridge University Press 1951, 19<sup>th</sup> reprint 1999, 159-160.

2 Arnaldo FORTINI, *Francis of Assisi*, English translation from the original Italian edition *Nova Vita di San Francesco*, Santa Maria degli Angeli, Assisi 1959, 5 Vols., by Helen Moak, Crossroads, New York 1992, 395.

3 SAINT BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX, *Liber ad Milites Templi. De Laude Novae Militiae. Opere*, Vol. 1, *Trattati*, a cura di F. Gastaldelli, Editiones Cistercenses, Romae 1957 ss. (Latin critical edition); Scriptorium Claravallense, Fondazione di Studi Cistercensi, Milano 1984 (Italian edition), Città Nuova Editrice 1984, pp. 440. 442: "Securi ergo procedite, milites, et intrepido animo inimicos crucis Christi propellite, certi quia neque mors, neque vita poterunt vos separare a caritate Dei, quae est in Christo Iesu, illud sane vobiscum in omni periculo replicantes: *Sive vivimus, sive morimur; Domini sumus* (Rom 14,8). Quam gloriosi revertuntur victores de proelio! Quam beati moriuntur martyres in proelio! Gaude, fortis athleta, si vivis et vincis in Domino; sed magis exulta et gloriare, si moreris et iungeris Domino. Vita quidem fructuosa, et victoria gloriosa; sed utrique mors sacra iure praeponitur. Nam si *beati qui in Domino moriuntur* (Apoc 14,13), non multo magis qui pro Domino moriuntur? Et quidem sive in lecto, sive in bello quis moritur, pretiosa erit sine dubio in conspectu Domini mors sanctorum eius. Certum in bello tanto profecto pretiosior, quanto et gloriosior. O vita segura, ubi pura conscientia! O, inquam, vita segura, ubi absque formidine mors exspectatur, immo et exoptatur cum dulcedine, et excipitur cum devotione! O vere sancta et tuta militia, atque a duplici illo periculo prorsus libera, quo id hominum genus solet frequenter periclitari, ubi dumtaxat Christus non est causa militandi. Quoties namque congredieris tu, qui militiam militas saecularem, timendum omnino, ne aut occidas hostem quidem in corpore, te vero in anima, aut forte tu occidaris ab illo, et in corpore simul, et in anima. [...] p. 444. 446: At vero Christi milites securi praeliantur praelia Domini sui, nequaquam metuentes aut de hostium cede peccatum, aut de sua nece periculum, quandoquidem mors pro Christo vel ferenda, vel inferenda, et nihil habeat criminis, et plurimum gloriae mereatur. Hinc quippe Christo, inde Christus acquiritur, qui nimirum et libenter accipit hostis mortem pro ultione, et libentius praebet seipsum militi pro consolatione. Miles, inquam, Christi securus interimit, interit securior. Sibi praestat cum interit, Christo cum interimit. *Non enim sine causa gladium portat: Dei enim minister*



*est ad vindictam malefactorum, laudem vero bonorum* (Rom 13,4; 1Petr 2,14). Sane cum occidit malefactorem, non homicida, sed, ut ita dixerim, malicida, et plane Christi vindex in his qui male agunt, et defensor christianorum reputatur. Cum autem occiditur ipse, non periisse, sed pervenisse cognoscitur. Mors ergo quam irrogat, Christi est lucrum; quam excipit, suum. In morte pagani christianus gloriatur, quia Christus glorificatur; in morte christiani, Regis liberalitas aperitur, cum miles remunerandus educitur. Porro super illo laetabitur iustus, cum viderit vindictam. De isto dicit homo: *si utique est fructus iusto? Utiue est Deus iudicans eos in terra* (Ps 57,11-12). Non quidem vel pagani necandi essent, si quo modo aliter possent a nimia infestatione seu oppressione fidelium cohiberi. Nunc autem melius est ut occidantur, quam certe relinquatur virga peccatorum super sortem iustorum, ne forte extendant iusti ad iniquitatem manus suas.” English translation taken from *ORB Online Encyclopedia. Military Orders. St. Bernard of Clairvaux, In Praise of the New Knighthood (Liber ad milites Templi: De laude novae militiae)*, trans. Conrad Greenia:

<http://www.the-orb.net/encyclop/religion/monastic/bernard.html>

(21 January 2015)

4 1C 55 (FAED I, 229).

5 LJS 34. 36 (FAED I, 394-395).

6 2C 30 (FAED II, 265).

7 LMj 9,5 (FAED II, 600).

8 LMj 9,7 (FAED II, 602).

9 Pacifico SELLA, *Francesco, l'Islam, l'Oriente*, in *Credere Oggi* 170 (Marzo-Aprile 2009), Edizioni Messaggero Padova 2009, 150-165.

