

THE FRANCISCANS

IN THE MIDDLE AGES



Michael Robson

THE FRANCISCANS IN THE MIDDLE AGES

Monastic Orders

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Monastic houses – houses of monks, regular canons, nuns, and friars – were a familiar part of the medieval landscape in both urban and rural areas, and members of the religious orders played an important role in many aspects of medieval life. The volumes in this new series provide authoritative and accessible guides to the origins of each of these orders, to their expansion, and to their main characteristics.

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The Franciscans
in the Middle Ages

Michael Robson

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CHRONOLOGY

1181/2	Birth of Francis in Assisi.
1202/4	Francis was captured in the battle of Collestrada and imprisoned at Perugia.
1206	Conversion of Francis.
1209/10	Francis obtained initial approval of his Rule from Pope Innocent III.
1215, Nov.	Meeting of the Fourth Lateran Council.
1219	Francis's third attempt to reach the Holy Land was successful.
1220, 16 Jan.	Execution of the five protomartyrs of the order in Morocco.
1223, 29 Nov.	The Rule of Francis was approved by Pope Honorius III.
1223, 25 Dec.	Francis celebrated the nativity at Greccio.
1224, c.14 Sept.	Francis received the stigmata at La Verna.
1226, 3/4 Oct.	Death of Francis at the Portiuncula just outside Assisi.
1227, 10 Oct.	Seven friars martyred in Morocco.
1228, 16 July	Canonisation of Francis by Pope Gregory IX.
1228, summer	compilation of Thomas of Celano's <i>Vita prima</i> .
1230, 25 May	Translation of Francis's body to the new basilica.
1230, 28 Sept.	<i>Quo elongati</i> , the first papal exposition of the Rule.
1231, 13 June	Death of St Anthony at Arcella, near Padua.
1231, 17 Nov.	Death of St Elizabeth of Hungary, tertiary.
1232, 30 May	Canonisation of Anthony and the composition of the first biography, the anonymous <i>Assidua</i> .
1236	Alexander of Hales, a regent master in theology, entered the order.
1239	Deposition of Elias of Cortona and election of Albert of Pisa, as minister general.
c.1243	Dissent over levels of observance in some Italian provinces.
1245, June/July	First Council of Lyons.
1245, 14 Nov.	Pope Innocent IV's <i>Ordinem vestrum</i> gave an interpretation of the Rule, going beyond the terms of Pope Gregory IX's <i>Quo elongati</i> .
c.1246–	The <i>Scripta Leonis</i> and Thomas of Celano's <i>Vita secunda</i> or the Remembrance of the Soul written in response to a plea from the general chapter for recollections of the founder.
1253, 11 Aug.	Death of Clare of Assisi, foundress of the Poor Clares.
1260	General Chapter of Narbonne published the earliest extant constitutions.
1266	Bonaventure's <i>Legenda maior</i> adopted as the official biography.

Chronology

-1272	<i>Expositio regulae</i> by David of Augsburg.
1274, 15 July	Death of Bonaventure at the Second Council of Lyons.
1279, summer	Peter Olivi's <i>Quaestio disputata de paupertate</i> on <i>usus pauper</i> .
1279, 14 Aug.	Pope Nicholas III, <i>Exiit qui seminat</i> .
1281, 2 March	Death of Agnes of Prague, Poor Clare.
1288, 22 Febr.	Election of Jerome Maschi of Ascoli, formerly minister general (1274–9), as Pope Nicholas IV (1288–92).
1297, 19 Aug.	Death of St Louis of Anjou, bishop of Toulouse.
1298, March	Death of Peter Olivi.
1300, 18 Febr.	<i>Super cathedram</i> promulgated by Pope Boniface VIII.
1305	Angelo Clareno at the papal court in Avignon.
1308, 8 Nov.	Death of John Duns Scotus in Cologne.
1309, 4 Jan.	Death of Angela of Foligno.
1309–12	Debates and pamphlets about the observance of the Rule at Avignon.
1311/12	Council of Vienne.
1312, 6 May	Pope Clement V's <i>Exivi de paradiso</i> .
1317, 7 April	Canonisation of St Louis of Anjou.
1317, 7 Oct.	<i>Quorundam exigit</i> , sets obedience above poverty and permits the ministers to coerce zealots for poverty.
1318, 7 May	Five friars executed in Marseilles.
1322, 26 March	Pope John XXII's <i>Quia nonnunquam</i> .
1322, 8 Dec.	John XXII's <i>Ad conditorem canonum</i> .
1323, 12 Nov.	John XXII's <i>Cum inter nonnullos</i> .
1324	Louis of Bavaria calls for a general council to depose Pope John XXII.
1326, 8 Febr.	Papal condemnation of Olivi's <i>Lectura super Apocalipsim</i> .
1328, 12 May	Peter of Corvara, a member of the order, crowned as Pope Nicholas V, an anti-pope (1328–30).
1328, 26 May	Michael of Cesena escaped from the papal court at Avignon.
1328, 6 June	Michael of Cesena removed from the office of minister general.
1328, 13 June	Cardinal Bertrand de la Tour appointed as vicar general of the order until the next general chapter.
1328, Oct.	Petition of Prince Philip of Majorca to live by the Rule.
1334	John de Valle's community of strict observance begins at Brugliano.
1336, 28 Nov.	Constitutions promulgated by Pope Benedict XII.
1337, 15 June	Death of Angelo Clareno.
1341	Martyrdom of 16 friars in Persia.
1342, 29 Nov.	Death of Michael of Cesena at Munich.
1343	Twelve friars were restored to the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.
1347, 9/10 April	Death of the impenitent William of Ockham at Munich.
1347/9	The Black Death sweeps through western Europe.
1354	The General Chapter of Assisi approved constitutions for the order.
1357, 8 Nov.	Richard FitzRalph appeals against the friars at Avignon.

