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## EDITORIAL

# LEAVE FRANCISCAN HISTORY TO THE HISTORIANS?

The statistics of the Order of Friars Minor as on 31 December 2014 have been published in *Acta Ordinis Fratrum Minorum* 134 (January-April 2015), n. 1, 97-99. The total number of Friars Minor in the world, together with novices, stands at 13632. The number of friars still makes the Order of Friars Minor (OFM) the largest among the religious families of the First Franciscan Order. However, the decrease in numbers of friars during these last decades has been dramatic.

One can reason, and rightly so, that numbers do not mean much, since it is not the quantity but the quality of the members of an institution that matters most. During these last decades the OFM has been at pains to try to understand what is going wrong among its rank and file. To this day no exhaustive explanation has been provided. One would have expected the last general chapter, celebrated in Assisi from 10 May to 7 June 2015, to provide us with a convincing answer. We stand to be disappointed.

Indeed, the chapter has been a great occasion to understand the importance of working together as Franciscans to revitalise our charism in the Church and in the world irrespective of historical differences. The ministers general of the other Franciscan families of the First Order, namely the Conventual and Capuchin ministers general, addressed the chapter members. The overall mood was: let's do away with historical differences and move on together in a new approach to what binds us as one, strong family in the Church.

Well said indeed. One cannot help to agree with such an affirmation. There is, however, a point that needs to be raised as a matter of concern. One gets the impression that history has become a kind of academic exercise reserved for historians who pore over documents in ancient archives in order to provide a thrilling story of events that shaped the Franciscan family along its 800 years plus of history. To be honest, most of these historians are not even Franciscans. Gone are the days when the scholars of Franciscan history were Franciscan friars. They are now a handful. The majority of experts of Franciscan history are lay men and women, and these scholars and professors are doing a splendid and praiseworthy job, more so because they are, in a certain sense, "neutral" to the "seraphic battles" that shaped Franciscan history written by Franciscan historians.

It is, however, sad to listen to comments like: "let us leave history to historians". It is as if we are saying that we want to forget all about our past and move on as if we have been reborn out of nothing. It is sad that the temptation to do away with history has to do with a serious lack of knowledge of our history. Indeed, the lack of knowledge of our roots is a lack of knowledge of who we are. It is a lack of knowledge of the fact that we have always been a great family, with a great message, with infinite possibilities of expression of our charism. That is what our differences have been all about.

To try to do away with differences and create a pan-Franciscan family artificially united from the top will spell disaster. We still have not learnt the lessons of history. Particularly the OFM family has never

been worse off than when people at the top decreed its internal unity, or rather, unification. The mistake is that of equating unity with unification. Unity is a natural process that comes from the grass roots. Unification is imposed from the top and is doomed to a miserable failure. The Secular Franciscan Order has been forcefully unified. But is it united? One has great doubts about the possibility to create unity through a conscious effort to wipe away deep-rooted differences that are a product of history.

One could argue that history has seen many mistakes and scandals being committed in the name of autonomy and separatist expressions. This is true, but it is also true that these same divisions in the Order, which were originally judged as separatist, or even as schismatic and heretical, have developed into the great Franciscan reforms.

What is even more intriguing is the fact that, while the official Franciscan Orders are speaking about the need for unification (not because of their dwindling numbers and limited resources, or so they say), there are many other tiny and less tiny Franciscan congregations that have mushroomed ever since Vatican II. These are much less likely to accept the idea of unification. They have never been thwarted in their attempts to develop by the great Franciscan Orders, even though, honestly, they offer little else which can be added to the richness of Franciscan experience during eight centuries of history. So, I ask, what shall we do when it comes to speak about unity outside the official channels of government of the Franciscan Order? Shall we create a mega religious Order forgetting our distinctive characteristics which are being imitated by these lesser brothers of ours?

In my lessons of Franciscan history I often like to comment on the grave scandal that was caused by the poverty controversy of the early 14<sup>th</sup> century, when the general government of the Order entered into a fray in the name of an ideology of Lady Poverty with Pope John XXII. I like to state that, if the Order did not disappear from the face of the earth in that period, those events are a proof that the Order will last till the end of the world. The Order at that time was divided, just as the Church was divided. But in one thing it felt united, in protecting its *raison d'être*. The Order knew who it was and defended itself from a Pope who wanted it to become something else. Funnily enough, in such a disastrous moment of its existence, the Order was united. Is it so united now?

Unity is a must for survival. Unity means mutual respect, brotherly love and cooperation. It means fostering our institutions and the ideals for which they were born. But unity does not mean forgetting the sacrifices that we entailed to be who we are today. It does not mean doing away with traditions and customs that have shaped our identity kit during centuries of history. It is not true to say that we, Franciscan brothers of the First Order, are all the same and that it is high time that we become one by pulling the same rope. Do we want to become one amorphous mass of religious who are increasingly ignorant of their roots?

If this is our choice, well, then let us leave history to historians. They are becoming increasingly more expert in showing us how we tend to ignore the lessons of history, and to forget that, *historia est magistra vitae*. At least for those who want to keep alive the flame that our forefathers have handed down to us.

Noel Muscat ofm



# BROTHER ELIAS IN THE LIBER DE PRELATO OF SALIMBENE'S CHRONICLE

Noel Muscat ofm

The enigmatic figure of brother Elias of Assisi, or of Cortona, has been the object of intense study during these last decades.<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to present the controversial figure of Elias without encountering an infinite number of problems. His portrait is, in fact, a series of portraits, and they are all different one from another. His person remains a genuine representation of the historical contradictions, which distinguished the Franciscan movement from the start. We meet the figure of Elias in many medieval documents, which present him either as a faithful disciple of St. Francis, or as an enigmatic man of government and General Minister of the Order.

One of the most famous portraits of brother Elias is that given by the Franciscan Salimbene of Adam in his *Chronicle*, written in 1283-1288, in the section known as *Liber de Prelato*<sup>2</sup>. Our aim is that of presenting a critical view of Salimbene's work, while at the same time trying to grasp what could have been the truth behind his assertions. First of all, however, we give a short biography of brother Elias, which will serve as a basis for the analysis of the accusations leveled against him by Salimbene in his *Chronicle*.

## Biography of brother Elias

There is scant information regarding the origins of brother Elias before he entered the Order of friars Minor. The date of his birth is uncertain, but it is highly probable that he was of the same age of Francis, who was born in 1182, or maybe some years older than him. The sources provide contradictory notes regarding his social origins.

Some hold that he was born in Assisi. According to Salimbene, the original name of Elias was Buonbarone (Bonusbaro). His father came from Castel Britti, a fortified village in the diocese of Bologna, while his mother was from Assisi. Elias exercised the activity of making mattresses and teaching young boys to read the Psalter. Others state that Elias was a notary in Bologna. Yet others present Elias as having been born in Cortona from the noble family of Coppi. Rosalind Brooke provides a plausible solution. She writes: "In a fresco that used to be above the door of the refectory of the Sacro Convento, he was depicted among St. Francis' companions as 'frater Helias de Bevilio', which has been identified with a tiny hamlet, about an hour's walk from Assisi, situated on the top of a hill looking out towards Perugia. A reasonable solution of these various indications has been suggested by Fortini. Up the valley of the Tescio, upon the opposite side of Assisi from Beviglie, is another hamlet, less well-known, called Bivigliano. The name of the district it is in is Castel Britti. Salimbene, then, gave his father's place of origin its correct name, but not knowing that there was one by Assisi, he presumed it to be the Castel Britti near Bologna."<sup>3</sup>

We do not know when Elias might have met Francis, but it seems that he joined the Order sometime between 1210 and 1215. Some modern biographers have believed that Elias was the mysterious friend of Saint Francis who accompanied him to the solitary crypt (or cave) during the period of his conversion, according to *The Life of Saint Francis* by Thomas of Celano, 6.

The *Chronicle* of Jordan of Giano, written in 1262, states that Elias was sent as missionary to

Syria in 1217, and that he became the first minister of the province of Syria (the entity later on known as The Holy Land). He resided in Acre on the Palestinian coast and welcomed Saint Francis when he came to Damietta in Egypt and landed in Acre in 1219, during the fifth Crusade. Elias subsequently left Acre and returned to Italy in 1220. The success of Elias' stay in Acre is proved by the fact that he welcomed an able bible scholar in the Order, namely brother Caesar of Speyer. It was during his tenure of office in Acre that Elias founded the friaries of Constantinople, Acre and maybe also those of Antioch and Tripoli on the Lebanese coast.

After the death of Peter Cattani, the first vicar appointed by Saint Francis (29 September 1220 – 10 March 1221), Francis chose brother Elias as the next vicar of the Order, a post that was roughly similar to that of minister general, a title that is reserved to the head of the Order after the death of Saint Francis in 1226. Until the death of Saint Francis on 3 October 1226, Elias was instrumental in the organisation of the Order, during a period in which Francis was often sick and too fragile to govern the friars. It was to Elias that Francis, sometime in 1220, addressed the *Letter to a Minister*, in which he admonishes him to observe the Rule in an inviolable way and to treat the brothers with the love and mercy of a loving father.