10 Cfr. Chronicle of ERNOUL (1227/1229), in *Chroniclers of the Fifth Crusade* (FAED I, 605-607); F. GABRIELI, *San Francesco e l'Oriente islamico*, in *Espansione del francescanesimo tra Occidente e Oriente nel secolo XIII*, Atti del VI Convegno della Società Internazionale di Studi Francescani (Assisi, 12-14 ottobre 1978), Centro di Studi Francescani, Assisi 1979.

11 G. BASETTI-SANI, *San Francesco è incorso nella scomunica? Una bolla di Onorio III e il supposto pellegrinaggio del Santo a Gerusalemme*, in *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 65 (1972) 3-19.

12 ANGELO CLARENO, *A Chronicle or History of the Seven Tribulations of the Order of Brothers Minor*, Translated from Latin by D. Burr and E. Randolph Daniel, The Franciscan Institute Publications, Saint Bonaventure University, NY 2005, 29.

13 ER 16,5-7 (FAED I: 74). Latin text in: FRANCESCO D'ASSISI, *Scritti*, Edizione critica a cura di Carlo Paolazzi, Frati Editori di Quaracchi, Fondazione Collegio S. Bonaventura (*Spicilegium Bonaventurianum*, Tom. xxxvi), Grottaferrata 2009, 266: “Fratres vero qui vadunt, duobus modis inter eos possunt spiritualiter conversari. Unus modus est quod non faciant lites neque contentiones, sed sint subditi *omni humanae creature propter Deum* (1Petr 2,13) et confiteantur se esse christianos. Alius modus est, quod, cum viderint placere Deo, annuntient verbum Dei, ut credant in Deum omnipotentem, Patrem et Filium et Spiritum Sanctum, creatorem omnium, redemptorem et salvatorem Filium, et ut baptizentur et efficiantur christiani.”

14 LR 12,4 (FAED I, 106): “submissive and subject at the feet of the same Holy Church.” Latin text in: FRANCESCO D'ASSISI, *Scritti*, 338: “ut semper subditi et subiecti pedibus eiusdem sancte Ecclesie.”

15 An example of this lacuna in the consideration of the true meaning of chapter 16 of the *Earlier Rule* is that taken by the attitude of JAN HOEBERICHTS, *Francis and Islam*, Franciscan Press,

Quincy University, Quincy, Illinois 1997, where the praiseworthy exegetical analysis of chapter 16 of the ER does not include the expression “*Confiteantur se esse christianos*” among the various subtitles to chapter 3 of part 1.

16 ER 16,10-12 (FAED I, 74).

17 ARNALD OF SARRANT, *Chronica XXIV Generalium Ordinis Fratrum Minorum*, in *Analecta Franciscana*, Tomus III, edita a Patribus Collegii S. Bonaventurae, Ad Claras Aquas (Quaracchi) 1897, 21.

18 JORDAN OF GIANO, *Chronicle*, 8, in *13<sup>th</sup> Century Chronicles*, Translated by P. Hermann, Franciscan Herald Press, Chicago 1961, 24.

19 LR 12,1 (FAED I,106).

# MALIK AL-KAMIL AND THE CHRISTIAN EFFORT TO REGAIN JERUSALEM

Henri Bresc

(Translation and adaptation from *Enciclopedia Treccani*, in:  
[http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/malik-al-kamil\\_\(Federiciana\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/malik-al-kamil_(Federiciana)/)

The relationship between Malik al-Kamil and Emperor Frederick II can be clarified in the light of the familiar Ayyubid system, which alternated competition and precise collaboration between princes. Saladin acquired a legitimisation *a posteriori* for having destroyed the Islamic Shi'ite dynasty in Egypt, and for his surprise victory over Guy of Lusignan in 1187 at the Horns of Hattin in Galilee. He captured Damascus and Aleppo from the heir of his lord Nur al-Din Ibn Zangi, and integrated the principalities of Syria and al-Gazira in a system of delegated authority, sanctioned by the proclamation of the name of the supreme sovereign after that of the Abbasid Caliph of Baghdad, the theoretical source of authority, during the Friday sermon in the mosques. The political and religious reference of the dynasty was Sunni Islam, of which the Ayyubids assured the triumph in Egypt and in Syria, without however eliminating the Shi'ite refugees on the Syro-Lebanese mountains. Side by side with the new dynasty, a pluralist organisation with its four juridical schools, Muslim mysticism spread, placing its roots in poverty, in devotional exercises practised in the convents of the Sufis and other confraternities of beginners, and in the cult of the saints. The Ayyubid dynasty, finally, made recourse to a mixed political personnel, and founded its ideals upon a theory of ecumenical royalty, expressed through the example of the princes, which exalted royal power, and the mission of wise and enlightened sages.