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1360, c.10 Nov. 1367	Death of Richard FitzRalph at Avignon. Paoluccio dei Trinci da Foligno licensed to settle at Brugliano.
1380, 8 Sept.	Birth of Bernardine of Siena.
1390, 14 Sept.	Death of Paoluccio de' Trinci da Foligno.
1392	Martyrdom of four friars in Jerusalem.
1407, 26 April	Incipient Observant houses exempt from the minister general.
1407, 13 May	Thomas de Curte appointed as vicar general of the Observants.
1409, 13 May 1414	Peter of Candia elected as Pope Alexander V (1409–10). John of Capistrano admitted to the community of the Observance.
1414/18	Council of Constance.
1415	The transfer of Santa Maria degli Angeli to the Observants.
1430	The General Chapter at Assisi espouses reform.
1442, 18 July	Albert of Sarteano appointed as vicar general of the order to celebrate the general chapter of Padua the following year.
1444, 20 May	Death of Bernardine of Siena at San Francesco, Aquila.
1446, 9 Febr.	John de Maubert, vicar general for the provinces north of the Alps, was licensed to found sixteen new friaries for the Observants.
1446, 23 July	<i>Ut sacra ordinis minorum religio.</i>
1450, 24 May	Canonisation of Bernardine of Siena.
1456, 23 Oct.	Death of John of Capistrano.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Cardinal protector: the cardinal designated by the pope to represent the interests of the order at the papal curia.

Conventual: an abbreviated form of Friars Minor Conventual, the friars who favoured the conventual life with papal interpretations of the Rule. Earlier they were known as the Community.

Cursor: a theologian active in the friars' schools under the supervision of the lector or master of theology.

Custody: a group of friaries in a specified region under the jurisdiction of the *custos* and minister provincial.

Custos (*custodes* in the plural): the friar appointed to supervise groups of friaries in a particular territory under the authority of the minister provincial.

Definitors: friars elected to advise the ministers general and provincial.

Delate: a formal appeal against the teaching or conduct of an official.

Discreets: friars whose function was to advise the guardian on the application of the Rule.

General chapter: the highest authority in the order from 1239 and responsible for the life of its members. The triennial chapters elected the minister general.

Guardian: elected by the provincial chapter, he was responsible for the friars' ministry and welfare in a community.

Friars: designated members of the order, some of whom were priests and others who were not clerics and were known as *fratres laici* in medieval nomenclature.

Friary or convent: the friars' home in a city, borough or remote location. It included a range of conventual buildings, many of which were a feature of monasticism.

Laudesi: confraternities who sang the Divine Offices and hymns. They frequently met in the mendicant churches of Italy.

Lector: the friar who taught theology in friaries. The terms *master* and *doctor* were also employed in larger friaries, especially the universities.

Limitatio: the geographical boundaries within which the friars worked.

Martyrology or **necrology**: a book or list of benefactors and others for whom the friars prayed, especially on the anniversary of death.

Michaelists: disciples of Michael of Cesena, the deposed minister general, who continued his campaign against Pope John XXII.