Elias witnessed the great expansion of the Order during this period. In 1221 he organised the mission in Germany, entrusting it under the care of Caesar of Speyer and sending with him also Jordan of Giano. On 10 September 1224 the first friars Minor landed in Dover in England. Some months after the death of Saint Francis, in 1227, a group of friars, Daniel of Calabria and companions, died as martyrs in Ceuta, Morocco. At the same time Elias took spiritual care of Saint Clare and the Poor Ladies of San Damiano. Although the sources coming from the pen of the Spiritual friars of the late 13<sup>th</sup> and early 14<sup>th</sup> centuries depict Elias as the head of the faction of ministers provincials against the writing of the *Regula bullata* of 1223, we have no reason to doubt his faithfulness to Francis. Jordan of Giano recounts how, during the general chapter at the Portiuncula in 1221 Elias was close to Francis and faithfully transmitted to the brothers the wishes of their founder.

The same image of Elias appears in *The Life of Saint Francis* written by Thomas of Celano

in 1228-1229. In this first official biography of the saint brother Elias is presented as a faithful custodian of the Order and a loving brother to Saint Francis, upon whom he lavished his care when the saint was sick and needed an eye operation by papal physicians in Rieti.<sup>4</sup> According to Celano, it was Elias who received the vision that announced to him the death of Saint Francis two years before the death of the saint.<sup>5</sup> Elias had the privilege of seeing the stigmata of Saint Francis when he was still alive and to him Francis reserved a special blessing at the moment of death<sup>6</sup>. In Celano's biography the vicar appears as the sure guide of the Order, and the natural successor of Francis.

Following upon the death of Saint Francis on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1226, brother Elias addressed an encyclical letter to the entire Order, in which he announced to the brothers the sad news of Francis' passing away, but also the joy of the miracle of the stigmata<sup>7</sup>.

During Pentecost of 1227 Elias convoked the general chapter of the Order at the Portiuncula. Strangely enough, he was not elected minister general, but the choice fell upon Giovanni Parenti. It seems that Elias was needed by Pope Gregory IX to dedicate his energies to the building of the basilica of Saint Francis in Assisi.

According to the Franciscan chronicler Mariano da Firenze, Elias was an able architect who was the brains behind the project of the building of the twin church of Saint Francis of Assisi. He personally presided over the building of the lower church or crypt, planned to look like the Holy Sepulchre as a kind of fortress enshrining the remains of the Christ-like Saint Francis. The upper church was probably designed by Filippo da Campello. What is sure is that on 29<sup>th</sup> March 1228 Elias, in the name of the pontiff Gregory IX, received from Simone Pucciarelli the donation of a plot of land on the "Colle inferiore" (the Lower Hill), also known by the name "Colle dell'Inferno", which was then changed to "Colle del Paradiso", upon which the new church was to be constructed. On 29<sup>th</sup> April the Bulla *Recolentes qualiter* officially proclaimed the beginning of the construction work on the basilica. On 17<sup>th</sup> July 1228, the day following the canonisation of Saint Francis at the church of San Giorgio in Assisi, Pope Gregory IX personally laid the foundation stone of the new church. On 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1228 Gregory IX accepted the new church as a personal property of the Holy See.



During the spring of 1230 the inferior basilica was ready. Gregory IX, with the Bulla *Is qui ecclesiam* of 22<sup>nd</sup> April, declared the church to be *caput et mater* (head and mother) of the Order of friars Minor. On 16<sup>th</sup> May he promulgated the Bulla *Mirificans misericordias*, in which he conceded an indulgence to those who assisted in the translation of the relics of Saint Francis. The ceremony took place on 25<sup>th</sup> May 1230 during the general chapter of the Order, but it was disturbed by a number of incidents, in which it is difficult to understand the role that Elias might have played. It seems that he feared that the remains of the saint would be stolen during the procession, and therefore he secretly arranged for them to be buried before the set date, and thus angered the friars who came from all over the world to see the holy relics, since he ordered the burial ceremony to be hastily carried out in secret.

Thomas of Eccleston, in his Chronicle, *De Adventu fratrum Minorum in Angliam*, although being hostile to Elias, might be right when he stated that during the general chapter of 1230 in Assisi, Elias tried to convince the friars to elect him as minister general, by forcefully taking many brothers who should not have come to the chapter and who threw open the chapter door and made Elias sit on the chair of the minister general Giovanni Parenti. Peace was eventually restored, and Parenti was again elected minister general, and Elias retreated to Cortona to do penance, in such a way as to regain the trust of the Pope and friars. Indeed, in 1232, during the chapter of Rieti, Elias was nominated minister general by the Pope, because of his close friendship with Saint Francis.

Elias was minister general from 1232 to 1239. During these seven years he gave a positive impulse to the progress of the Order, which grew to over 15 thousand brothers spread out in all Europe, up to Scandinavia, Scotland, Ireland, Poland, Livonia. Elias gave particular attention to the missions of the Order. In 1232-33 he sent Haymo of Faversham and Rudolph of Rheims to Nicea, in order to promote unity between the western and eastern Churches. During the same year he sent Giacomo da Russano to Georgia, and opened missions in Damascus, Baghdad and Morocco. In 1235 he sent a mission to Tunis and in 1238 opened a friary in Aleppo. Elias encouraged studies in the Order, opening *studia* in various principal friaries. He was in favour of an intense diplomatic service of the friars to the

Holy See, and from 1235-37 also in favour of the Inquisition. He reorganised the structure of the provinces, increasing their number from 16 to 40, and he instituted and institutionalised the figure of the visitor, who became a kind of controller in the single provinces in the name of the minister general.

The extraordinary expansion of the Order and the personal prestige of Elias gained him the support of the important political figures of the time. In fact, Elias was often called to accomplish delicate diplomatic missions, like the one in which he intervened to bring peace between the Communes of Spoleto and Cerreto in 1233 during the year of the "Alleluia". The trust that he gained from Saint Clare is seen in the second letter that she wrote to princess Agnes of Bohemia, who had founded a monastery of Poor Ladies in Prague, telling her to listen to Elias' counsels more than to those of anyone else. Robert Grosseteste, bishop of Lincoln, in two letters written in 1236 and 1237, asks the minister general to collaborate in his pastoral activity and augurs a more intense friendship between them. Grosseteste was an outstanding benefactor of the brothers in England and bequeathed to them his enormous library in Oxford. Emperor Frederick II also sent a letter to Elias on the occasion of the translation of the relics of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary (17<sup>th</sup> May 1236), in which he promises his support for the sterling work of the Franciscan Order. In 1238 Gregory IX sent Elias on a delicate mission of mediation between himself and Emperor Frederick II. Such a mission had a negative result and the Pope ended up by excommunicating the Emperor in 1239, but by that time Elias himself had fallen into disgrace with the Pope and the Order. Elias finalised the building of the basilica of Saint Francis, with the bell tower in 1235 and with the large monastery and papal palace at the back. He also willed to be represented at the foot of the large Crucifix painted by Giunta Pisano in 1236 for the same basilica. Unfortunately this Crucifix is now lost.

In spite of all these successes of his tenure of office as minister general, brother Elias did not fail to attract much criticism from his confreres. It is rather difficult to discern the exact nature of the accusations that have been levelled against Elias. Jordan of Giano accuses him of despotism and lack of observance of the Rule; Thomas of Eccleston accuses him of a lavish life-style and violent methods of government;



*Portrait of Brother Elias*

Salimbene gives us a list of thirteen accusations in his *Liber de prelado*. These will be the object of our analysis in the second section of this paper.

The problem with Elias regarded, on one part, his faithfulness to the Franciscan ideal embraced by Saint Francis and the first brothers, and on the other, by his fear of the newcomers in the Order, particularly the friars beyond the Alps, who were in their majority clerics and not lay brothers. Elias indeed favoured lay brothers like him in positions of government. It is true that Elias never asked for any special dispensations from the Holy See regarding the observance of the Rule, and in this respect he was presenting himself a faithful son of Saint Francis.

The distance of the provinces beyond the Alps from the Italian core-group of friars who were all partisans of Elias, necessitated the sending of visitors in the provinces. The

aim of sending visitors was that of controlling the provinces that were becoming more and more autonomous from the Italian model of living the Franciscan life. It was precisely in the ultramontane provinces that the initiative to overthrow Elias began, with the help of a coalition of masters from the University of Paris, including Alexander of Hales, Jean de la Rochelle, Richard Rufus, Haymo of Faversham, and helped by brother Arnulph, the papal penitentiary. Interestingly enough, Arnulph, Alexander and Haymo were Englishmen, and so was cardinal Robert of Somercotes, who took part in the famous general chapter of 1239 in front of Pope Gregory IX. One could almost speak of an "English plot" to overthrow Elias!

Against the will of Elias these friars and various ministers provincial asked for a general chapter to be convened in Rome in the presence of Pope Gregory IX on 15<sup>th</sup> May 1239. During the chapter these friars accused Elias regarding the lack of observance of the Rule, accusing him of nurturing an excessive love for comfort and of exercising a violent style of government. At the same time they presented to the Pope a project of reform for the Order. Elias tried to defend himself from the accusations, citing his fragile health. At that moment cardinal Somercotes asked the Pope to listen to Haymo of Faversham, as a wise man who would speak only a few balanced words (in the typical style of an Englishman!). After Haymo had spoken Elias was furious and his partisans created havoc during the chapter procedures. At that stage the Pope ordered silence and, after a brief moment of reflection, stated that he had been thinking that Elias was a good minister general but that, since the majority of the friars were refusing him, it was evident that something had to be done. Cardinal Somercotes suggested to Elias to hand in his resignation to the Pope. Elias refused, and the Pope immediately deposed him from the office of minister general. Immediately afterwards the chapter elected brother Albert of Pisa, minister of the English province, and a priest, as minister general.



