

**Ethics and Poetics:  
The Architectural Vision of Saint Francis of Assisi**

**Gregory Paul Caicco  
School of Architecture  
McGill University, Montréal  
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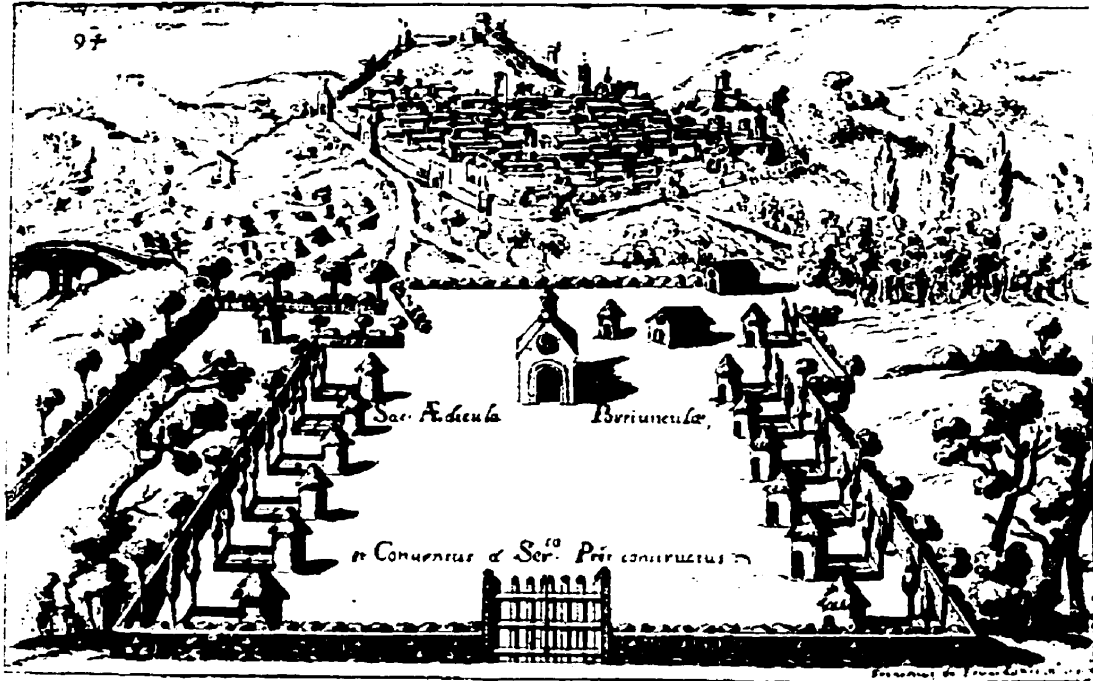
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*Sacra Aedicula Portiunculae*, engraving by Francesco Providoni  
(from F.M. Angeli, *Collis Paradisi Amoenitas*, Assisi, 1704).





And where there had been  
just a makeshift hut to receive the music,

a shelter nailed up out of their darkest longing,  
with an entryway that shuddered in the wind—  
you built a temple deep inside their hearing.

Rainer Maria Rilke, *Sonnets to Orpheus*



*To my parents*

## **Abstract**

Contrary to the view of many interpreters that Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) dabbled in church renovation for a few years following his first conversion experience in 1205, architecture remained a central preoccupation until his death in 1226. His creative practice ranged from hermitage planning to the clothing design of its occupants, from architectural legislation to the composition of psalms to be sung in the hermitage churches. Through the medieval art of memory, Francis formed his architectural intentions around two contemplative foci: first, the symbol of the *tau*, which became his attire, prayer position, signature, talisman for healing the sick, and the crucifixion of Christ imprinted on his flesh in the stigmata; and second, the chapel of the Portiuncula, which Francis renovated himself to be the cave of the annunciation and the nativity, the womb of Mary and a portion of heaven on earth where angels descended. With its hedge-bound monastery, it became the prototype for construction among his followers. As the art of memory aimed at an ethics, so did his architecture strive to inspire communal good through narratives of compassion, voluntary penance and humility.