Minister general: appointed by the general chapter. He could be re-elected for further terms and was invested with the authority to remove unsuitable ministers provincial from office.

Ministers provincial: elected either by the provincial chapter or the minister general, they were responsible for the government of the order and visited the friaries within the province.

Novice: someone undertaking a year of probation, after which the novice made profession of vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

Observants: the successors to the Spiritual friars, who became known as *Fratres minores de observantia*.

Procurator general: a friar who liaised between the order and the papal curia.

Provinces: friaries within a region, often a country. There were several provinces in Italy, France, Germany and Spain.

Provincial chapters: an annual review of the friars' ministry. The minister provincial and his advisers appointed guardians, lectors and other officials.

Second Order: an order of nuns, inspired by St Francis and led by St Clare of Assisi. The movement, known also as the Poor Clares, spread from Assisi to numerous centres in western Europe.

Spirituals: the growing group of friars who wished to bypass papal relaxations of the Rule, which they wished to embrace in a more spiritual manner.

Studium generale: applied primarily to the universities of Paris, Oxford and Cambridge which had faculties of theology. The term was later extended to the universities which opened such faculties in the second half of the fourteenth century.

Third Order: the society founded for lay people who wished to live by St Francis's insights.

Visitation: each province and friary was visited by the minister general and minister provincial, who made a report to the general or provincial chapter.

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AFH</i>	<i>Archivum Franciscanum historicum</i>
<i>ALKG</i>	<i>Archiv für Litteratur- und Kirchen-Geschichte des Mittelalters</i> , ed. H. Denifle and F. Ehrle, 4 vols (Berlin and Freiburg, 1885–8)
<i>AP</i>	<i>Anonymus Perusinus</i> , in <i>FF</i> , pp. 1311–51
<i>BF</i>	<i>Bullarium Franciscanum</i> , ed. J. H. Sbaraleae, C. Eubel <i>et al.</i> , 7 vols (Rome, 1759–1904), new series 1–4, i–ii (Rome, 1929–90)
BIHR	Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, University of York
BL	British Library, London
<i>CA</i>	<i>Compilatio Assisiensis</i> , in <i>FF</i> , pp. 1471–1690
<i>CF</i>	<i>Collectanea Franciscana</i>
<i>DSBOO</i>	Bonaventure, <i>Doctoris Seraphici S. Bonaventurae S.R.E. episcopi cardinalis opera omnia edita studio et cura PP.Collegii a S.Bonaventura</i> , 10 vols.
<i>FF</i>	<i>Fontes Francescani</i> , ed. E. Menestò, S. Brufani <i>et al.</i> , Medioevo Francescano, Collana diretta da Enrico Menestò, Testi II (Assisi, 1995)
<i>FS</i>	<i>Franciscan Studies</i> , new series
<i>MF</i>	<i>Miscellanea Franciscana</i>
MGH, SS	Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores
n.s.	New Series
RS	Rolls Series
SB	Spicilegium Bonaventurianum
<i>SC</i>	<i>Sacrum commercium sancti Francisci cum domina Paupertate</i> , in <i>FF</i> , pp. 1705–32
<i>SF</i>	<i>Sinica Franciscana</i> , 1, ed. A. Van Den Wyngaert (Florence, 1929)
<i>StF</i>	<i>Studi Francescani</i>
<i>Vita prima</i>	Thomas of Celano, <i>Vita prima Sancti Francisci</i> , in <i>FF</i> , pp. 275–424
<i>Vita secunda</i>	Thomas of Celano, <i>Vita secunda Sancti Francisci</i> , in <i>FF</i> , pp. 443–639

For Professor John A. Watt

INTRODUCTION

St Francis of Assisi imitated Jesus Christ, his divine master, as closely as he could, abandoning his possessions for the benefit of the poor. His voluntary poverty was perceived as the recovery of an earlier strand in the Christian tradition, the belief that Christ and the Apostles had lived in simplicity and some physical hardship. As a symbol of this life of sacrifice the friars' badge of identity was the cord around their waist; they were known as the *cordati*.¹ The cord's three knots signified the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.² As the movement spread, friars reached almost every diocese of Christendom; within a century of the founder's death there were 1,421 friaries, with the greater number to the north of the Alps.³