The *Chronicle* of Thomas of Eccleston informs us regarding ulterior developments in the life story of brother Elias. A document of 27<sup>th</sup> May 1239 defines Elias still as custodian of the church of Saint Francis in Assisi. But it seems that he soon went to live in Cortona, maintaining close contacts with the Poor Ladies, in spite of the prohibition of the *Later Rule*, chapter 11 and the orders of the minister general. This grave challenge of disobedience on the part of Elias prompted him to seek the protection of Emperor Frederick II, who at that moment was in Tuscany. Gregory IX, upon hearing of this action, immediately excommunicated Elias. From that moment Elias lived in the retinue of Emperor Frederick, even though there was an attempt at reconciliation with the Pope in 1240. Although Elias was afraid to present himself to the minister general and the friars, he did respond to Albert of Pisa's mediation, by writing a letter to the Pope, with the aim of justifying himself and asking for pardon. The letter was entrusted to Albert of Pisa, but it never arrived to the Pontiff, since Albert of Pisa died during the same year 1240 and the letter was found in his pocket and was never delivered to the Pope.

The solidarity between Elias and Emperor Frederick lasted for many years. The Emperor entrusted Elias with important commitments. In 1240-41 Elias participated with Frederick in the siege of Ravenna and Faenza. In 1243 the Emperor sent him on a mission with an imperial letter to the king of Cyprus. Elias remained two years in the east on delicate diplomatic missions and trying to reconcile the Latin and the Greek churches. In 1244 he was back in Italy, having brought with him a precious relic of the holy Cross, which he deposited in Cortona. On 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1245 the Commune of Cortona donated to Elias and his friars a plot of land close to the locality known as *Balneum Reginae*, upon which he constructed a basilica dedicated to Saint Francis. The Commune also added another plot of land close to the Porta di San Cristoforo on 7<sup>th</sup> January 1246. The church was already open for cult in 1245, although it was consecrated much later, in 1347.

Towards the end of 1244 a mysterious episode occurred when a plot under the direction of Tiberio Magalotti from Assisi tried to snatch the town out of papal domain and hand it over to the Emperor's party. Some documents published by Faloci Pulignani witness that there might have been contacts between Magliotti and brother Elias in the

convent of Cortona where Elias was living, but we do not know to what extent Elias was involved in the plot, or whether he wanted Assisi to pass over to imperial domain in order to be able to return to his hometown.

In 1247 there was another attempt on the part of the Order to reconcile the rebel friar Elias. According to Salimbene, brother Gerard of Modena was sent to Cortona on the initiative of the minister general John Buralli of Parma to plead with Elias to re-enter the Order and be reconciled to the Church. Elias, however, was afraid of having to face punishment for his faults on the part of the ministers provincial he had offended, and he did not want to lose the sympathy of the Emperor. In fact, Elias ended up being excommunicated yet once again by Pope Innocent IV during the general chapter of Genova in 1244, when he appeared in front of the capitulars and, instead of trying to ask for pardon, arrogantly defended his past actions yet once more.

We do not possess much information regarding the last years of life of Elias. The *Actus beati Francisci et sociorum eius*<sup>8</sup> state that in 1250 Elias was again close to the Emperor in Sicily, where he assisted him in the construction of some fortifications. Emperor Frederick died on 13<sup>th</sup> December 1250 and Elias seems also to have got sick soon after. Time was now ripe for him to ask to be reconciled with the Church and Order. It is probable that Elias passed the last two years of his life in Cortona, where he died on 22 April 1253, after having admitted his faults (the adherence to the party of Emperor Frederick II and the abusive administration of the Order) and having obtained the absolution from the excommunication and reconciliation with the Church through the good deeds of archpriest of the *pieve*, Bencio. Elias was buried behind the altar of the church of Saint Francis in Cortona, in a simple tomb with a slab on which there was an inscription that used to appear on the slab between 1651 and 1721, when it was destroyed: *Hic iacet frater Helias Coppi de Cortona, primus Generalis Ordinis Minorum, qui obiit x kalend. Maii MCCLIII*.<sup>9</sup> The marble slab has been restored together with the Church of Saint Francis in Cortona.<sup>10</sup>

### *Brother Elias in Salimbene's Liber de Prelato*

The *Liber de Prelato* is an integral part of the voluminous *Chronicle* by Salimbene de Adam of Parma. Salimbene himself states the reasons

as to why he dedicated this particular section of his *Chronicle* to the figure of Elias as a prelate: "The preservation of religious orders is dependent on the frequent change of prelates. And this entire work, which pertains to Brother Elias, should be called "The Book of the Prelate", for in it we have written not only the faults of Brother Elias and evil prelates in general but also of the proper qualities of good prelates."<sup>11</sup>

Before entering into the themes developed in the *Liber de Prelato*, let us first give a short presentation of Salimbene's biography. Born to Guido and Immelda de Adam on 9<sup>th</sup> October 1221, he was called Ognibene at the baptismal font. When he entered the Franciscan Order the friars changed his name to Salimbene, stating that only God can be described as "all good", and that Salimbene would mean that he made a good leap in joining the Order. Although coming from a well to do family, Salimbene suddenly decided to join the Franciscans on 4<sup>th</sup> February 1238, much to the dismay of his father who did all he could to ruin his son's plans, but did not succeed. Salimbene states that Brother Elias himself accepted him in the Order, while he was on a journey to Cremona to meet the Emperor, where he had been sent by Pope Gregory IX in the year 1238.<sup>12</sup>

Salimbene entered the Order just twelve years after the death of Saint Francis, at a time when some of the first brothers of the Order were still alive. He states that he met the first and last friar that Saint Francis had received in the Order. He lived for a time with brother Bernard of Quintavalle. Salimbene eventually became interested in the apocalyptic writings of the Cistercian abbot Joachim of Fiore, which were very popular among the Spiritual circles of Franciscans during the late 13<sup>th</sup> and early 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. He became acquainted with Joachim's writings in 1243-1247, at a time when he was living in Pisa and knew an old abbot from the Order of Fiore, founded by abbot Joachim. When he describes Hugh of Digne, he calls him a *magnus Joachita*, and also states that the minister general John of Parma was a Joachite. However, after the death of Emperor Frederick II in 1250 and especially after 1260, when the Joachite prophecies were to be fulfilled with the age of the Spirit, Salimbene became uninterested in this theory.

When he became an old man Salimbene decided to write a voluminous Chronicle, which he compiled in 1283-1288. The Chronicle covers

various topics and in it Salimbene narrates that he personally knew many personages of his age, like Innocent IV, Saint Louis of France, Giovanni da Pian di Carpine, Gerard of Borgo San Donnino, Bernard of Quintavalle. But his greatest interest lay in Emperor Frederick II, who became a kind of antichrist in his anti-papal expeditions, and especially brother Elias.

It is precisely brother Elias who is the object of the tendentious *Liber de Prelato*, in which Salimbene castigates the ex minister general who fell in disgrace. The *Liber de Prelato*, occupying the section of the *Chronicle* beginning in folio 246v, according to Rosalind Brooke, "is not a separate book but an integral part of the larger work."

Salimbene's life was that of an itinerant friar. He travelled widely, throughout most of France and Italy: Paris, Troyes, Villefranche, Provins, Avignon, Geneva, Lyons, Bologna, Ferrara, Jesi, Reggio. Many a time he was on the move, and one doubts whether he truly had received obedience to be so itinerant. He wrote his Chronicle in Reggio. In 1287 he took up residence at Montefalcone, where he probably died in the year 1289, when he was 67 years of age.

Salimbene begins his *Liber de Prelato* by speaking about his vocation to the Order, and then immediately begins to criticise the way of life of brother Elias. He describes how Gerard of Corigia, the *podestà* of Parma, came for a visit of courtesy to brother Elias, the minister general. "At the time, Brother Elias was in the room set aside for the reception of secular guests, sitting on a bed of cushions in front of a roaring fire, and he was wearing an Armenian cap on his head. And when the *podestà* entered and greeted him, Brother Elias neither stood up nor moved from his place, as I saw with my own eyes, conduct which was thought most discourteous."<sup>13</sup>

Salimbene next states how "God humbled Brother Elias [...] when Brother Elias was deposed in a general chapter under Pope Gregory IX. And he well deserved to be deposed because of his many faults."<sup>14</sup> In order to criticise Elias, Salimbene presents a list of 13 grave that he attributes to the minister general's responsibility. We shall present them shortly, to give an idea of the intense dislike that Salimbene developed to the very man who had welcomed him into the Order of friars Minor.

