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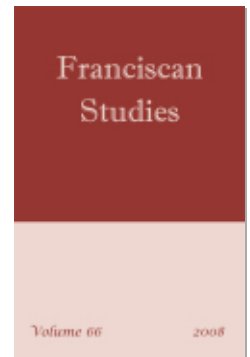
Toward a Resolution of the Franciscan Question: Manuscripts and the Reading of History

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TOWARD A RESOLUTION OF THE FRANCISCAN QUESTION: MANUSCRIPTS AND THE READING OF HISTORY

The “Franciscan question” studied in this book depends to a great extent on the manuscripts of the early *Lives* of St. Francis: when, by whom, for whom, and why they were written. Our view of the character and mission of the historical Francis depends on the answers to these questions. Since the sources are in many respects contradictory, so is our view of Francis. The “Franciscan question” is therefore the question of Francis himself as depicted in the sources. Here I shall be concerned with some of the codicological problems. The other speakers will address the sources themselves, hagiological and liturgical, and the broader question of Franciscan history, upon which I can only touch here.

In the book Jacques Dalarun studies in particular the manuscripts of the so-called *Umbrian Legend*. The term “legend” in the Middle Ages, incidentally, did not carry the implications of fabulous it has today and referred to reading – *legendus* meant “to be read” – from the life of a saint. The *legenda* concerning St. Francis were very numerous, and Dalarun describes their genealogy as a house of cards. The *Umbrian Legend* was not previously unknown, but it was only partially published and its importance not fully recognized. It was preserved, Dalarun says, like a hermit-crab, in the protective shell of the liturgy, for which it may have been written. It is as if, *mutatis mutandis*, it were known only from fragments like those recited in the evening prayer in which we just participated, and other fragments, from which the entire text had to be reconstructed.

Dalarun works in particular from the three manuscripts at Naples, Terni, and Assisi, all of which originated in Assisi. They present a unity of sense, as he puts it, if not of physical presentation, and from them he is able, by a remarkable feat of textual analysis, to reconstruct the integral original text. The process is complex and technical, and you would not thank me for describing it to you in detail. He studies both the content of the manuscripts and the style of the work, including what is known as the *cursus*, the type of rhythmical prose which was more or less forgotten until it was rediscov-

ered by the French scholar Noel Valois in the nineteenth century. It governed the length of the syllables in the words at the beginnings and ends of sentences and assured a dignified and sonorous style. It was used in papal documents in the eleventh century and increasingly in other types of works, including the *Lives* of St. Francis.

Dalarun shows that with a few exceptions (principally at the end of miracle 38 and the beginning of miracle 39, where there are signs of textual revisions) most of the differences between the manuscripts are scribal errors rather than authorial changes. When two of the manuscripts agree against the third, therefore, they as a rule establish a basis for reconstructing the text as it was written. Dalarun cites the distinction drawn by St. Bonaventura between copies, compilations, commentaries, and rewritings and shows that the *Umbrian Legend* was a rewriting based primarily on the *First* and *Second Lives* and the *Treatise on Miracles* by Thomas of Celano, and to a lesser extent on the *Readings for use in the choir*, also by Thomas, and the *Life* of Francis by Julian of Speyer. He establishes beyond reasonable doubt that it was written by Thomas of Celano and dates it at the outside between 1232 and 1253 and more narrowly between 1237 and 1244.

The history of the *Umbrian Legend* and the texts upon which it depends is closely tied to the early history of the Franciscan Order and particularly the controversial role of Brother Elias, who was General Minister from 1221-27 and again from 1232-39. The *First Life* by Thomas of Celano, of which the *Umbrian Legend* can be regarded as an abbreviated version, presents a favorable picture of Elias and an account of Francis himself and the foundation of the order which stresses hierarchy and charismatic leadership, unlike, for instance, the *Legend of the Three Companions*, which stresses fraternity and cooperation. These differences constituted what Dalarun calls a hagiographical crisis or imbroglio, which is embodied in the manuscripts of the various texts. The political controversies of the early order, especially those surrounding Elias, are built into the *Lives* and the manuscripts. The *Umbrian Legend* is on the whole favorable to Elias and contains mostly what may be called "inoffensive"

miracles, though some of those written in the 1220s and 1230s emphasize the role of Elias.

This brings us back to the manuscripts and the questions of when and for whom the Umbrian Legend was written. It was never, so far as is known, formally suppressed or condemned, but its “active life,” as Dalarun calls it, seems to have been short, and it was apparently circumvented or covered up in the three liturgical manuscripts, as the image of the hermit crab suggest. An interesting puzzle is presented by an erased inscription at the end of the text in the Assisi manuscript, which any of you who have Dalarun’s book can see on plate IV. It begins *generalis minister noster* followed by an illegible word of instruction, which may be *iussit*, *iniunxit*, or *precepit*, or on the contrary, *prohibuit*, but it does not say who the General Minister was or what he either ordered or forbade. A great deal depends on these words, which affect the entire interpretation of the purpose and use of the text. Some significant questions about the Umbrian Legend therefore remain, but in this book Dalarun has made a notable contribution to the study of early Franciscan history.

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TOWARD A RESOLUTION OF THE FRANCISCAN QUESTION: FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF HAGIOGRAPHY

I am extremely happy and honored to be part of this roundtable that celebrates Jacques Dalarun’s recent book, *Vers une résolution de la question franciscaine: La Légende ombrienne de Thomas de Celano* (Paris: Fayard, 2007). During his stay with us at the Franciscan Institute as Visiting Professor in 2004-2005, he and Jean François Godet-Calogeras led a seminar for us faculty and students on the so-called *Legend of the Three Companions* which did much more than simply interpret that text, and it was in the context of that seminar that his attention was drawn to the subject of his recent book, the *Umbrian Choir Legend*.