Friars left their mark upon the medieval Church and society – their itinerant ministry took them to almost every parish. Their origins coincided with the growth and expansion of cities in western Europe. Their apostolate was attuned to the pastoral needs of the city and they became part of its fabric. They brought the Gospel to the laity in colourful, dramatic and intelligible terms, preaching in both church and *piazza*. This adaptation became a salient feature of their preaching and the allied ministry of hearing confessions. Friars preached peace in the divided cities of Italy, and friars restored peace and harmony, frequently in a public demonstration of reconciliation. Their sermons against usury and their social influence led to the creation of the *monte di pietà* in several Italian cities during the second half of the fifteenth century. The *monte* was a charitable, non-profit organisation which lent money at a low rate of interest. Some cities revered individual friars as the founders of the *monte*.⁴

Innumerable communes supplied the friars with alms and contributed to the construction of their churches. The friars' church was a place of devotion

¹ 'Defensio fratrum mendicantium', in *Fratris Johannis Pecham quondam archiepiscopi Cantuariensis tractatus tres de paupertate*, ed. C. L. Kingsford, A. G. Little and F. Tocco, British Society of Franciscan Studies, II (Aberdeen, 1910), pp. 148–91 at 173, v. 301. In Dante's *Divina commedia*, ed. N. Sapegno, *La letteratura italiana storia e testi*, IV (Milan, 1957), *Inferno*, XXVII, v. 67, p. 314. Guido da Montefeltro introduced himself as a *cordigliero*. The poet and jongleur Rutebeuf refers to the Cordeliers (*Oeuvres complètes*, ed. E. Faral and J. Bastin (Paris, 1959–60), I, pp. 229–37, 325).

² Federico Visconti, *Les Sermons et la visite pastorale de Federico Visconti archevêque de Pise (1253–1277)*, ed. N. Bériou, no. 14, p. 780.

³ G. Golubovich, *Biblioteca bio-bibliografica della Terra Santa e dell'oriente francescano*, 5 vols (Quaracchi, Florence, 1906–27), II, pp. 250–1.

⁴ F. L. Tognato, *Legge di Dio e monti di pietà Marco da Montegallo 1425–96* (Vicenza, 1996).

and instruction and the friary was the home of men committed to the dissemination of Christian values. They inspired a new form of architecture designed to accommodate large crowds for sermons and they were decorated by many of the finest artists, from Cimabue to Sassetta, via Giotto, Taddeo Gaddi, Simone Martini and Pietro Lorenzetti and Piero della Francesca. Devotion to the holy name was promoted by Bernardine of Siena whose monogram of YHS, set like the golden rays of the sun, decorated many churches and houses in Tuscany and spread to other parts of Western Europe. The church of San Francesco occupies a central site in many Italian cities to this day; Greyfriars Street or La Rue des Cordeliers are reminders of the suppressed friaries of England and France.

The friars' ranks included preachers and contemplatives, philosophers and ascetics, craftsmen and artists, theologians and musicians, missionaries and scientists, historians and mystics, poets and artisans. They filled many of the highest ecclesiastical offices as well as the most humble and menial. Several friars were renowned for their sanctity and their tombs became places of pilgrimage. While the lives of innumerable friars remain hidden from view, many were lauded by contemporaries. The friary was the home of a large and vibrant religious community which ministered to an urban population. Its members were men possessed of remarkable skills.⁵ Friars brought news of events from the surrounding villages, the countryside and overseas, a service underlined by the cosmopolitan nature of the community. Their ranks included a handful of well-travelled men who had served as missionaries and messengers. As a member of a cosmopolitan order the friar inhabited a world which was not circumscribed by a parish, city, diocese or nation. The friary was a place of natural resort, especially for travellers and merchants who found themselves outside the systems of medieval parishes.⁶ These men needed confessors and other spiritual ministrations. Men with an attachment to the friars in one city might request burial in the friary nearest to their place of death.⁷

The order's apostolate was grounded in its impressive educational structures. The order and the new universities grew side by side and their histories were closely entwined in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The leading theologians were mendicants, Albert the Great, Bonaventure, John Duns Scotus and Thomas Aquinas. The friars' schools were widely regarded

⁵ The order's influence was celebrated by a Majorcan friar, Anselm Turmeda, in 1398. He praised seven friars, one who became a royal confessor and three who became bishops in Malta and Sardinia. Another four taught in the cathedral. A. Turmeda, *Obres menors*, ed. M. Olivari (Barcelona, 1927), pp. 117–19.

⁶ J. Röhrkasten, 'Local Ties and International Connections of the London Mendicants', *Mendicants, Military Orders, and Regionalism in Medieval Europe*, ed. J. Sarnowsky (Aldershot, 1999), pp. 145–83.