The first fault, which we have already mentioned, concerned the lack of respect of

brother Elias towards civil authorities, especially in the case of the *podestà* of Parma who paid him a courtesy call. “Let us speak first of the insult which Elias did to Lord Gerard de Corigia. Since this noble man of high position – for he was, after all, *podestà* of Parma – had come to visit him honourably with his knights. Elias should have honoured him by rising in his presence. For honour becomes the one who extends it far more than the one who receives it. Yet Brother Elias did not understand this, and so he acted most uncivilly.”<sup>15</sup>

Salimbene was angry at Elias because of the fact that, whereas there was a good number of educated clerics in the Order, the minister general preferred to admit lay brothers and give them positions of responsibility. “A second fault of Brother Elias was that he accepted many useless men into the Order. I lived in the convent of Siena for two years, for example, and I saw twenty-five lay brothers there. Then I lived in Pisa for four years, and I saw thirty lay brothers living there.”<sup>16</sup> “The third fault of Brother Elias was that he promoted unworthy men to offices in the Order. For he placed lay brothers in the positions of guardians, custodians, and ministers, an absurd practice, since there was an abundance of good clerics available in the Order.”<sup>17</sup>

Salimbene dwells at length on the fourth fault of Elias. “The fourth fault of Brother Elias was that during his entire term of office there were no constitutions instituted to govern the Order and thereby to attain the desirable goals of preserving the Rule and regulating the Order and making it uniform.”<sup>18</sup> This is not to say that, during the time of brother Elias the Order was devoid of any legislation. It is true, however, that the first organised legislation of the Order dates from 1239, the year in which Elias was deposed from minister general. Much of this legislation was later to be incorporated in the first official constitutions of the Order, those of Narbonne, published by Saint Bonaventure in 1260.

But to return to the fourth fault of Elias, we now quote some expressions from Salimbene which intend to portray the state of affairs of his tenure of office. “Under Elias’ governance, there were many lay brothers, even tonsured lay brothers, who were totally illiterate, as I saw with my own eyes when I was living in Tuscany. Some lay brothers lived in the city near to, but completely set apart from, the convent of the friars, and, moreover, they conversed with women

through their windows. Furthermore, these lay brothers were completely useless as confessors or spiritual advisors [...] Some lay brothers were also empowered as full delegates to chapters, while others, who did not have that privilege, would come to chapter meetings in great numbers. I once attended a provincial chapter held in Siena, where more than three hundred brothers were in attendance, the majority of whom were lay, and they did nothing but eat and sleep [...] In that time indeed lay brothers were honoured more highly than priests. Thus once in a certain house where, save for one learned priest, all were lay brothers, the priest was required to take his turn in the kitchen. And so it happened that on one occasion the priest’s day fell on a Sunday, and he spent his time in the kitchen, cooking the vegetables as well as he was able. While he was at the task, however, a company of Frenchmen came by requesting a Mass immediately, and there was, of course, no one to celebrate it. Therefore, the lay brothers hastened to the kitchen and knocked on the door, asking the priest to come out and celebrate Mass. But he answered, ‘You go and sing Mass; I am cooking because you refused to do it.’ And it was indeed a wretched act of stupidity not to have given honour to the priest by whom they were confessed.”<sup>19</sup>

At least Salimbene is kind to brother Elias regarding the issue of studies. “For Brother Elias did have this good quality: he promoted the study of theology in the Order.”<sup>20</sup> But this is as far as Salimbene goes to provide a positive judgment on Elias.

“The fifth fault of Brother Elias was that he would never personally visit the districts of the Order, but always lived either at Assisi or in another place which he had built in the bishopric of Arezzo – the most pleasant, delightful, and beautiful place imaginable – which is still today called Celle di Cortona.”<sup>21</sup>

“The sixth fault of Brother Elias was that he treated the provincial ministers harshly and abusively unless they paid him off with money and gifts [...] Brother Elias held such powerful sway over the provincial ministers that they trembled before him like a reed struck by the water or a lark terrified by the swooping of a hawk. Truly, no one dared to tell him the truth in condemnation of his misdeeds, except Brother Augustine of Recanati and Brother Bonaventure of Iseo. For he did not hesitate to abuse those ministers slandered by his spies, who were, in fact, spread throughout the

provinces, a band of malicious and stiff-necked laymen [...] For he would depose them from the ministerial office without any just cause, denying them books and depriving them of their proper functions as preachers and confessors. Moreover, he made some of them put on the hood of probation and sent them from the east to the west, that is, from Sicily or Apulia into Spain or England.”<sup>22</sup>

According to Salimbene, Elias exercised power over the provincial ministers by instituting the office of Visitators. “In one particular province Elias made use of a Visitator who would spend the whole year making a tour of the province as if he himself were minister, and, accompanied by his companion, he would remain in some places for fifteen days or a month, or even longer if he wished. Whoever wished to denounce his minister could do so, and always received a favourable hearing. Thus whatever the minister ordained for his province the Visitator could completely disrupt, adding or diminishing as he liked.”<sup>23</sup>

The seventh fault of brother Elias regarded his lavish life-style. “The seventh fault of Brother Elias was that he wanted to live too luxuriously amid pomp and splendour. He would rarely go anywhere, save to see Pope Gregory IX or the Emperor Frederick, whose close friend he was. The only other places he would go to visit were Saint Mary of the Portiuncula, where Saint Francis started the Order of the friars Minor and also where he died; to the convent at Assisi, where the body of Saint Francis is kept in veneration; and to Celle di Cortona, where he had built a very beautiful and delightful residence in the bishopric of Arezzo. And Brother Elias kept strong well-fed horses, and he always rode wherever he went, even if he were travelling just half a mile from one church to another. And in so doing he broke the Rule, which says that the friars Minor ‘ought not to ride horseback, save when forced by clear necessity or infirmity.’ Also, like a bishop, he kept young servants, secular boys dressed in multicoloured clothing, to wait on and minister to him. Moreover, he rarely ate in the convent with the other brothers, but always alone in his own room [...] He also had his own personal cook in the convent at Assisi, who prepared him the most elegant of food [...] Elias had a special retinue of twelve or fourteen brothers, whom he kept with him at Celle di Cortona, and none of them ever stopped wearing the friar’s habit [...] Also, Elias had in his company a certain man named John, a

lay brother, who was called *de Laudibus*. And this John was harsh and brutal, a bully employed by Elias to inflict punishments on the brothers without mercy.”<sup>24</sup>

“The eighth fault of Brother Elias was that he attempted to retain rule over the Order by violence. In order to do this, he made use of many political manoeuvres. First of all, he changed ministers frequently, so that they could not become firmly enough ensconced to rise up against him. Second, he put only men he considered friends in the post of minister. Third he held no general chapters, save limited ones, that is, those restricted wholly to Italy. For he did not summon the ministers from beyond the Alps for fear that they would depose him.”<sup>25</sup>

“The ninth fault of Brother Elias was that when he learned that the ministers were gathering together against him, he sent commands throughout the whole of Italy to all the strong lay brothers that he considered friends. He instructed them to be sure to attend the general chapter meeting, for he hoped that they would defend him with their staffs. Having learned that, however, Brother Arnulf (the papal penitentiary who laboured most strenuously to convoke the general chapter for the deposition of Brother Elias) brought it about, with Pope Gregory’s consent, that only those brothers that the Rule specified should attend the general chapter.”<sup>26</sup>

“The tenth fault of Brother Elias was that after his deposition, he did not conduct himself with humility but rather attached himself wholly to the Emperor Frederick, who had been excommunicated by Pope Gregory IX. And while living at the imperial court, Brother Elias accompanied the Emperor on horseback, although he continued to wear the robes of the Order (as did all the other members of his retinue), an act which scandalised the Pope, the Church, and his own Order.”<sup>27</sup> According to Salimbene, after Elias’ downfall, the Order was slandered in many places. “For whenever the country people and children met a friar making his way through Tuscany, they sang the following song, which I have heard a hundred times: ‘There he goes, old Brother Elias / not too good and not too pious.’”<sup>28</sup>

“The eleventh fault of Brother Elias was that he had the evil reputation of being an alchemist.” This accusation has been object of study by contemporary scholars. Besides being far-fetched as an accusation, it does, however,



shed light on Elias' friendship with Emperor Frederick II's court and his possible knowledge of medieval sciences. There were, indeed, other friars who were reputed to practice, or at least, study alchemy.<sup>29</sup>

"The twelfth fault of Brother Elias was that, even after his deposition and his sojourn with the Emperor, he sought to establish his innocence and to prove the injustice of the Order in deposing him."<sup>30</sup> Salimbene here refers to Elias' poor show of self-defence during the general chapter of Genova in 1247.

Salimbene ends his attacks on Elias in a negative tone, stating that, "the thirteenth fault of Brother Elias was that he never sought to be reconciled to his Order, but persisted in his obstinacy until the day he died."<sup>31</sup> We know that this is not correct, since Elias did indeed die reconciled to the Church and the Order. What Salimbene seems to imply is that Elias did present a staunch resistance to reconciliation for a long period of his life, and this, in many ways, is true.

Historians and scholars have tended to criticise Salimbene's approach to historical facts, particularly in the case of brother Elias. It is true that, most of the literature coming from the pen of the Spiritual Franciscans of the late 13<sup>th</sup> and early to mid-14<sup>th</sup> centuries is very harsh in its criticism against Elias, seen as the embodiment of the betrayal of the original intentions of Francis of Assisi. Salimbene seems to have been influenced to a great extent by such literature. Yet he also knew Elias personally, and thus it is not possible to imagine that he invented all his accusations. Indeed, Elias has been rehabilitated during these last decades of studies. Many scholars today see him as a faithful son of Saint Francis, and describe his mistakes as a genuine effort to remain faithful to the humble beginnings of an Order of itinerant brothers. It is not easy to strike a balance between the figure of Elias disciple of Francis and Elias as vicar and as a disgraced minister general. It is difficult to present the enigmatic figure of Elias without encountering an infinite number of problems. His portrait is, in fact, a series of portraits, and they are all different one from another. His person remains a genuine representation of the historical contradictions, which were to distinguish the Franciscan movement from the start and all along its long history to this very day.