Al-Malik al-Kamil Nasir al-Din Abu l-Ma'ali Muhammad was the first born son of al-Adil Abu Bakr ben Ayyub, brother and successor of Saladin (Salah al-Din Yusuf Ibn Ayyub) in supreme authority. He was born between 1177 and

1180, and started his political career in al-Gazira in 1191 as representative of his father. He was lieutenant of Saladin and a friend of Richard the Lion-Heart of England. Together with his father he succeeded in dethroning al-Afdal, son of Saladin, from his states and his sovereignty. In 1200 al-Adil was proclaimed Sultan of Egypt and of Syria. In 1207 he became Caliph and divided his provinces among his sons. Malik al-Kamil received the throne of Egypt.

In May 1218 an unexpected expedition, the Fifth Crusade, planned to conquer Egypt. Al-Adil came to defend the province of Egypt, 'seat of the Empire', but he died in August and Malik al-Kamil succeeded him as supreme commander of an unstable familiar system. After the conquest of Damietta by the Crusades in November 1219, he continued to defend the rest of Egypt, the heart of the Empire, until the arrival of his brothers, al-Ashraf and al-Mu'azzam, who encircled the Crusader army. On the basis of a treatise he obtained the retreat of the Fifth Crusade which had wanted to capture Cairo. The Crusade retreated on 27 August 1221.

In a letter written to Malik al-Kamil, the *Epistola salutaris*, the historian of the Crusade, Olivier of Paderborn, thanked Malik al-Kamil for having provided for the care of the wounded and sick Crusaders, and for having permitted to the Christian army to go to Acre with provisions that the Sultan himself had sent. The humanity and benevolence of Malik al-Kamil are evident also in the episode of the coming of Saint Francis of Assisi in the Muslim camp. They are also evident in the Sultan's reflection upon a lasting peace and upon the means to make it happen. His efforts were



concluded in the treaty of Jaffa. The sovereign offered to the Crusader commanders to exchange Jerusalem with Damietta during the most dramatic moment of the Crusade, after having acquired the approval of al-Mu'azzam who had restored the *Haram al-Sharif*, or the noble enclosure of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. Unfortunately the Papal Legate Pelagius Galvan had refused the proposal, because of the belligerent spirit of the Crusaders and their will to liberate the Copts, who were also inspired by an eschatological movement.

The years between 1221 and 1227 were marked by a staunch competition between Malik al-Kamil and his brothers. Malik al-Kamil became an ally of al-Ashraf and threatened al-Mu'azzam, sovereign of Damascus. In 1225 al-Mu'azzam allied himself with a Persian commander, the Shah of the Khwarezmian Turks, Galal al-Din, who was the commander of a powerful army that had been thrown out of Transoxiana by the Mongols and had become a mercenary army. Malik al-Kamil was also preoccupied to establish a barrier between Egypt and the threat of his brother, and was fearful of the Sicilian Crusade and maybe a new expedition against Damietta. Therefore in 1226 Malik al-Kamil resuscitated the ancient strategy of the Egyptian sovereigns. The Crusader States

had been their shield, since they had consented to the survival of the Fatimid regime in the face of Nur al-Din and to the peaceful ascent to power of Saladin. Therefore, Malik al-Kamil offered to Emperor Frederick II, King of Jerusalem, who had married Jolanda of Brienne, the possibility of regaining Palestine, which at that moment was under the sovereignty of al-Mu'azzam.

The death of al-Mu'azzam in November 1227, and the succession assured by a young prince, namely the son of al-Mu'azzam, al-Nasir, rendered Malik al-Kamil the leader in the game. In August 1228 he occupied Palestine and installed his governors. The arrival of Frederick II on 7 September, saved al-Nasir. According to the scholar Humphreys (1977) the objective of Malik al-Kamil consisted in guaranteeing for himself the possession of Syria. He could count upon sufficient forces and he did not want in any way to disperse them because of a useless war. He was therefore constrained to avoid any conflict. We note, however, that his position was very strong. It is true that Frederick was in charge of 800 knights and 11 thousand men, but he could not remain in Palestine for long, since the division of the Latins between the Emperor who had been excommunicated by Gregory IX and the partisans of the Pope rendered his situation very fragile.



*St. Francis and Sultan Malik al-Kamil. Painting in the divano of Saint Saviour Monastery in Jerusalem*

A profound political reflection, therefore, made Malik al-Kamil able to attempt a durable solution. The agreement that started in Damietta was to be extended in a parallel manner to the circle of Frederick II. As Paul Alphandéry wrote: "It was not a question of taking the Holy Places from the Infidel, but of arriving to the Holy Places together with the Infidel." The pilgrimage was a supreme value and a peaceful politics of convergence, and it was possible between leaders of nations that were enlightened by a philosophical reflection. The Emir Fakhr al-Din, son of the 'Shayk of the Shuyukh', Sadr al-Din, who belonged to a family of Persian Sufis and sages, who was also a man in arms and a diplomat, and who became regent in 1249, was the one who guaranteed this political agreement and was the interlocutor of Frederick, who created him knight. The relationship between the sovereigns was consolidated by an exchange of philosophical correspondence and by the sending of an astronomer to the camp of Frederick.