⁷ A citizen of York asked for burial in the friars' church at Bruges; his will was witnessed by a member of the Flemish friary on 18 September 1389. BIHR, Probate Register 1, fol. iv.

as centres of theological excellence. The order pioneered a form of study to equip men for the apostolates of preaching and hearing confessions. Two friars were instrumental in the foundation of Balliol College, Oxford, and Pembroke College, Cambridge.⁸ Alumni of the schools contributed to the Church in a variety of ways. The liturgical revisions of Haymo of Faversham acquired an importance and popularity beyond the order. The friars' interest in contemporary events produced several histories of local and international importance. William of St-Pathus, the confessor of Queen Marguerite of Provence, wife of Louis IX, wrote a biography of the canonised king about 1303.⁹ The friars' preaching revitalised the western Church and even their critics acknowledged that their message had reached the boundaries of the world.¹⁰ Their preaching and devotional literature provided a boost for the growing use of the vernacular in prose, poetry and hymns. For example, mastery of local languages was reflected in the diocese of Exeter, where their penitentiaries were the only ones who understood Cornish sufficiently well.

Vowed to chastity, obedience and without anything of his own, the friar renounced social and economic status. He was an accessible man in social terms and was a familiar figure in hospitals and the homes of the sick. He was to be seen visiting prisons and the homes of the aristocracy. He was frequently selected as a mediator in urban disputes or between local communes. He could be invited to preach before the king.¹¹ Equally he might be selected as the ambassador of his community or his country to announce or negotiate peace; he was no stranger to the battlefield. His status as a member of a large international order made him an ideal instrument of the crown, crossing from one territory to another and recognisable by his habit. A further symbol of this global dimension was a ministry to travellers, who moved around the markets. Friars were expressly licensed by the local bishop to hear the confessions of foreign merchants visiting the fairs of western Europe.

Francis's vision was global and his Rule (*regula vitae*) made provision for friars who were inspired to become missionaries in remote lands. He led by example on his pilgrimage to the Holy Land. His boldness in walking into the heart of the Muslim camp during the battle for Damietta in 1219 was breath-taking and betokened his respect for people of different faiths. By

⁸ William Woodford, *Defensorium fratrum mendicantium contra Ricardum Armachanum*, in Cambridge University Library, MS Ff. I. 21, fol. 120r: *et manifestum est quod unus frater minor confessor unius venerabilis domine movit illam facere Oxonie aulam quae dicitur Baylioli et alius frater minor confessor domine Comitisse Pembrochie movit eam ad constructionem et dotationem aule Pembrochie in Cantebrihia.*

⁹ *Vie de Saint Louis par Guillaume de Saint-Pathus confesseur de la Reine Marguerite*, ed. H. F. Delaborde (Paris, 1899).

¹⁰ Matthew Paris, *Matthaei Parisiensis, monachi Sancti Albani, Chronica majora*, IV, ed. H. R. Luard, 7 vols, RS, LVII (London, 1872–83), p. 346.

¹¹ *Histoire de Saint Louis par Jean Sire de Joinville*, ed. N. de Wailly (Paris, 1868), nn. 11, 132, pp. 20, 235–7.

the turn of the fourteenth century friars were working on missions to the Ethiopians, Indians, Mongols, Persians and Syrians.¹² They were the only Catholic religious or priests ministering in Syria, the Holy Land, Arabia and Egypt. In 1322 James, bishop of Caffa, claimed that the friars had ministered in Morocco and India as well as China for several decades and had given new martyrs to the Church.

St Francis remains one of the most attractive figures of the medieval Church. His exceptional abilities as a preacher soon brought him to the attention of his neighbours. The acceptance of disciples, albeit initially few in number, began to change the nature of this small fraternity, which would soon be transmuted into an international religious order. His was the last Rule to win papal approval before the religious upheaval of the sixteenth century. However, what was permissible and desirable for a dozen friars in Umbria about 1210 was less practicable for the population of more than a hundred at the Cordeliers of Paris a century later. Fidelity to the Rule was a matter of the utmost concern for friars and this caused them much heart-searching. Within four years of the saint's death a crisis of leadership occurred; unable to resolve their doubts about their founder's teaching, friars sought papal intervention in 1230 and this resulted in *Quo elongati*, the first interpretation of the Rule. The controversial conduct of Elias of Cortona concentrated the friars' minds on their vocation and the limitations of the office of the minister general. The general chapter emerged as the ultimate source of authority in the order at the expense of the minister general in 1239. The failings of the ministers during the 1280s and 1290s stiffened the reformers' resolve to seek a measure of independence and therein lay the forces of separation. The desire for a more satisfactory observance of the Rule and the *Testament* stoked opposition. These disputes resulted in two versions of the friars' life.