The Portiuncula was copied throughout the Franciscan order, but as the order grew its commitment to poverty waned. As a result, buildings began to deviate from Francis' ideals. Rather than resort to prescriptive architectural legislation, Francis addressed this dilemma through an intricately choreographed performance of his death whose poetic image would be unforgettable for those who wished to imitate him in word, deed and architecture. Two years after this event, the Basilica of San Francesco in Assisi, built by his friend and hand-chosen successor, Br. Elias, rapidly rose to house the newly canonized saint. Its earliest form, narrative and symbolism, also widely imitated, seems to illustrate aptly Francis' architectural vision: if the Portiuncula was the Bethlehem of the order, the Basilica's *tau* plan became its Jerusalem. From these two prototypes Italian mendicant architecture for the next century drew its meaning and form.

## Résumé

Contrairement à l'opinion de plusieurs interprètes selon laquelle François d'Assise (v.1181-1226) se serait donné dans la rénovation d'église durant les quelques années suivant sa première conversion en 1205, l'architecture est demeurée pour lui une préoccupation centrale jusqu'à sa mort en 1226. Sa pratique créative s'étendait de la planification d'ermitage au dessin des vêtements des occupants, de la législation architecturale à la composition des psaumes que seraient chantés dans les églises des ermitages. Dans la pratique de l'art de la mémoire au moyen-âge, saint François a défini ses intentions architecturales autour de deux éléments contemplatifs: premièrement, le symbol du *tau* qui devint son habit, sa position de prière, sa signature, son talisman pour guérir les malades et le crucifix imprimé sur sa chair en stigmaté; deuxièmement, la chapelle du Portiuncula que saint François rénova lui-même la caverne de l'annonciation et de la nativité, les entrailles mariales, un coin de ciel sur la terre où les anges pouvaient descendre. Avec son monastère entouré de haies, cette chapelle devint l'exemplum construit pour ses disciples. Comme l'art de la mémoire dont l'objectif était éthique, son architecture s'efforçait d'inspirer le bien commun à-travers des récits de compassion, de pénitence volontaire et d'humilité.

Le Portiuncula fut copié à maintes reprises, mais à mesure que l'ordre s'agrandit, son engagement à la pauvreté s'affaiblit. Conséquemment, les bâtiments commencèrent à s'écarter de l'idéal de saint François. Plutôt que de recourir à une législation architecturale normative, saint François adressa ce dilemme en chorégraphiant tous les détails qui entourèrent sa mort dont l'image poétique devait demeurer inoubliable dans l'esprit de tous ceux qui voulurent ensuite l'imiter en parole, en action et en architecture. Deux ans après cet événement, la Basilique Saint-François-d'Assise fut rapidement érigée par son ami et successeur désigné, Frère Élias, pour abriter le saint nouvellement canonisé. Sa forme originale, son récit et son symbolisme qui furent aussi largement imités, semblent illustrer de façon adéquate la vision architecturale de saint François: si le Portiuncula fut le Bethléem de l'ordre, le plan en forme de tau de la Basilique en devint la Jérusalem. De ces deux prototypes, l'architecture mendicante italienne tira sa signification et sa forme pour le siècle à venir.