The agreement of Jaffa was concluded for a period of 10 years, 5 months and 40 days, starting from 18 February 1229. It included the restitution of Jerusalem, Lydda and the road which led up to the Holy City into Crusader hands. Toron (Tibnin) and Bethlehem were given as personal gifts of Malik al-Kamil to Emperor Frederick II. The *Haram al-Sharif* (Al-Aqsa Mosque and Dome of the Rock) were to remain in Muslim hands, as well as the nearby villages, and were to fall under the authority of a governor. There is doubt regarding the chapter which concerns the reconstruction of the city walls, that had been torn down by order of al-Mu'azzam. According to Muslim chroniclers the walls were not to be reconstructed. The representatives of Frederick II did not attempt at consolidating the walls. The Ayyubid historiography enriched the coming of the Emperor to Jerusalem with apocryphal anecdotes that represent similar elements of interpretation: the Emperor would have arrived to listen to the Muslim call to prayer and threw out a priest who had entered the *Haram*. The historians, men of religion, did not understand the logic of peace of the royal culture, and attributed it to a pure materialism on the part of the Emperor. Frederick did indeed explain his deeds in a letter written on 28 March 1229 in Jerusalem. The city and its environs had been ceded peaceably "in order to consent to the pilgrims to arrive and enter freely the Holy Sepulchre and return without any danger." Jerusalem had been subdivided according to the same principle: "Since the Saracens show a certain veneration for the Temple, and they go up

to it to adore according to their rite in the manner of pilgrims, we consent to them to come freely, without carrying arms, and in the numbers they so wish to come, without however staying in the city, but only praying outside in that place, and once they finish their prayers, they are to leave the city."

The decision of Malik al-Kamil found opposition in the devout quarters, who were staunch censors of all power that had been gained in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, particularly of the question of the *jihad*, or holy war, that had become an instrument of influence and a principle of their alliance with Saladin. Emmanuel Sivan (1967) noted that their indignant voices were soon heard. However the men of religion of Jerusalem who arrived to protest in the camp of Malik al-Kamil were punished. They were preachers of al-Gazira, Mossul, Baghdad and also Egypt. Their protest went even beyond religious circles. Some composed poems against the ceding of Jerusalem. An Emir was arrested and a Turkish prince of Irbil, grandson of Saladin, wrote to express his indignation. But Malik al-Kamil easily suffocated the opposition that had arisen in support of al-Nasir. In fact, in Damascus, during a sermon, a certain sage by the name of Sibt Ibn al-Gawzi, who had settled in the reconquered city of Jerusalem, did not hesitate to say a lie by assuring that the pilgrimage to Jerusalem was now prohibited for Muslims. But Malik al-Kamil reassured his opponents by telling them that he could easily retake the Holy City without much effort.

After the departure of Emperor Frederick, Malik al-Kamil, who felt strengthened once again, manifested his authority. The alliance with al-Ashraf and a brief siege of Damietta in June 1229 imposed to al-Nasir, who had been abandoned by his Emirs, to make an exchange: he gave Damascus over to al-Ashraf and acquired the Trans-Jordan with Kerak and Shawbak fortresses. Some princes who were favourable to the strategies of Malik al-Kamil settled in the minor principalities, and thus separated the dominions of al-Ashraf, namely Syria and Armenia. Malik al-Kamil, therefore repropounded in 1234 to overthrow the Seljuk Sultanate of Asia Minor in order to transfer in those lands the princes of his family that had possessions in Syria and to establish a unitary state that would unite Syria with Egypt, without any vassal princes. The opposition of al-Ashraf and the other Ayyubids constrained him to renounce to his plan. In 1237, when al-Ashraf died, Malik al-Kamil occupied Damascus, and died in this city in March 1238.