## NOTES

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3 R. BROOKE, *Early Franciscan Government. Elias to Bonaventure*, 50.

4 1C 101 (FAED I, 271); 1C 105 (FAED I, 274).

5 1C 109 (FAED I, 277).

6 1C 108 (FAED I, 276).

7 BROTHER ELIAS (attributed to), *A Letter on the Passing of Saint Francis* (FAED II, 489-491). Cfr. F. ACCROCCA, *Is the Encyclical Letter of Brother Elias on the Transitus of Saint Francis Apocryphal*, in *Greyfriars Review* 13 (1999) 19-63.

8 *Actus beati Francisci et sociorum eius*, 52 (FAED III, 553-554).

9 I. AFFÒ, *Vita di frate Elia ministro generale de' francescani*, Parma 1783, 104.

10 M. DOCCI, *L'Eredità del Padre: le reliquie di san Francesco a Cortona*, Edizioni Messaggero, Padova 2007; L. CARLINI, *Un secolo di restauri nel complesso monumentale della chiesa di San Francesco*, 1913-2009, Cortona 2009.

11 J. L. BAIRD, *The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam. "Liber de Prelato"*, 149.

12 J. L. BAIRD, *The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam. "Liber de Prelato"*, 74: "In the year of 1238, Indiction XI, I Brother Salimbene de Adam of Parma entered the Order of the friars Minor on the 4th of February, the feast of Saint Gilbert; and I was received on the evening of the vigil of Saint Agatha in the city of Parma by Brother Elias, the Minister General. For Brother Elias happened to be travelling through Parma on his way to Cremona to see the Emperor at the request of Pope Gregory IX."

13 J. L. BAIRD, *The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam. "Liber de Prelato"*, 75. Salimbene then goes on to state that such a conduct was haughty and arrogant: "For Elias was of humble parentage – his father was from Castel de' Britti in the bishopric of Bologna and his mother from Assisi – and before he entered the Order he used to earn his living by sewing cushions and teaching the children of Assisi to read their psalters. In the secular world he was called Bonusbaro, but on entering the Order he took the name Elias. He was elected minister general twice, and he stood in the good graces of both the Emperor and the Pope."

14 J. L. BAIRD, *The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam. "Liber de Prelato"*, 77.

15 J. L. BAIRD, *The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam. "Liber de Prelato"*, 77.

16 J. L. BAIRD, *The Chronicle of Salimbene de*

*Adam. "Liber de Prelato"*, 79.

17 J. L. BAIRD, *The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam. "Liber de Prelato"*, 81.

18 J. L. BAIRD, *The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam. "Liber de Prelato"*, 81.

19 J. L. BAIRD, *The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam. "Liber de Prelato"*, 82-83.

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23 J. L. BAIRD, *The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam. "Liber de Prelato"*, 85.

24 J. L. BAIRD, *The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam. "Liber de Prelato"*, 149-150. ANGELO CLARENO, *Chronica seu Historia septem tribulationum Ordinis Minorum*, in the second tribulation, describes the dubious story of how brother Caesar of Speyer was "killed" by one of Elias' strongmen companions (brother John *de Laudibus*?) when he had been imprisoned by the minister general. Cfr. ANGELO CLARENO, *A Chronicle or History of the Seven Tribulations of the Order of Brothers Minor*, Translated from the Latin by D. Burr and E. R. Daniel, Franciscan Institute Publications, Saint Bonaventure, NY 2005, 78.

25 L. BAIRD, *The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam. "Liber de Prelato"*, 150.

26 L. BAIRD, *The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam. "Liber de Prelato"*, 150.

27 L. BAIRD, *The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam. "Liber de Prelato"*, 152.

28 L. BAIRD, *The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam. "Liber de Prelato"*, 152.

29 P. CAPITANUCCI, *Francescani e alchimia fra realtà e mito: Elia da Assisi e Bonaventura da Iseo*, in *Elia di Cortona tra realtà e mito*, 161-180.

30 L. BAIRD, *The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam. "Liber de Prelato"*, 152.

31 L. BAIRD, *The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam. "Liber de Prelato"*, 154.



# THE CHURCH OF SAINT FRANCIS IN CORTONA AND THE CELLE DI CORTONA

The figure of brother Elias is intimately linked with the town of Cortona. It was in this Etruscan town that Elias found refuge after his dismissal from the office of minister general in 1239. The reason was simple. Cortona was a Ghibelline city during the 13<sup>th</sup> century, that is, it was closely allied with Emperor Frederick II.

To this very day Cortona remains part and parcel of the story of brother Elias. He lies buried in the magnificent church which he himself built and dedicated to Saint Francis, and his presence in the hermitage of Celle di Cortona is well-documented by the Franciscan sources, even from the times of Saint Francis himself. These two monuments remain a living reminder of the importance of brother Elias as a man of government, albeit his faults and shortcomings, as well as of his faithfulness to the original inspiration of Saint Francis.

## *The Church of Saint Francis in Cortona*

The church of Saint Francis, which lies in Via Berettini, in the heart of the ancient town of Cortona, was built by brother Elias in 1247, upon the model of the basilica of Saint Francis in Assisi. The plot of land donated to him by the Commune of Cortona was known as *Balneum reginae*, from the many Roman remains that existed in that place, which were probably the remains of thermal baths.

The church was built in a Gothic style in a single large aisle, just like the upper basilica of Saint Francis in Assisi, but having three arches at the very end, with the high altar and two side

chapels, giving it the form of a Franciscan TAU. It also contains a crypt, just like the lower Basilica in Assisi, which is not open for the public. Although it is Gothic in style, during the 17<sup>th</sup> century it was embellished by many Baroque additions, particularly in the high altar and in the side altars. Its original plan, however, is still intact.

The main door is a work of art, as well as the large windows on the left hand side, which have lately been restored. The basilica was originally frescoed, just like the one in Assisi, but unfortunately the frescoes disappeared when they were painted over, and especially when the Baroque side altars were erected during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. On the right hand side of the main



## *Celle di Cortona*

entrance one sees the remains of a 14<sup>th</sup> century fresco attributed to Buffalmacco.

The original main altar which was in stone, was substituted by a monumental Baroque altar in marble, the work of Bernardino Radi (17<sup>th</sup>

century). It is at this altar that the famous relic of the Holy Cross which Elias brought over from Constantinople in 1247 is enshrined. Other famous relics venerated in this church include the habit worn by Saint Francis, the book of the Gospels which is a manuscript, and the cushion belonging to Francis. These relics were all in the property of brother Elias who bequeathed them to the church. The great respect that Francis showed towards Elias, when he was still his vicar in 1221-1226, is evident in these relics which Elias cherished and enshrined in this special church that he wanted to be built in honour of the Seraphic Father at a time when he was no longer custodian of the famous Basilica of Assisi, which he had built between 1228 and 1235.

The side altars contain famous paintings. Among them we mention the painting of the Immaculate Conception by Comodi (1609). The altar dedicated to Saint Anthony of Padua has a painting by Cigoli (1597), depicting the miracle of the mule which adored the Eucharist. One of the most beautiful paintings in the church is that of the Annunciation by Pietro da Cortona (1597-1669), dated 17<sup>th</sup> century. In the right hand chapel of the apse stands the funerary monument of the first bishop of the diocese of Cortona, Ranieri Ubertini, who died in 1348. In the crypt, which was filled over during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, one finds the tomb of Luca Signorelli, who was buried there in 1523.

Behind the main altar, in the choir, is the tomb of brother Elias. Elias died in Cortona on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1253. Shortly before dying he dictated a detailed written confession which brought him back into favour with the Catholic Church which he had abandoned after a series of heated discussions that had rendered him a controversial character in Franciscan history. His brothers buried him beneath the main altar of the Church of Saint Francis. The tomb remained unknown until 1651, when it was discovered by chance and immediately covered with a slab of marble, which copied the inscription found on a sheet of copper on the body. The marble was broken after vandals desecrated the tomb in 1721, but later on, in 1976, it was replaced by the same inscription: *Hic iacet frater Helias Coppi de Cortona, primus Generalis Ordinis Minorum, qui obiit x kalend. Maii MCCLIII.*

## *The hermitage of Celle di Cortona*

The friary or hermitage of Sant'Angelo (Saint Michael Archangel) alle Celle, or more



*Church of St. Francis*

simply, Celle di Cortona is one of the oldest Franciscan hermitages. It was founded in 1211, when Saint Francis went to preach in Cortona, and retreated to this place in order to dedicate himself to prayer. A nobleman of the city, Guido Vagnottelli, who later on became a Franciscan and is known as the Blessed Guido of Cortona, one of the first companions of Francis, offered him this place which was totally cut off from human habitations. Francis was happy to accept it because of its inaccessibility.

It might be possible that, from the very start, Francis would have left a group of friars as custodians of these "Celle", an Italian word meaning cells, or rock-cut habitations for hermits. According to a trustworthy tradition, in 1215 Francis returned to the Celle for the Easter celebrations, after having spent the whole period of Lent on the Isola Maggiore of the Lake of Trasimeno. The episode is found in the *Actus beati Francisci et sociorum eius* 6 (FAED III, 448) and in the *Fioretti* 7 (FAED III, 578-579). Francis imitated Christ by fasting for forty days on this deserted island, and eating only half a loaf of bread during that period.