The accommodation between Francis's vision and the needs of a conventual life for a large community contained the seeds of discord and eventual division. While Francis believed that Christ knew penury and hardship, his followers were required to formulate their own rationale for the order and justify its scriptural and theological bases. The onslaught of the secular masters of the University of Paris in the 1250s was deeply damaging; it also created a durable satire which branded the friars as pseudo-apostles and hypocrites. Although Pope Nicholas III's *Exiit qui seminat* placed the friars on the moral high ground, it proved to be a false dawn and the practicalities of a large number of friars claiming to be living in poverty caused further controversy.

The order's espousal of evangelical poverty, which became the criterion of its fidelity to the Rule and its rationale, brought tensions in its wake.

¹² Iacopone da Todi, *Laude*, ed. F. Mancini, Scrittori d' Italia, CCLVII (Bari, 1974), no. 47, pp. 130–2.

David Knowles comments that the friars were 'riven by a succession of acrid controversies over the observance of their founder's conception and command of Christlike poverty'.¹³ Even though the Benedictines had groups of monasteries with dependent priories and general chapters, there was nothing comparable to the mendicant centralisation which undoubtedly heightened and exacerbated the bitterness. The impatience, character-assassination and punishment meted out to Ubertino da Casale and Angelo Clareno constituted a black day in the history of the order with a reputation for making peace. Despite currents of reform among the Friars Minor Conventual, there was a remarkable lack of foresight at ministerial level in the 1420s and 1430s when there was still time to preserve the organic unity of the order. Instead of offering decisive leadership and an openness to renewal, many ministers placed the focus on obedience.

Bernardine of Siena personifies the purity and vigour of the Observant reform in the first half of the fifteenth century, when the initiative was passing to the reformers. The two branches of the order co-existed, sometimes in the same city, and were valued by the local Church. On the eve of the dissolution in sixteenth century England many testators gave alms to Observant and Conventual communities alike. The order carried virtually all before it in the thirteenth century. Although the friars' schools produced numerous outstanding theologians in the fourteenth century, it had already surrendered its intellectual dominance. The Observants played a vital role in the preservation of Francis's ideals. Bernardine of Siena, John of Capistrano, James of the Marches and Albert da Sarteano were among the most famous preachers of their epoch. Despite such vigour, new movements of reform appeared and the Observants did not escape criticism, as the *Heptameron* of Marguerite de Navarre (1492–1539) attests. Within fifteen years of Leo X's *Ite vos*, which officially divided the order in 1517, another reform movement, the Friars Minor Capuchin, was born. This book was completed on the threshold of the eighth centenary of the conversion of St Francis. His challenge to respond openly and imaginatively to the Gospel has attracted people since the year 1206. That call is equally fresh and inviting today.

The sources

Hagiography was regulated by its own assumptions and conventions. The hagiographers celebrated the saints, whose virtues and miraculous powers were accentuated. This framework was eternal as well as temporal and Francis's death was unself-consciously reported as his passing from the shipwreck of this world.¹⁴ There were abundant instances of the way in which the saints' conduct was profoundly changed by the grace of God and elevated

¹³ M. D. Knowles, *Christian Monasticism* (London, 1969), p. 116.

¹⁴ For example BL, MS Add. 14251, fol. 214r.

to a higher level of communion with both their Creator and creatures. The *legendae* were intended to be read in the church and the monastic refectory for the instruction and edification of a religious community. Nonetheless, changing tastes are discernible in the work of Francis's first biographer, Thomas of Celano, who described the character and appearance of the saint:

he was of medium height, closer to shortness; his head was moderate in size and round, his face a bit long and prominent, his forehead smooth and low; his eyes were of moderate size, black and sound; his hair was black, his eyebrows straight, his nose symmetrical, thin and straight; his ears were upright, but small; his temples smooth.¹⁵