# THE FIRST FRANCISCAN FRIARY IN JERUSALEM

Noel Muscat ofm

The Franciscan presence in the Holy Land goes back to the times of Saint Francis himself. In 1215, in the company of another friar chosen by Francis, Giles went again on pilgrimage, this time boarding a vessel from Brindisi in order to go to the Holy Land, where he devoutly visited the Holy Sepulchre of Christ and other holy places. It is probable that Brother Giles was the first Franciscan to visit the Holy Land (G. GOLUBOVICH, *Biblioteca bibliografica di Terra Santa*, I, Quaracchi 1906, 105). The account is found in the *Chronicle of the 24 Generals*:

“Giles also received obedience from blessed Francis, so that he and a companion could go and visit the sepulcher of the Lord Jesus Christ and the other places of the Holy Land. While he was staying for some time at the port of Brindisi, in order to wait for a ship to take him on his crossing, he acquired a pitcher, which he filled with water, and afterwards he went along the town crying: ‘Who would like to have a drink of water?’ He would then accept all those things which were necessary for his livelihood and for that of his companion. After crossing over he visited with the greatest devotion the sepulcher of the Lord and the other holy places. When he arrived at Acre, he stayed there and worked for a living. He used to make reed baskets, which are used by the people of that town. He also used to carry the dead to the cemetery and to carry water in the town. With this work he would acquire bread and other necessities of life. Whenever he could not acquire anything, he would then ‘have recourse to the table of the Lord, begging alms from door to door’ (*Testament* 22, in FAED I, 25-26). After

these events he returned to Saint Mary of the Portiuncula” (*Chronica XXIV Generalium*, in *Analecta Franciscana* III, 77, English translation by N. MUSCAT, *Chronicle of the 24 Generals*, Franciscan Communications, Malta 2009, 101 [<http://www.i-tau.com/franstudies/>]).

The general chapter of 14 May 1217 sent friars on mission to various parts. It also divided the Order into provinces. One of these provinces was that of Syria, or the province of Outremer (Beyond the Sea), with its headquarters in the Crusader town of Acre on the Palestinian coast. Brother Elias of Assisi was sent as the first minister provincial of Syria and it was he who welcomed Saint Francis when he set foot in the Holy Land in July 1219, before proceeding by ship to Damietta to join the Fifth Crusade. According to Golubovich, Elias returned to Italy in the spring of 1221, and during the general chapter of 30 May 1221 he was chosen by Francis to be his vicar in the place of Peter Cattani, who had died at the Portiuncula on 10 March 1221. The Franciscan presence in Acre continued until 18 May 1291, when the city fell to the Muslim armies of Malik al-Ashraf and the Crusaders and Knights Templars and Hospitallers escaped to Cyprus. The original Franciscan friary lay outside the present-day city walls, and was the headquarters of the provincial of the Holy Land.

The Franciscan presence in the Holy Land was not limited to Acre. During the 13<sup>th</sup> century the Franciscans established themselves in all the Crusader strongholds of the Palestinian and Lebanese coast, starting from Tripoli in the north and going down to Sidon, Tyre, Acre and Jaffa.

But the most interesting presence was that in the holy city of Jerusalem. It was short-lived, lasting only from 1229 till 1244, but it is a proof that, just three years after the death of Saint Francis, the Friars Minor were living in Jerusalem, where they would eventually settle on stable basis during the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

On 7 September 1228, Emperor Frederick II landed in Acre and went up to Jerusalem in order to receive the gift of the holy city from Malik al-Kamil of Egypt, who made with him a peace treaty in Jaffa on 18 February 1229. On 17 March Frederick II entered the holy city, and the following day he placed upon his head the crown of King of Jerusalem in the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre. Frederick had concluded with Malik al-Kamil a truce of 10 years, which would mean that he received the city of Jerusalem, except the *Haram al-Sharif* where Muslims pray in the Al-Aqsa Mosque and Dome of the Rock, and the town of Bethlehem. This was a political strategy on the part of Malik al-Kamil in order to weaken the power of the Sultan of Damascus. In the meantime Pope Gregory IX had excommunicated Emperor Frederick II for having established a peace treaty with the Sultan of Egypt without the Pope's authorisation. For this reason the Pope sent two Friars Minor to Acre with letters to the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem Gerald of Lausanne, to announce publicly to all Christians that the Emperor had been excommunicated. Before leaving Acre the Emperor punished the Franciscan and Dominican friars of Acre on 8 April 1229, before he left and went to Cyprus.

The truce established between the Sultan of Egypt and the Holy Roman Emperor, however, had its positive aspects. It meant that Jerusalem became a Christian city and that Christians could live peacefully within its confines. Taking advantage of the truce the Patriarch entered Jerusalem in March 1229, and the clergy and regulars took possession of their ancient churches and other properties. The historian Matthew Paris does not mention that the Franciscans were among the regulars who went to live in Jerusalem. However, we know that on 1 February 1230, Gregory IX had published a letter, *Si Ordinis Fratrum Minorum*, and sent it to the Patriarch of Antioch, Albert de Rezato (†1245) and to the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Gerald of Lausanne (†1239), in which it is evident that the Friars

Minor had a friary in Jerusalem in 1229, and the Pope was defending their rights. The following is the English translation of the text of the letter (*Breve*) *Si Ordinis Fratrum Minorum*, published by G. GOLUBOVICH, *Biblioteca Bio-Bibliografica della Terra Santa*, Vol. I, 160:

“Gregory, Bishop, Servant of the servants of God: to our Venerable Brothers the Patriarchs of Antioch and Jerusalem, Legates of the Apostolic See, and to all Archbishops, Bishops, and our beloved sons the Abbots, Priors, Provosts, Deans, Archdeacons, and other Ecclesiastical Prelates who will receive this letter, wishes health and Apostolic Benediction. – If you are aware of the Religion of the Order of Friars Minor, you can fully come to know that they are not desirous of any temporal goods, since they have founded their institution upon poverty and are content with the bare necessities, and they have professed this kind of life in a praiseworthy manner. Therefore it is to Your favour, as it is fitting, that you help them in all ways, since it can hardly be presumed that they are searching for or desiring any temporal comforts. Therefore we admonish you all, and we attentively exhort you to strictly adhere to what We are commanding you through this Apostolic letter, namely, that if some among the faithful, or any other person would like to build oratories for them in your parishes, as long as they are looking for the spiritual welfare of souls, and are working for their benefit, you are to give them permission to do so with all benevolence, and you are to permit those who have received mandate from their Provincial Minister, to preach the word of God in your parishes as trustworthy men. We also will that the friars of the aforementioned Order do not receive thites, first offerings and other oblations, nor can they give ecclesiastical burial. Therefore, as has been requested of you, you are to procure that you bless the cemeteries and other buildings given to them by the Apostolic See, and you are not to hinder them or compel them in any way, and you are not to issue any sentence of excommunication against them without the special mandate of the Apostolic See. You are to see that you carry out these Our commands, since these Religious have proven themselves to be zealous, and We want you to regard them favourably and with benevolence, and we do not want you to act in any other way in their regards. Given at Perugia, on the kalends of February, the



third year of our Pontificate” (1 February 1230).

This document is a proof that the Franciscans were given a special privilege by Pope Gregory IX, namely that of accepting money offerings, in their exceptional status as missionaries in Saracen lands, as long as they respected the parochial rights of the clergy. The Franciscan Rule, in fact, prohibited friars to receive money offerings. The fact that the letter mentions dwellings and oratories for the friars is an indication that, during the truce established between Frederick II and Malik al-Kamil, the Franciscans could very well have had a friary in Jerusalem.

The presence of the Franciscans in Jerusalem is documented by Ricoldo of Montecroce, who visited Jerusalem in 1288-1291. When describing the place where the soldiers compelled Simon of Cyrene to carry Jesus' cross in the Via Dolorosa, this Dominican friar states that it is to be found at the junction of Jehoshapat Street (today the Via Dolorosa) and the street leading from Saint Stephen's Gate (today al-Wad), and adds: “Next to that place is the house (*locus*) that formerly belonged to the Friars Minor.”

According to Denys PRINGLE, *The Churches of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem. A Corpus*, Vol. III, *The City of Jerusalem*, Cambridge University Press 2010, 97 (no. 290), this house would certainly have existed in the period 1229-1244, when Jerusalem was under Christian control during the truce established between Frederick II and Malik al-Kamil. We do not know where the Franciscan friary exactly stood, since the present Fifth Station of the Via Dolorosa was only established in 1850. It must have been in the area, although we are not even aware on which side of the street it would have stood. One of the friars who lived in this house in 1230-1234 was Brother Ardizio Corradi, who died in Senigallia in November 1235.

We know nothing else about this convent, except that in 1244 the Franciscans in Jerusalem were probably massacred during the raid of the Khwarizmian Turks, that ended the Christian presence in the Holy City (GOLUBOVICH, 189-190). There are some indications of a sporadic presence of Friars Minor in Jerusalem, as in the case of the friars present for the Holy Fire in 1267. The idea that the Franciscans were present in the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre already in 1240 has been shown to be incorrect by Golubovich,

185-187.

The Franciscan presence in Jerusalem during the 13th century was, therefore, shortlived. However, we do know that it was possible that Franciscans were present in the Holy City and that they had received special permission by the Apostolic See to be able to survive in an environment that was, on the whole, hostile, and that this presence heralded their definite presence in Jerusalem as from 1335, on Mount Zion.

# NEW BIOGRAPHY OF SAINT FRANCIS DISCOVERED

*Paolo Di Stefano*

*in Corriere della Sera (25 January 2015)*

André Vauchez, a scholar of medieval history and sanctity, has affirmed that he has witnessed the most important find of the last century in his field of studies. The news was given by *Le Monde* on 24 January 2015, in a detailed article written by Catherine Vincent. The discovery was made by the medieval scholar Jacques Dalarun, author of numerous studies on Saint Francis and Saint Clare of Assisi, and an authority in the field of Franciscan studies.