The hermitage of Celle di Cortona was



accessible because it lay close to the road that led from Assisi to Tuscany. The most documented period of Francis' presence in this secluded place is that of 1226, the very year in which Francis died. That spring Francis was in Siena, to receive medical attention because of his illnesses and because of the fact that he was very weak after having received the stigmata on La Verna in September 1224. While he was in Siena, Francis was on the verge of dying one night because of an internal haemorrhage. On that occasion he dictated the *Testament of Siena*. After his condition improved his companions decided to take him back to Assisi. On his way Francis stopped at the Celle di Cortona. "Six months before the day of his death, he was staying in Siena for treatment of his eye disease. But then all the rest of his body started to show signs of serious illness. His stomach had been destroyed, and his liver was failing. He was vomiting a lot of blood, so much that he seemed close to death. On hearing of this in a place far away, brother Elias rushed to his side. At his arrival the holy father had recovered so much that they left that area and went together to Le Celle near Cortona. After reaching the place he stayed for a while, but then the swelling began in his abdomen, his legs, and his feet. His stomach became so weak that he could hardly eat any food at all. At that point, he asked brother Elias to have him carried to Assisi" (1C 105: FAED I, 274).

According to a tradition, that is not proved in the Sources but is simply a theory, it was at Le Celle that Francis began to dictate his final *Testament*, which many scholars believe was



View of the convent of the Celle di Cortona

dictated some months later at the Portiuncula, just some days before Francis died.

After the death of Saint Francis the friars did not abandon Le Celle. Brother Elias was to become linked with this hermitage in an inseparable way. According to Thomas of Eccleston, in *De Adventu fratrum Minorum in Angliam*, chapter 13, after the disturbance caused by Elias' supporters during the general chapter of 1230 and the great tension that ensued during the translation of the relics of Saint Francis to the new basilica. "Brother Elias, going apart to a certain hermitage, let his hair and beard grow, and by this pretense at holiness was reconciled to the Order and to the brothers." According to a well-founded tradition, Elias retreated for two years at Le Celle in order to do penance, even though he did not interrupt his work as overseer of the building of the basilica of Saint Francis in Assisi.

When Elias became minister general of the Order (1232-1239), he continued to take care of Le Celle. It was he who in 1235 began to construct the most ancient part of the hermitage and shrine, particularly the Cell and Oratory of Saint Francis. Above this nucleus Elias constructed a small refectory and five small cells. He personally lived at Le Celle for long periods of his life. The sources all point out that Le Celle was one of the favourite places for Elias.

After the death of Elias in 1253 the hermitage remained inhabited for about a century, and for a time around 1318 it was a refuge for the Fraticelli, until it was taken over by the diocese of Arezzo. For over 200 years nobody lived in the hermitage and it was practically abandoned.

In 1537 the bishop of Cortona, Bonafede, called the friars Minor Capuchins, who had just been founded in 1528, to come to Le Celle and take care of this unique Franciscan hermitage. It soon became the novitiate house of the Capuchin province of Tuscany. The friars began to build the conventual church and the novitiate. The place remained a novitiate house until 1988, and is nowadays a house of prayer for retreats and for the welcoming of pilgrims coming to pray in this Franciscan shrine. ♦♦♦♦♦

# VITA BREVIOR SANCTI FRANCISCI BY THOMAS OF CELANO

The French scholar of Franciscan history, Jacques Dalarun, has just published the critical edition of the *Vita Beati Patris Nostri Francisci*, known as *Vita Brevior*, by Thomas of Celano, in *Analecta Bollandiana. A Journal of Critical Hagiography*, edited by the Société des Bollandistes, Tome 133, Bruxelles 2015, 23-86. The source of this information is taken from the website: [www.medievalhistories.com](http://www.medievalhistories.com).

Immediately after the death of St. Francis of Assisi in 1226 his friends began to write down the stories of his life. Later in the 13<sup>th</sup> century – when it became opportune to gloss over the more radical ideas of the saint – many of these stories were suppressed. A newly found tiny codex hold some of these first texts, later eradicated from the tradition.

A tiny codex measuring no more than 12 x 8 cm, but holding 122 densely written pages, is currently creating a buzz amongst both clerics and historians. Without illuminations and seemingly rather insignificant the find was really only discovered by accident by a professor of history at Vermont, Sean Field. He spotted the codex as it was coming up for auction in Paris and alerted his friend, Jacques Dalarun, historian and director of research at *Centre Nationale de la Recherche Scientifique*. Cursorily studying the manuscript from photos presented by the auction house he was immediately stirred by the fact that this seemed to be a manuscript with an unknown text by Thomas of Celano, friend and chronicler of Francis. The text was perhaps one of those suppressed and lost in the 13<sup>th</sup> century after the final official biography was published by Bonaventura in 1263. In 1266 Bonaventura's version was declared the only official text and all others were ordered destroyed by the General Chapter in Paris. Hence a dearth

of early manuscripts make the understanding of the man beneath the saintly myth a historiographically very complicated task to undertake.

## The works of Thomas of Celano

In September 1226 Francis of Assisi died at Portiuncula, where he had asked to be taken in the last days of his life. Immediately afterwards his body was carried inside the walls of Assisi in order to forestall the robbery of a body of a person so obviously on the way to both beatification and sanctification. As part of this process Pope Gregory IX in 1228 conferred the task of writing the official *Vita* to Thomas de Celano, who had been a companion to Francis since at least 1215. The *Vita* was soon completed and already in February 1229 it was approved, confirmed and declared official by the Pope. Later – in 1244 – Celano wrote a second Life of St. Francis after having "meditated on his holiness." The official aim was to present a more organised version of the Life of the Saint. Thomas de Celano also wrote *The Legend for Use in the Choir*, plus a *Treatise on the Miracles*, and other minor texts.

However, it is well known that a number of non-authorised remembrances at the same time circulated among the Franciscans, some of which were even written down. These different texts played a major role in the struggles between the different factions of the Franciscans about the proper understanding of the visions of the Poverello concerning the proper rules and regulations. During this period the tiny band of brothers was extremely busy turning itself into a major spiritual and political resource all over Europe. One of these texts was an intermediate *Vita* by Thomas





*Codex containing Vita Brevior*

de Celano. Until now, though, only fragments of this had surfaced. However Dalarun had for some time been busy trying to reconstruct this text from preserved fragments found elsewhere. Now, it seems, he has a full text to work with. Hopefully this might shed new light on the interplay between the different layers of reminiscences and texts, which circulated in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

As of now Professor Dalarun believes that the chronology is as follows: "In 1229 Thomas of Celano writes the *First Life*. Between 1232 and 1239 he writes the second – newly found Life summarising and updating the first one. In the same period he writes the *Legenda ad usum chori*, which is a summary of number two. Finally there is the *Life of Saint Francis* written by Julian of Speyer, which is a mixture of one and two."

### *The new text*

According to Professor Dalarun the new-found text thus seems to be an amendment of the first *Vita* of Celano. Apparently this original text was deemed too long by the brethren and was later shortened. However it also holds new items or vignettes as well as some reflections of Thomas de Celano, especially concerning the vexed problems of how to understand the Franciscan concepts of voluntary poverty and the love of creation. These

reflections are not so much preoccupied with fostering a symbolical point of view; rather they are lodged in concrete and manifest stories of the practicalities of how to experience the peculiar Franciscan poverty. To be a Franciscan is – according to this text – to dress as the poor and eat their food as well as to embrace a practical brotherhood with the full creation – humans, animals and plants. In one instance Francis is told to have taken bark and fibres from the trees and fields to mend his

habit just as the poor did, whenever their rags were disintegrating completely.

However, the manuscript does not only contain this newly found biography, which only fills the first 16 pages. It also holds other texts like sermons, recollections of admonitions by the saint, a commentary of the Pater Noster, etc. So far this part has only been looked at, but it might indicate that the tiny volume has been a kind of private notebook belonging to a brother around Assisi. Paleographically there is no doubt about the Italian origin of the manuscript, which is dated to the years after 1230.

As of now historians are eagerly waiting for the scholarly edition of the *Vita*, which will be published together with translations into French, English and Spanish (the *Vita* has been officially published in its original Latin in the *Analecta Bollandiana*). The Latin Edition and the French translation are ready and will soon be published in *Journal des savants* and *Etudes Franciscaines*. The Italian and English versions are scheduled to be published in *Frate Francesco* and *Franciscan Studies* later this year.

Exactly when the full manuscript, which in the end was purchased by the Bibliotheque Nationale de France for €60.000, will be published is another question. A group of 5 to 6 scholars are engaged in the project, which is believed to take at least two years.

# SAINT ROCHE OF MONTPELLIER: THE LAST LAY SAINT OF THE MIDDLE AGES

*André Vauchez*

**Excerpts from a study by: André VAUCHEZ, *San Rocco, in Esperienze Religiose nel Medioevo*, Vielle Editrice, Roma 2003, 81-95.**

Few saints have been as famous as Saint Roche in the West between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, a period that saw the spreading of his cult in all countries of Europe and in the most varied environments. In Italy, sixty-four places bear his name and three thousand churches have been dedicated to him. In spite of all this, we hardly know anything regarding this mysterious personage whose historical reality is controversial because of the difficulty of finding objective data in his biographies. As a hero of cult, canonised by his image and his legend, Roche is the product of an era – the end of the Middle Ages and the first decades of the Renaissance – in which the common people were still creating saints. In the veneration that became linked to his name we find the expression of anguish and trust: the anguish of the men of his times in front of sickness and death which were daily threats to their existence, and their trust in the intercession of a poor pilgrim whom God had cured miraculously from the plague, conferring upon him the power to heal all those who placed themselves under his protection. Contemporary to the black death and to the macabre dance, Saint Roche, together with the Virgin of Mercy, was the extreme remedy of

a humanity that had been decimated by the great trial, and that was desiring to rediscover peace for body and soul.

