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FEDERICO CIOLI

Franciscan Landscapes

*Conservation, Protection and Use
of Religious Cultural Heritage
in the Digital Era*

vol. 1



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edited by
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This volume collects the papers presented at the concluding conference of the European project 'F-ATLAS: Franciscan Landscapes: The Observance between Italy, Portugal and Spain' that took place in Assisi, May 11-13, 2023.

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Porziuncola, Assisi (Italy). Drawing by Stefano Bertocci.

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Francesco Salvestrini
University of Florence
francesco.salvestrini@unifi.it

Abstract

The contribution traces the history of the Observance of Minorities from the origins to the sixteenth century, presenting the religious issues and theological questions at the basis of this movement in Italy during the early Renaissance. The text also introduces the case of the Tuscan convent of San Vivaldo, an exceptional observant settlement flanked by a sacred mountain imitating the plan of Jerusalem; a site that subject other historical and architectural contributions.

Keywords: Observance, Sacred Mounts, Indulgence.

1. The origins

The origins of the Friars Minor of the Observance are to be traced to the emergence of dissension between the spiritual component and the conventual branch of the *familia* founded by Francis of Assisi (Elm, 2001). Chroniclers are not in agreement as to what triggered this movement that is part of the extensive process of reform that almost all religious orders underwent, particularly in Italy, in the 14th and 15th centuries (Fois, 1985; Merlo, 1998; Fasoli, 2011; Mattei, 2013, pp. 42-48; Roest, Uphoff eds., 2016; Duval, Morvan, Viallet eds., 2018; Furlan, Trolese eds., 2022; *L'Observance*, forthcoming). However, most ancient historians and memorialists situate the beginning of the new obedience in the first half of the 14th century, at a time when Spiritual Franciscans, who believed themselves to be closer than others to the legacy of their founder, began to raise rigoristic objections.

The climate of conflict in the Seraphic family had become entrenched at least from the 1274 Council of Lyon, which had decisively curbed the most radical pauperistic groups (see Vauchez, 2005, pp. 181-88; Andenna, 2013). In 1312, Pope Clement V showed favour to the 'friars of the Community' (or *de conventu*), imposed a less restrictive interpretation of the *usus pauper*, the source of the Spirituals' grievances, and allowed the Minors to possess material goods (*Exivi de paradiso*, Council of Vienne). Pope John XXII (1316-34) would later condemn proponents of the rigid evangelical pauperism preached by radicals, since then known as the *Fratricelli*, who were involved in the dispute that emerged from the circles of Friars Minor and from the Parisian *studium* on the absolute poverty of Christ and the Apostles (*Quorundam exigit* 1317, *Sancta Romana* 1317, *Gloriosam Ecclesiam* 1318; see Squillante, 2003-04). The radical movement seemed to subside, but a number of prestigious convents, such as La Verna in the Casentino Apennines, hosted some of its exponents and preserved its original reforming spirit (Mencherini ed., 1924; Cacciotti ed., 2000; Baldini ed., 2012).

According to the *Compendium chronicarum Ordinis fratrum Minorum* by Mariano of Florence (early 16th century), the demands for literal observance of the rule came from several friars at the convent of San Francesco in Foligno. In fact, it was from this cloister that Giovanni delle Valli (†1351), a follower of Angelo Clareno, 'founder' of the *Fratricelli* (†1337), emerged in 1334. With the permission of the Minister General of the Order, he and a few companions withdrew to the San Bartolomeo hermitage in Brogliano, in the Central Apennines between Foligno and Camerino. The experience he began there did not amount to much, but in 1350 his disciple, Gentile of Spoleto, obtained the bull *Bonorum operum* from Clement VI. This allowed a number of friars to follow

the Franciscan rule *sine glossa*, that is, to the letter, and live in certain hermitages of great symbolic importance linked to the memory of the holy founder, including the Eremo delle Carceri hermitage near Assisi, Giano dell'Umbria and Monteluco (Mariano da Firenze, 1909-11, 2, p. 641). Fearing that, opposed by the Conventuals, these groups would bring about a schism, Innocent VI took the advice of his powerful legate in Italy, the Iberian Cardinal Gil de Albornoz (Pirani, 2019), and revoked the concessions that had been made to this faction of the Order (1355). However, as reported by the Observant chronicler Bernardino Aquilano da Fossa, the movement re-emerged under the direction of Paoluccio di Vagnozzo Trinci (1309-91), who, according to a later tradition, came from the noble Foligno family of the same name. In 1368, the Minister General, Tommaso da Frignano, granted them permission to repopulate Brogliano, described by Bernardino and Iacopo Oddi as a harsh place reminiscent of the desert of the Egyptian fathers. There he gathered together fellow friars wishing to lead a solitary life, who, on account of their simple dress and rough footwear, were dubbed the *zoccolanti* (clog-wearers; Bernardino Aquilano, 1902. See Sensi, 1985, pp. 19-73; Id., 1992; Id., 2004; Pellegrini, 2010, pp. 180-82). The female order of Observance was founded in the early 1370s in the Foligno area.