The discovery of this new biography of Saint Francis reopens the “Franciscan Question” and obliges us to take a step backwards in order to go through a very troubled history that speaks about the deep divisions within the Order of Friars Minor, especially between the “conventuals” and the “spirituals”. It was from such a division that a multiplication of biographies of Saint Francis was born, all of which were “politically” meant to present an image of the saint and his Order according to the various tendencies. In 1260 the general chapter of Narbonne had entrusted Saint Bonaventure with the task of writing an official biography of the saint for reasons of peacekeeping in the Order. The *Legenda Maior* of Saint Bonaventure revealed itself to be contradictory and full of fantastic episodes, although it was approved by the chapter of Pisa in 1263 with the aim of destroying the memory of the non-official biographies and put an end to controversy once and for all. The order of the chapter of Paris in 1266 was meticulously carried out, and the disappearance of many biographies led to painstaking search on the part of the future

scholars of Franciscan history.

It was only in 1768 that the *Vita Sancti Francisci*, or *Vita Prima*, was discovered. It had been composed in 1228, upon encouragement of Pope Gregory IX, by the Franciscan erudite scholar Thomas of Celano (1185/90 – 1265), who had personally known the founder of the Order. The work of Thomas tended, however, to exalt the figure of the all-powerful brother Elias, minister general of the Order (1232-1239). The delusion of many followers imposed upon the successor of Elias, Crescenzo da Jesi, in 1244-46, to request to the same Thomas a *Vita Secunda* (which was discovered in 1806) with the collaboration of the “three companions” of Saint Francis (Leo, Rufino and Angelo), authors of a letter accompanying a manuscript compiled in Greccio and containing various witnesses of other companions of the Saint. The end result was a new biography, also known as the *Memoriale in desiderio animae* (The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul), which was rather uncertain and not trustworthy in both its lacunae and interpolations. The decision to include the miracles of Saint Francis obliged Thomas to compose a *Tractatus Miraculorum* (Treatise on the Miracles) in 1253.

Now, Dalarun has discovered an intermediate biography between the *Vita Prima* and *Vita Secunda*. He started his research in 2007, when Dalarun published an *Umbrian Legend*, dated between 1237 and 1239, which narrates the last two years of the life of Saint Francis, that is from the episode of the reception





of the stigmata on La Verna in September 1224 until his death on 3 October 1226. (THOMAS DE CELANO, *Les Vies de saint François d'Assise. Vie du bienheureux François, Légende de chœur, Légende ombrienne, Mémorial dans le désir de l'âme* (dir.), Éditions franciscaines - Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 2009, 844 pp. [ISBN 9782204086974]). His suspicion was that this document was a fragment of a much longer biography, which has been lost until now. In September 2014, Jacques Dalarun received an email by a friar from Vermont, Sean Field, who told him that he discovered that a manuscript

was on sale during an auction in the prestigious gallery of New York, Les Enlumineurs.

The codex, coming from a continental private collection, contains a Life of Saint Francis, which includes the *Legenda Umbra*. The prologue of the Legenda is found online. In deciphering it, Dalarun discovered that the author declared that he had written the *Vita Prima*. It is therefore undoubtedly Thomas of Celano, who also states precisely that brother Elias had given him the information he wrote. Celano also adds that, since many friars were complaining that the *Vita Prima* was too long, he was asked to



provide a summary copy of it. This biography is therefore the result of this initiative; it is an intermediate biography between the *Vita Prima* and the *Vita Secunda*.

Dalarun immediately contacted the director of the Manuscript department of the National Library of France, who was prompt in acquiring the precious codex for 60 thousand Euros. Thus we now possess the true *Vita Secunda*. The small volume, 120 by 82 mm,

contains various works, among which a series of sermons, the Admonitions of Saint Francis and a commentary on the Our Father. The Italian origin (probably a Franciscan friary of central Italy) according to Dalarun is certain, and the compilation of this “pocket library” is dated during the 1230’s. An équipe of scholars are now working hard to study it, and it is hoped that a critical edition of the biography will be out in two years’ time.