### *An obscure biography*

Although Saint Roche was among the most venerated saints in the Catholic world between the end of the Middle Ages and the 19<sup>th</sup> century, we do not possess many details regarding his life. The ancient sources are not very explicit, in particular regarding chronological data, and the rare concrete facts are rendered obscure by the addition of innumerable episodes which are more or less legendary.

According to tradition, Roche was born in the 14<sup>th</sup> century at Montpellier, a city in southern France (Languedoc). This is the only detail upon which all medieval sources concur. According to the most ancient and most trustworthy source, the *Vita Anonima*, known also by the name *Acta breviora*, written probably in Lombardy towards 1430 and printed for the first time in 1483, his birth occurred following upon a vow that his parents had made, since they were without child. Roche remained an orphan when he was about eighteen years old. He then sold all his belongings and distributed the money to the poor and left on pilgrimage to Rome. On his way, he stopped at



a hospice ad Acquapendente, in Lazio, where he assisted those suffering from the plague, and also making some miraculous cures. Then he passed through Cesena before reaching Rome, where he cured a cardinal who presented him to the Pope, who then gave him the plenary indulgence which he had longed for.

About three years later, Roche returned due north, passing from Rimini, Novara and Piacenza. In this last town he contracted the plague and retreated to a forest in the vicinity, where he used to be fed by a dog, which would go and steal food from nearby houses. The strange attitude of this dog surprised the rich landlord of the town, who followed it into the wood and there discovered Saint Roche. This rich man, called Gottard, welcomed Roche, took care of his cure and, following the invitation of the saint, followed him by begging for alms in the streets of his own town. Some time later an angel appeared to Roche and miraculously cured him. When he was about to leave his hermitage, Roche wanted to return to his homeland, but was arrested at Angera, on Lake Maggiore, by soldiers who accused him of being a spy. They shut him up in a prison, where he died five years later. The miracles that accompanied his body attracted the attention of all upon him and afterwards it was discovered that Roche was the nephew of the governor of the fortress. His remains were then solemnly buried in an unidentified church. According to another tradition, Roche died in Voghera, a city that had been defended by Galeazzo II Visconti (1320-1378), brother of Bernabò, duke of Milan, and enemy of the pope.

From this story devoid of any precise chronological references the majority of the successive biographies drew their information, except the one published in 1475 – from oral traditions or an Italian text – by the jurist and humanist Francesco Diedo from Padua, who was at the time governor of Brescia in the name of the Republic of Venice. According to Diedo, Roche was born in 1295 and died in 1327. But this ancient date does not convince us much, since we do not find traces of cult towards Saint Roche in France or in Italy before the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and the encounter in Rome between the saint and the pope – at least if it does not concern an episode of fiction – was impossible before 1367, the year in which Urban V left Avignon and returned to live in Rome. Besides this, always according to Diedo, Saint Roche did not die in Lombardy but

in France, close to Montpellier, in an *oppidum* that he left to his uncle before leaving for Rome. Finally, only Diedo narrates the miracle that Saint Roche accomplished during the epidemic of the plague that broke out in Constance in 1414, during the Council. A cardinal is said to have suggested carrying from Piacenza a painting of the saint, venerated in that town, which was solemnly welcomed by the bishops, and immediately worked the miracle of stopping the spreading of the plague. In reality, it is impossible that the episode would refer to the Council of Constance of 1415: maybe it refers to the Council of Ferrara in 1439, but there is no trace of its being mentioned by contemporary texts. Even the description of the supposed canonisation of Saint Roche by the Avignon Pope Clement VII or Benedict XIII, of which another biographer speaks, namely the French bishop Jean Pin (*Vie de saint Roch*, 1516) is hardly credible because of lack of documentation.

Once we exclude the information given by Diedo, we need to move the period of the life of this servant of God to the 14<sup>th</sup> century. There are two opposing theses regarding this argument. According to A. Maurino, Saint Roche lived between 1345 and 1376, thus staying in Rome during the return of Urban IV (1367-1370). The cardinal mentioned in the anonymous *Vita* was Angelic Grimoard, brother of the pope and his legate in Lombardy. The biography would have been written by Gottardo Pallastrelli, disciple and friend of the saint: this explains the richness of particular details regarding Piacenza and the imprecise information regarding Montpellier. According to the French scholar Augustin Fliche, the life of Saint Roche has to be placed between 1350 and 1378-79, and he would belong to the influential family of Rog, which occupied important municipal positions at Montpellier during the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. His surname, which was that of a family of Languedoc, was changed in Italy as a baptismal name. This hypothesis is, however, an object of discussion, since the name Roche already existed in Italy before the 14<sup>th</sup> century, particularly in the region of Padua and Treviso. The only certain conclusion, which we can make from all these texts, is that Saint Roche was a pilgrim who from Languedoc came to Italy during the second two-third part of the 14<sup>th</sup> century and died as a holy man when he was still young.

It is even more difficult to follow the whereabouts of his relics: from Angera, where the



*Franciscan Church of St. Roche in Virovitica, Croatia*

saint died, they were taken to Voghera. In the *Statuti civili e criminali* of Voghera, written in 1389 and approved by Visconti in 1391, the feast of Saint Roche is considered a normal working day, without any further details. This could mean that his cult was already well established. His relics were kept in the church of San Enrico from where they were stolen by the Venetians in 1485. The historians in Languedoc maintain, but less convincingly, that Roche returned to Montpellier and was buried in the chapel of the Dominican church. But it seems that there was no place of cult dedicated to Saint Roche in Montpellier during the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, and no local source speaks about his tomb. We know that, during the plague that struck the city in 1410, the university invoked its traditional patron saints against this disease – Saint Fermin and Saint Sebastian – without mentioning Saint Roche. Later on, the possession of the relics of Saint Roche was defended, but without proof, by the church of Marthurins – belonging to the Trinitarians – of Arles, which became one of the central places of cult of the saint in France during

the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### *Birth and spreading of the cult of Saint Roche*

Although there are many uncertainties regarding the life of Saint Roche and regarding his true identity, the success of his cult was rapid and marvellous.

In the absence of a precise chronology, we can note the existence of two fundamental centres of devotion from where the fame of this famous healer spread to all Europe: southern France, where the first explicit references to his cult go back to 1420-1430 (in the region of Le Puy and in that of Lodève), and in northern Italy, from Piacenza to Brescia and Venice, from where it passed on to southern Germany. Another ancient centre of cult was Belgium and the Netherlands. Since 1435 it seems that there was a painting of Saint Roche in the church of Sablon in Bruxelles, and a *Vita* of the saint in Flemish has recently been published,



which is older than 1470.

The role of Venice was particularly important and is well documented. During the course of the last quarter of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, there was a great development of the cult of Saint Roche in the Veneto region. In 1477 a confraternity of Saint Roche was founded in the church of Saint Julian in Venice. It was a confraternity of flagellants, who besides their proper devotions, cured those stricken by the plague in the hospitals of the city. In 1478 there existed a confraternity of Saint Roche at Villa di Bosco, and in 1479 at Pieve di Sacco, close to Padua. In 1480 the Council of the Ten officially recognised the Venetian confraternity of Saint Roche. In 1485 the city built a church in the area of Portanuova, after the outbreak of the plague. The translation of the relics of Saint Roche, which had been stolen and taken to Voghera in 1485, through the merits of a Venetian merchant helped by a Camaldolese monk of Murano, gave a lasting impact to the devotion. On that occasion the Doge and the Patriarch of Venice decided to build a church in honour of Saint Roche. On 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1490 the relics were solemnly translated to the new church, consecrated in 1508. Tintoretto decorated the walls of this church, known as “Scuola di San Rocco” with fifty paintings depicting important episodes from the life of the saint.

In 1499 Pope Alexander VI gave permission for the establishment of a confraternity of Saint Roche in Rome. This confraternity built a hospice for the plague stricken close to Ripetta and took care of the victims of the plague in the outbreaks of 1522, 1527 and 1530. In 1560 it obtained from Pius IV permission to construct a *Lazzaretto* (hospital for plague victims) underneath Monte Mario. Clement VIII in 1596 and Urban VIII in 1640 gave permission to enshrine the relics of the arm of Saint Roche in this church.

During those years many *Vitae* of Saint Roche were translated from Latin into the vernacular. The first anonymous biography, known as *Acta breviora*, was translated in French in 1494 by the Dominican Jean Phelipot, with the title *La vie, légende, miracles et oraison de Mgr. Saint Roch*. In 1492, taking inspiration from the *Vita* by Diedo, Ercole Albifiorio wrote a *Vita Sancti Rochi*, which was then published in Venice and in Udine in 1494. Some years later the bishop Jean Pin, ambassador of Francis I in Venice, published a *Vie de Saint Roche* in 1516. In Germany the biography was a great success. The first *Vita* in Latin (*Acta*

*breviora*) was published in Cologne in 1483. The translation in German had already been published in Vienna in 1481 or 1482, and another one was published in Nuremberg in 1484 with the text of a Mass in honour of Saint Roche. This Mass, entitled *Historia ex italica lingua redita Teutonice... ad honorandum S. Rochum*, seems to have been translated from Italian, probably in Venice: it is inspired by the *Acta breviora*, but contains other information that can include more ancient written or even oral traditions. In 1982 a *Vita* of Saint Roche dated 1470 circa, was published in Flemish, from the manuscript IV (74) of the Bibliothèque Royale di Bruxelles.