2. The *fratres de familia*

Decisive to the advancement of the *fratres de familia* was the backing of several noblemen in Central Italy (Sensi, 2018, pp. 101-03). In 1373 the reformer bishop Alfonso Pecha (1330-89), protector of the new community, obtained recognition from Gregory XI for nine Observant convents in Umbria and Sabina (*Provenit ex devotionis affectu*; Faloci Pulignani, 1926, pp. 36-39). In 1380 the Umbrian Minister Provincial appointed Paoluccio to be commissioner for the communities he had reformed and, on 12 February 1384, granted him authorisation to accept novices.

The Brogliano reform attained legal stability four years later, when the title of commissioner was also approved by the Minister General Enrico Alfieri. From that moment on, spaces were opened up to Observant groups in Central and Northern Italy (Cismontane) and beyond (Pellegrini, 2011). The *fratres divoti* occupied poor and often run-down shelters located in isolated areas mostly outside urban centres, although not too distant from them, on account of the pastoral ministry Trinci's followers intended to pursue (Manselli, 1989). The reformers presented themselves at that time as members of the Order authorised to follow a strict discipline of poverty, inspired by the original hermit vocation of the Friars Minor movement (Merlo, 1991, pp. 131-47; Salvestrini, 2012). The height of the development of the Observance movement came when several important personalities joined their ranks,

including Bernardino of Siena (whose ‘membership’ of the group was called into question by the Conventuals after his death), John of Capestrano and James of the Marches (see Serpico, Giacometti eds., 2012). Their acceptance of a ‘middle way’ to poverty between orthodoxy and moderation, as well as their open dissent of the rigid positions of the *Fraticelli* (as emerged from public debate in Perugia in 1373), ensured the Observants’ success with the city’s lay authorities and the Apostolic See. At the same time they turned the main components of Franciscanism into two currents that were not always clearly distinct, contrary to what has universally been suggested in the literature, where the emphasis has been on conflict (Pellegrini, 2011, pp. 10-11, 15-16; Sensi, 2018, pp. 107-08).

3. Developments in the 15th century

After several events related to the pontificate of Martin V, who approved the new ‘Martinian’ constitutions drafted and proclaimed by John of Capestrano prohibiting the use of money and instituting the renunciation of property, it was mainly his successor, Eugene IV, an admirer of the Observance movements, who confirmed the concessions so far granted, although not without some degree of uncertainty and vacillation. He appointed Bernardino of Siena as vicar general and commissioner to the Minister General for the Italian Observants; in 1446 he issued the bull *Ut sacra Ordinis Minorum religio* removing the reformed friars from the jurisdiction of the Provincials and restricting the authority of the Minister General over them to issues concerning life and correction; and he entrusted the governance of the new community to two vicars, who were to oversee respectively the Cismontane family and the Ultramontane family of common obedience. The bull also set out the possibility for friars to move from the Community to Observance, although it prohibited transfers in the opposite direction (Amonaci, 1997).

On the death of Pope Eugene IV (1447), the Community attempted to have the prerogatives that had been granted to the movement annulled. This led to intense and even violent clashes between the two factions for control of convents and hermitages, access to pulpits and the distribution of novices. Popes Nicholas V and Callixtus III made vain attempts to conciliate. Meanwhile the reformers, who had now become the majority component, began to reinterpret the origins of the Franciscan order in Observant terms (Lambertini, Pellegrini, 2010), as well as putting forward new models of holiness that were in keeping with their own perspectives (Galamb ed., 2018). With the issue of the bull *Illius cuius in pace* (or *Bulla Concordiae*) on 2 February 1456, the Minister General

was given authority over the 'Observant' vicar, but the ordinary governance of those who called themselves the *paupercola familia* of friars *de Observantia* essentially remained autonomous. In addition, the Reformed Friars acquired the right to an active voice in the election of the Minister General, whereas the Conventuals had no influence on the appointment of the three candidates to the vicariate general or potential vicars provincial (Piana, 1978-79). On the development of the Observance in the 15th century, including its cultural development, see Alf, Bianchi, Chiocchini, 2000, pp. 19-21; Labriola 2020).