The *vita* was not a biography in the modern sense because the author was uninterested in the faults of the individual, unless these failings offered an occasion to contrast moments of weakness with the triumph of grace and the resultant conversion. Similarly, parental and sibling ties were of little interest and they constituted a preamble to the work of grace. The act of conversion rendered the family redundant, a fact reflected in the two *vitae* by Thomas of Celano. Hagiography articulates the prevailing values of the Church and this conditions and distorts examples of Francis's contact with women. The *Vita secunda's* arresting claim that Francis knew only two women by their faces reveals more about the reforming Lateran Councils, which combated clerical marriage and concubinage, than a saint, whose warmth and spontaneity drew people in vast numbers.¹⁶ While the biographers of St Anthony of Padua (†1231) narrate the grace of God at work in the saint who had left the Augustinian Canons to become a friar in 1220, the sources for the life of Francis of Assisi carry an added complexity due to the polemical climate in which they were composed. The sympathies of the biographer and his audience are thinly disguised in the *vitae* compiled from the later 1230s. The biographer thenceforth not only recounts the wondrous virtues of the saint, but also *interprets* them for contemporaries, seeking to offer a reliable and authoritative portrait.

Thomas of Celano, the author of the *Dies irae*, was part of the mission to Germany which was relaunched in 1221, although he was back in Umbria before the death of the saint. His account of Francis is largely derivative. He wrote at the request of Pope Gregory IX for the canonisation on 16 July 1228. This gives the *vita* a wider perspective because the pope wanted to present Francis as a model of the mendicant mission. The *Vita prima* was completed some months later and approved by Pope Gregory IX on 25 February 1229.¹⁷

¹⁵ R. B. and C. N. L. Brooke, *Popular Religion in the Middle Ages: Western Europe 1000 to 1300* (London, 1984), p. 44, *Vita prima*, no. 83.

¹⁶ *Vita secunda*, no. 112.

¹⁷ M. F. Cusato, 'Talking about Ourselves: The Shift in Franciscan Writing from Hagiography to History (1235–1247)', *FS* 58 (2000), pp. 37–75 at 38, n. 3.

This was the first *official* biography and it was located within the traditional models of sanctity culled from the Bible and the Fathers of the Church. The hagiographical influence of the lives of Sts Anthony the hermit, Augustine of Hippo and Martin of Tours provide the context for the radical change which occurs in the life of Francis of Assisi. *The Anonymous of Perugia*, written by John of Perugia between the general chapter of 1239 and before the death of Gregory on 22 August 1241, reflects the new clerical orientation of the order. His account of the history of the order is a partisan one. He endeavours to justify the present orientation of the movement with Haymo of Faversham at the helm. Emphasis is placed on the ministry of preaching and the admission of Sylvester, a priest of Assisi. The friars' relations with members are the hierarchy are underlined.

Conscious that the collective memory of the saint was fading through the death of those who had known him, the general chapter of 1244 invited friars to forward their recollections. Leo, Rufino and Angelo, three of the early friars and companions of the saint, responded with a warm personal recollection. They delighted in anecdotes concerning the simplicity and poverty of the saint and their fresh and spontaneous account is less circumscribed than many of the later biographies. They reflect a primitive view of the order and they emphasise the primacy of the vow of poverty, the Rule and the hermitage. These reminiscences lament the direction which the order was taking in the later 1230s and 1240s. Thomas of Celano produced a revised and expanded biography, the *Vita secunda* or *Memoriale* about 1247/8, incorporating many of the illustrations of the saint's teaching and example and concentrating upon the vow of poverty. He also reaffirms the centrality of the Portiuncula, the scene of a decisive phase in his conversion, as the spiritual focus of the order. The roots of *The Legend of the Three Companions* were also laid in this period. This text offers a full account of the early years of the fraternity and the road to initial papal approbation. The city of Assisi plays a central role in this text.¹⁸

Bonaventure's *Legenda maior* was conceived as a biography to bring peace and unity to an order. The last part of the prologue sets out the author's credentials as a historian: he had visited Assisi and other places associated with St Francis; the surviving companions of the saint had been interviewed. Despite these lofty claims, the biography contains little new materials. Indeed, substantial portions of the text were derived from Thomas of Celano's *Vita secunda*. What the biography lacks in terms of originality it gains in mystical insights and offers a programme of full conversion. The 1266 general chapter of Paris approved Bonaventure's biography and declared it to be the official *vita*; earlier biographies were recalled and destroyed.¹⁹ This decision, which

¹⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 56–63; R. B. Brooke, 'Recent Work on St Francis of Assisi', *Analecta Bollandiana* 100 (1982), pp. 653–76.