The cult of Saint Roche passed early on from Venice into Germany through Nuremberg, and precisely through the good services of a merchant family who traded with Venice, namely the Imhoff. Peter Imhoff and his brother Franz, who was a member of the confraternity of Saint Roche in Venice, introduced in 1484 the feast of Saint Roche on 16<sup>th</sup> August in the parish church of Saint Lawrence in Nuremberg.

### *Saint Roche, patron saint of victims of the plague and cholera*

The birth and spreading of the cult of Saint Roche in the West coincide with the great epidemics that struck the majority of the countries of Europe as from 1346. The most violent and famous epidemic was the Black Plague of 1346-1353. It originated in Asia, and spread to Italy, Spain and France. It killed between one third and one half of the European population. It also affected central Europe, Germany, Flanders, Great Britain and even spread as far north as the Baltic countries and Scandinavia.

The need for security and protection against the recurring outbreaks of the plague explains the success of the cult of Saint Roche. At first Saint Roche was venerated with other saints, whom the medieval mentality associated with the power of healing. Thus Saint Roche was initially venerated together with Saint Sebastian, who until that moment had been the principal patron of the victims of the plague, since the arrows by which Sebastian was killed reminded people of the wounds inflicted by disease.

In northern France, in Normandy and Piccardy, and in Champagne, people invoked also

Saint Adrian, protector against sudden death. Saint Roche was often presented close to him. In southern France, Saint Roche was represented close to Saint Anthony Abbot, patron saint of the victims of “Saint Anthony’s fire” or else with the holy doctors Saints Cosmas and Damian. From the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century the name of Saint Roche appears in the list of the fourteen auxiliary saints against the plague. Gradually, especially during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Saint Roche took precedence over all the other saints as protector of those who fell victims of the plague.

When the plague epidemic began to wane during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the cult of Saint Roche suffered a setback. From 1830 onwards he became to be invoked especially as the patron saint against the outbreak of cholera, which at the time was a dangerous epidemic. Montpellier attributed to Saint Roche the immunity of the city from the epidemic of 1834 and began to venerate him as a special patron. During the outbreak of cholera in Rome in 1837, Pope Gregory XVI recommended the Romans to the intercession of Saint Roche.

### *Saint Roche venerated as a Franciscan Tertiary*

The cult of Saint Roche was established in 1485 in Nuremberg, with a Mass in the Roman Missal for his feast day on 16<sup>th</sup> August. By that time the Franciscans considered Saint Roche as one of their own saints who were members of the Third Franciscan Order. Pope Pius IV referred to the fact that Saint Roche belonged to the Franciscan Tertiaries in a bulla of 1547. Since we do not possess any ancient documentation on this question, the link between Saint Roche and the Franciscan penitential movement seems to be arbitrary, but the Franciscans were enthusiastic to spread his devotion. At the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Pope wanted to solve once and for all the position of Saint Roche in the liturgy, and according to the testimony of the Venetian ambassador Badoer, in 1590, the Franciscan Conventual Pope Sixtus V had the intention either to canonise Roche or else to cancel his name from the list of saints. Fortunately Roche was canonised. Some years later Pope Gregory XIII introduced the name of Saint Roche in the

*Roman Martyrology* on his feast day, on 16<sup>th</sup> August. Finally Urban VIII solemnly approved his cult in 1629 and the Congregation of Rites prepared a proper Mass to be celebrated in the churches dedicated to Saint Roche.

### *The iconography of Saint Roche*

Roche is normally presented as a mature man, with a beard, and with some distinctive signs of a pilgrim. In the most ancient representations he is shown in the traditional clothes of pilgrims: when he carries a wide hat, called “romeo” it indicates a pilgrim who went to Rome, whereas the “Veronica” (or holy face) and the sea-shell indicate the pilgrim who went to Jerusalem or Santiago de Compostela. His tunic is tied at his waist by a cord and he has breeches. Normally he carries the staff of a pilgrim, and in this he is similar to representations of Saint James or Saint Pellegrino.

The power of Saint Roche against the plague comes from the fact that he was struck by the epidemic but was then cured. That is why many of the representations show Roche indicating the bubonic wound, which would normally be found in the groin, but which for reasons of respect for decency is represented on his thigh. Many times the wound is shown on the left thigh, maybe to indicate the power of evil, with Roche indicating it with his right finger. The wound is often represented in an oval or vertical manner, and in some instances it is graphic, with pus and blood oozing out, although later representations tend to hide with a bandage.

In paintings, beside Saint Roche there stands an angel and a dog: the angel intervenes to announce the terrible epidemic that Roche had to endure, or to console him, or even to cure his bubonic wound. This way of representing the saint comes from the tradition according to which he was cured by an angel. The dog of Saint Roche has known the same popularity of the piglet in the case of Saint Anthony Abbot. The dog appears in the iconography of Roche at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Since he has often been confused with Saint Lazarus, patron saint of lepers, he is sometimes represented with the dog licking his wound.





originally dedicated to Saint Roche, and this is a sign of the devotion of this saint as a protector against the plague, which used to ravage the Maltese islands fairly frequently during the 16<sup>th</sup> century and even beyond.

The devotion to Saint Roche in the Maltese islands is ancient. It flared up particularly in 1593 when Malta was ravaged by a plague epidemic, which killed over 3800 of its inhabitants. Many chapels were dedicated to this saint after that date, particularly in Hax-Xluq, a hamlet outside Siggiewi, in Haż-Żebbuġ, in Hal Balzan, in Valletta and in other places, including the ancient parish churches of the island. The fact that the Franciscan church of *Ta' Ġiezu* in Valletta had a side altar dedicated to Saint Roche is also a proof of the fact that this popular saint was believed to have been a Franciscan Tertiary and was venerated as such. Pilgrim, penitent and itinerant, he embodies all the qualities of the Franciscan charism that spread not only among the friars and cloistered nuns of the Order, but also among the lay people, a good number of whom lived a life of holiness and are venerated as saints and blessed of the Franciscan lay Order of brothers and sisters of penance.

### Addendum: the Statue of Saint Roche in Saint Mary of Jesus Church, Valletta, Malta

The Franciscan church of Saint Mary of Jesus in Valletta, Malta, built in 1575, boasts an ancient statue of Saint Roche, who was venerated as a Franciscan Tertiary. Underneath the organ loft of the church, on both sides of the internal doorway, there are two niches. One of them contains the statue of Saint Roche. According to the late historian of the Maltese Franciscan province, fr. George Aquilina ofm, this is an ancient statue dated prior to 1769, and which used to be found on the altar of Saint Eligius, in the northern aisle of the church. Nowadays in that chapel there are the statues of Saints Cosmas and Damian, who were also doctors. The chapel of Saint Eligius was

## The heart of what it is to be human

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*I do not want to write this Encyclical without turning to that attractive and compelling figure, whose name I took as my guide and inspiration when I was elected Bishop of Rome. I believe that Saint Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically. He is the patron saint of all who study and work in the area of ecology, and he is also much loved by non-Christians. He was particularly concerned for God's creation and for the poor and outcast. He loved, and was deeply loved for his joy, his generous self-giving, his openheartedness. He was a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature and with himself. He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace. Francis helps us to see that an integral ecology calls for openness to categories which transcend the language of mathematics and biology, and take us to the heart of what it is to be human. Just as happens when we fall in love with someone, whenever he would gaze at the sun, the moon or the smallest of animals, he burst into song, drawing all other creatures into his praise. He communed with all creation, even preaching to the flowers, inviting them "to praise the Lord, just as if they were endowed with reason." His response to the world around him was so much more than intellectual appreciation or economic calculus, for to him each and every creature was a sister united to him by bonds of affection. That is why he felt called to care for all that exists. His disciple Saint Bonaventure tells us that, "from a reflection on the primary source of all things, filled with even more abundant piety, he would call creatures, no matter how small, by the name of 'brother' or 'sister'". Such a conviction cannot be written off as naive romanticism, for it affects the choices which determine our behaviour. If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs. By contrast, if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously. The poverty and austerity of Saint Francis were no mere veneer of asceticism, but something much more radical: a refusal to turn reality into an object simply to be used and controlled. What is more, Saint Francis, faithful to Scripture, invites us to see nature as a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of his infinite beauty and goodness. "Through the greatness and the beauty of creatures one comes to know by analogy their maker" (Wis 13:5); indeed, "his eternal power and divinity have been made known through his works since the creation of the world" (Rom 1:20). For this reason, Francis asked that part of the friary garden always be left untouched, so that wild flowers and herbs could grow there, and those who saw them could raise their minds to God, the Creator of such beauty. Rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise.*

Pope Francis  
Encyclical Letter "Laudato si"  
24 May 2015  
Vatican, 27 April 2014

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## 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 Commmercium 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..
LCI	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.

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**Cover picture:**

*Eremo, Celle di Cortona*