## True “aggiornamento” is the fruit of obedience

*In the account of Jesus' Presentation in the Temple, wisdom is represented by two elderly persons, Simeon and Anna: persons docile to the Holy Spirit, led by him, inspired by him. The Lord granted them wisdom as the fruit of a long journey along the path of obedience to his law, an obedience which likewise humbles and abases, but which also lifts up and protects hope, making them creative, for they are filled with the Holy Spirit. They even enact a kind of liturgy around the Child as he comes to the Temple. Simeon praises the Lord and Anna “proclaims” salvation (cf. Lk 2:28-32, 38). As with Mary, the elderly man holds the Child, but in fact it is the Child who guides the elderly man. The liturgy of First Vespers of today's feast puts this clearly and beautifully: “senex puerum portabat, puer autem senem regebat”. Mary, the young mother, and Simeon, the kindly old man, hold the Child in their arms, yet it is the Child himself who guides them both. Here it is not young people who are creative: the young, like Mary and Joseph, follow the law of the Lord, the path of obedience. The elderly, like Simeon and Anna, see in the Child the fulfilment of the Law and the promises of God. And they are able to celebrate: they are creative in joy and wisdom. And the Lord turns obedience into wisdom by the working of his Holy Spirit. At times God can grant the gift of wisdom to a young person, but always as the fruit of obedience and docility to the Spirit. This obedience and docility is not something theoretical; it too is subject to the economy of the incarnation of the Word: docility and obedience to a founder, docility and obedience to a specific rule, docility and obedience to one's superior, docility and obedience to the Church. It is always docility and obedience in the concrete. In persevering along the path of obedience, personal and communal wisdom matures, and thus it also becomes possible to adapt rules to the times. For true “aggiornamento” is the fruit of wisdom forged in docility and obedience. The strengthening and renewal of consecrated life are the result of great love for the rule, and also the ability to look to and heed the elders of one's congregation. In this way, the “deposit”, the charism of each religious family, is preserved by obedience and by wisdom, working together. By means of this journey, we are preserved from living our consecration in “lightly”, in an unincarnate manner, as if it were some sort of gnosis which would ultimately reduce religious life to caricature, a caricature in which there is following without renunciation, prayer without encounter, fraternal life without communion, obedience without trust, and charity without transcendence. Today we too, like Mary and Simeon, want to take Jesus into our arms, to bring him to his people. Surely we will be able to do so if we enter into the mystery in which Jesus himself is our guide. Let us bring others to Jesus, but let us also allow ourselves to be led by him. This is what we should be: guides who themselves are guided.*

Pope Francis  
Homily at Mass on the Day of Religious Life  
Vatican, 2 February 2015

## Abbreviations

### Writings of St. Francis

Adm	Admonitiones.
CantAudPov	Cantico Audite Poverelle.
CantSol	Canticum fratris Solis.
LaudDei	Laudes Dei Altissimi.
BenLeo	Benedictio fratri Leoni data.
EpAnt	Epistola ad sanctum Antonium.
EpCler I	Epistola ad Clericos (Redactio prior).
EpCler II	Epistola ad Clericos (Red. posterior).
EpCust I	Epistola ad Custodes I.
EpCust II	Epistola ad Custodes II.
EpFid I	Epistola ad Fideles I.
EpFid II	Epistola ad Fideles II.
EpLeo	Epistola ad fratrem Leonem.
EpMin	Epistola ad Ministrum.
EpOrd	Epistola toti Ordini missa.
EpRect	Epistola ad populorum rectores.
ExhLD	Exhortatio ad Laudem Dei.
ExpPat	Expositio in Pater noster.
FormViv	Forma vivendi sanctae Clarae data.
Fragm	Fragmenta alterius RegulaeNB.
LaudHor	Laudes ad omnes horas dicendae.
OffPass	Officium Passionis Domini.
OrCruc	Oratio ante crucifixum.
RegB	Regula bullata.
RegNB	Regula non bullata.
RegEr	Regula pro eremitoriis data.
SalBMV	Salutatio beatae Mariae Virginis.
SalVirt	Salutatio virtutum.
Test	Testamentum.
UltVol	Ultima voluntas S. Clarae scripta.

### Sources for the Life of St. Francis

1C	Tommaso da Celano, Vita Sancti Francisci.
LCh	Celano, Legenda ad usum chori.
2C	Celano, Memoriale in Desiderio Animae.
3C	Celano, Tractatus de Miraculis S. Francisci.
LJS	Julian of Speyer, Vita Sancti Francisci.
OR	Officium Rhythmicum S. Francisci.
AP	Anonimo Perugino.
L3C	Leggenda dei Tre Compagni.
CA	Compilatio Assisiensis.
LMj	S. Bonaventura, Legenda Maior S. Francisci.
LMn	S. Bonaventura, Legenda minor S. Francisci.
SP	Speculum Perfectionis.
SC	Sacrum commercium S. Francisci.
ABF	Actus Beati Francisci et Sociorum Eius.
Fior	Fioretti di San Francesco.

### Sources for the Life of St. Clare

BICl	Blessing of St. Clare.
1-4LAg	Letters to St. Agnes of Prague..
LCl	Legend of St. Clare.
PC	Acts of the Process of Canonization.
PrPov	Privilege of Poverty.
RegCl	Rule of St. Clare.
TestCl	Testament of St. Clare.

**Editor: Noel Muscat OFM**

All correspondence should be  
addressed to  
[muscatnoel@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:muscatnoel@yahoo.co.uk)



**Cover picture:**

*St. Francis blessing the chapel of the Porziuncola*