¹⁹ A. G. Little, 'Definitiones capitulorum generalium ordinis fratrum minorum, 1260–1282', *AFH* 7

has provoked historians' wrath, may have been inspired by the general chapter of the Dominicans at Strasbourg in 1260 which enacted similar legislation regarding *vitae* of St Dominic.²⁰

The implementation of the decree of 1266 did not extend to paintings of the founder, which supplement the biographical tradition. On occasion, appeal was made to these portraits to settle polemical points regarding the friars' habits.²¹ Bonaventura Berlinghieri's dossal in San Francesco at Pescia was executed in 1235 and contains scenes from the *Vita prima*, such as the sermon to the birds, stigmata, as well as different miracle stories. Professor William R. Cook notes that seven Italian dossals were painted before 1263 and were derived from Thomas of Celano. The Siena dossal – from San Francesco, Colle Valdelsa – was painted after 1263 and depends upon the *Legenda maior*.²² Almost a hundred portraits of the saint survive from thirteenth-century Italy, mainly in Umbria and Tuscany.²³ Artists such as the unnamed master of San Francesco, who was active in the lower basilica, made parallels between the life of Jesus Christ and the founder. While hagiography, art and contemporary references are major sources, they should be used in conjunction with the writings of St Francis, who explains his own conversion and salient features of his piety.

Historians of the order are deeply indebted to the palaeographical skills and patient scholarship of friars, who have supplied critical editions of the major sources. Projects like the Bullarium Franciscanum, Analecta Franciscana, Bibliotheca Franciscana Scholastica Medii Aevi, Spicilegium Bonaventurianum and the critical editions of the writings of the order's theologians emanating from the Collegio di San Bonaventura offer invaluable assistance. A stream of admirable scholars, from Fr Michael M. Bihl to Fr Cesare Cenci, has produced editions of the decisions of general and provincial chapters as well as constitutions. Frs Celestino Piana, Ignatius Brady and Jacques Bougerol among others have devoted their energies to the publication of texts produced by the friars. Dr Andrew Little, the doyen of historians of the English province, contributed several editions of texts and his commentaries contain enduring insights. Critical editions of chronicles lift the veil on the daily life of the friars and their interests. Historians of the Franciscan movement are indebted to Gratien de Paris, John Moorman, Lazaro Iriate de

(1914), pp. 676–82 at 678, no. 8.

²⁰ 'Acta capitulorum generalium ordinis praedicatorum', I, *Monumenta ordinis fratrum praedicatorum historica* 3, ed. B. M. Reichert (Rome, 1898), p. 105.

²¹ M. Bihl, 'Fratricelli cuiusdam "Decalogus evangelicae paupertatis" an. 1340–2 conscriptus', *AFH* 32 (1939), VI, no. 5, pp. 279–411 at 343.

²² W. R. Cook, 'The St. Francis Dossal in Siena. An Important Interpretation of the Life of Francis of Assisi', *AFH* 87 (1994), pp. 3–20 at 3–4.

²³ W. R. Cook, 'Fraternal and Lay Images of St. Francis in the Thirteenth Century', in *Popes, Teachers and Canon Law in the Middle Ages*, ed. J. Ross Sweeney and S. Chodorow (Ithaca, 1989), pp. 263–89 at 265.

Aspurz and Duncan Nimmo, who have compiled rich accounts of the order and its distinctive contribution to the medieval Church.²⁴

Principle of selection

The present volume begins with the conversion of Francis and concludes with the death of John of Capistrano, a period of some two and a half centuries. The aim is to offer a rather more concise treatment than for example the works of John Moorman and Duncan Nimmo on the Franciscans, and no pretence is made at an exhaustive history of the order. I have continued to use the critical edition of Salimbene de Adam, the chronicler, which was published by Giuseppe Scalia in two volumes at Bari in 1966, and republished in two volumes by the Corpus Christianorum, *continuatio mediaevalis* series in 1998–9.

²⁴ Gratien de Paris, *Histoire de la fondation et de l'évolution de l'ordre des frères mineurs au XIII siècle*, Bibliotheca Seraphico-Capuccina, XXIX (Rome, 1926); J. R. H. Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order: From Its Origins to the Year 1517* (Oxford, 1968); L. Iriarte de Aspuz, *Historia franciscana* (Valencia, 1979), translated from the Spanish by P. Ross, *Franciscan History: The Three Orders of St. Francis of Assisi* (Chicago, 1983); D. Nimmo, *Reform and Division in the Medieval Franciscan Order: From Saint Francis to the Foundation of the Capuchins*, Bibliotheca Seraphico-Capuccina, XXXIII (Rome, 1987).

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