Pope Sixtus IV proved to be less receptive to requests of the increasingly autonomous regular community, out of fear that the Order might split. The potential division would likely not only be formal and ecclesiological in nature, but also theological and obedience-related, as well as being driven by a conflict of identity, with both factions claiming the sole and indivisible legacy of the founder Francis (Merlo, 2003; Meyer, Viallet eds., 2005). Yet, many powerful lay potentates openly backed the Observance, with its strong moral prestige linked to intense homiletic activity at all social levels. At the same time, unrelenting was the client consolidation work taking place among the most influential members of the Roman Curia (Merlo, 1998).

4. The final split

The last attempt at conciliation was made by Pope Julius II, who had initially been a Conventual and then Cardinal Protector of the Franciscans. In 1506 he convened a general chapter and proposed new constitutions (the *Statuta Iuliana*), which, however, were rejected by the Observants. Separation was now an inevitability. On 29 May 1517, Leo X promulgated the bull *Ite vos* (also known as *Bulla separationis*), which granted the Observants the right to elect their superior as Minister General, whose authority extended to other reformed Franciscan groups (Coletans, Amadeites, Guadalupan, Clareni, Discalced).

As the Observants were more numerous than the Conventuals, the seal of the Order was given to their superior general (Fois, 1985). The 1517 papal bull also established that use of the name 'Friars Minor' was restricted to the new congregation, that is, the Friars Minor of the Leonine Union, whereas the other group was now to add the qualifier 'Conventual' to the original name (Sella, 2001; Salvestrini, 2018).

The Observants remained divided between the cismontane segment (Italy and Eastern Europe) and the ultramontane segment (Northern and Western Europe). The first foundations, initially outside the city and later within it, were progressively flanked or replaced by buildings that were simple but increasingly larger, intended for essentially cenobitic groups, although able to accommodate the movement's anchoretical heritage.

5. A 'model' settlement

One of the Observant convents in Italy that deserves special attention is an apparently secondary settlement in Tuscany that is, indeed, so singular that it created one of the most interesting experiences in the Franciscan reform in the early modern age. San Vivaldo in Valdelsa, central Tuscany, near the route of the *Via Francigena*, is a male convent, located between Florence, Pisa and Siena, and near the famous town of San Gimignano. It is part of the diocese of Volterra and originated in the second half of the 15th century (Agnoletto, Battisti eds., 1987; Salvestrini, Piatti eds., 2018). This place played an important role in the spread of the Franciscan Observant movement because of the 'holy mountain' built by friars close to their settlements during the 16th century, thanks to a papal indulgence of 19 February 1516 (Cardini, Vannini, 1983; Amonaci, 1997, pp. 194-205; Pacciani, Vannini, 1998). The Minorite and Observant matrix of San Vivaldo sanctuary and its declared intention to evoke the life of Christ and the spiritual topography of Jerusalem are a reminder of the Ottoman Turks' conquest of Palestine led by Sultan Selim I (1516), who took over from the Mamelukes. In fact, as is well known, this political change had important consequences for the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land and the possibility of making a pilgrimage from Europe to Jerusalem (see Gómez, García Ayoso eds., 2021). San Vivaldo thus became one of the destinations of 'alternative pilgrimage' to the Holy Land, that is, one of the sacred mountains where the faithful could gain indulgences and have direct contact with the places of Jesus's life, while still in the land of their birth (Rusconi, 1982; Benvenuti, Piatti eds., 2013; Cañal, 2022, pp. 46-53). The sacred mountain of San Vivaldo today consists of 18 chapels (there were originally 25), each of which contains terracotta sculptures depicting the main elements of the Passion. This is a fairly accurate topographical reconstruction of Jerusalem and other places mentioned in the Gospels, in keeping with an artistic and architectural typology that we find elsewhere in Italy, especially along the section of the Alps closest to Protestant regions, but also in Poland, France, Spain and Latin America (Gensini ed., 1989). San Vivaldo is an unusual case, in that it is one of the earliest Christological sanctuaries of this typology that would spread during the Catholic Reform, and because the spatial distribution of its chapels closely reflects the layout of Jerusalem, of which it is meant to be a miniature reconstruction.

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Integrating historical research with technological progress opens exciting possibilities to create comprehensive digital archives, virtual reconstructions, and immersive experiences that can bridge the gap between the past and the present.

Stefano Bertocci is Full Professor at the Department of Architecture of the University of Florence. He led numerous research projects on the opportunities offered by 3D digital surveys and remote sensing in archaeology, architecture, and urban planning. His major works include research on Architectural Heritage in Europe and Latin America, wooden architecture in Russia and investigations of various archaeological sites in Europe and the Middle East.

Federico Cioli is a Research Fellow and Contract Professor at the Department of Architecture of the University of Florence. His research addresses historical architecture, urban centres, and digital documentation, focusing on the relationship between tangible and intangible cultural heritage. His main activity includes research on the historical and traditional trade in Florence’s UNESCO city centre and the cultural heritage of historical theatres.

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