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## Abbreviations

- AF* *Analecta Franciscana* (Quaracchi: 1885-1941), 10 vols.
- AFH* *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* (Quaracchi: 1908-)
- ALKG* *Archiv für Litteratur und Kirchengeschichte des Mittelalters* (Berlin and Freiburg-im-Br., 1885-1900)
- Armstrong *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*, trans. and ed. Regis J. Armstrong and Ignatius C. Brady (New York: Paulist Press, 1982)
- BF* *Bullarium Franciscanum*, ed. H. Sbaralea (Rome, 1759-68)
- Bonaventure *Doctor Seraphici S. Bonaventurae S.R.E. episcopi cardinalis Opera Omnia*, ed. PP. Collegii a S. Bonaventura (cited by volume and page)
- Brooke Rosalind Brooke, *Early Franciscan Government* (Cambridge: University Press, 1959)
- 1 Cel Thomas of Celano, *Vita prima S. Francisci*, in *Legendae S. Francisci Assisiensis, Saeculis XIII et XIV Conscriptae*, ed. PP. Collegii S. Bonaventurae, fasc. I, *AF*, x; translation in *Omnibus*, 225-353
- 2 Cel Thomas of Celano, *Vita secunda S. Francisci* in *Legendae S. Francisci Assisiensis, Saeculis XIII et XIV Conscriptae*, ed. PP. Collegii S. Bonaventurae, fasc. II, *AF*, x; translation in *Omnibus*, 354-543
- 3 Cel Thomas of Celano, *Tractatus de miraculis B. Francisci* in *Legendae S. Francisci Assisiensis, Saeculis XIII et XIV Conscriptae*, ed. PP. Collegii S. Bonaventurae, fasc. III, *AF*, x; translation of selected passages in *Omnibus*, 545-554
- CF* *Collectanea Franciscana*, ed. Istituto Storico dei Fr. Min. Cappuccini (Assisi and Rome, 1930-)
- Carruthers Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, England; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990)
- Eccleston Thomas of Eccleston, *Tractatus de adventu Fratrum Minorum in Angliam* (c. 1258), in A.G. Little, ed., *Collection d'études et documents sur l'histoire religieuse et littéraire du Moyen Age*, VII (Paris, 1909 and Manchester, 1951); translated by Placid Hermann, in *Thirteenth Century Chronicles* (Chicago, 1961)
- EF* *Études Franciscaines*
- ER Francis of Assisi, *Earlier Rule* (1221); Latin text in *Regula I. Fratrum minorum*, in *Opuscula Sancti Patris Francisci Assisiensis*, ed. PP. Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 3rd ed. (Quaracchi: Typo. S. Bonaventurae, 1949), 24-62; translation and citation numbering in Armstrong, 107-35
- Esser Cajetan Esser, *Origins of the Franciscan Order*, trans. A. Daly (Chicago: Franciscan Press, 1970)
- FD* *Franciscan Digest* (1991-)
- Fortini Arnaldo Fortini, *Francis of Assisi*, trans. Helen Moak (New York:



- Crossroad, 1981); originally published as *Nova Vita di San Francesco* (Assisi: Tipographia Porziuncula, 1959), citations are to English text unless noted
- FS *Franziskanische Studien* (Münster i. W., 1914-)
- FSt *Franciscan Studies*
- 24 Gen *Chronica XXIV generalium Ordinis Minorum* ('The Chronicle of the 24 Generals') in *AF*, iii; citation by page number
- Jordan Jordan of Giano, *Chronica Fratris Jordani*, ed. H. Boehmer, *Collection d'études et de documents*, VI (Paris, 1908), ch. 10-11; translated by Placid Hermann, *XIIIth Century Chronicles* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1961), 20-79
- Lambert Malcolm Lambert, *Franciscan Poverty: the Doctrine of the Absolute Poverty of Christ and the Apostles in the Franciscan Order, 1210-1323* (London, S.P.C.K.)
- LE Letter of Brother Elias; Latin text in Wadding, *Annales Minorum*, II, 149-50 (old ed.), 167-69 (new ed.); and in *Acta Sanctorum*, Oct. II, 668-69; English translation in *Omnibus*, 1955-60. Citation by *Omnibus* page number
- LM St. Bonaventure, *Legenda maior*, in Bonaventure, VIII, 504-64; see also *AF* x, 557-626; translation in *Omnibus*, 627-787
- Lm St. Bonaventure, *Legenda minor*, in Bonaventure, VIII, 504-64; see also *AF* x, 557-626; translation in *Omnibus*, 789-831
- LP *Legenda Antiqua of Perugia*; "La 'Legenda Antiqua S. Francesco' Texte du MS. 1046 de Pérouse," ed. Ferdinand M. Delorme, *AFH* 15 (1922), 23-70; revised, *EF* 38 (1926), 555ff. See translation by Paul Oligny in *Omnibus*, 957-1101; and *Saint François d'Assise: Documents, Écrits et Premières Biographies*, eds. T. Desbonnets and D. Vorreux (Paris, 1968), 859-989
- LR Francis of Assisi, *Later Rule* (1223); Latin text in *Regula II. Fratrum minorum*, in *Opuscula Sancti Patris Francisci Assisiensis*, ed. PP. Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 3rd ed. (Quaracchi: Typo. S. Bonaventurae, 1949), 63-76; translation and citation numbering in *Armstrong*, 136-45
- MF *Miscellanea Franciscana*
- MP The Mirror of Perfection; *Speculum Perfectionis ou Mémoires de frère Léon*, ed., Paul Sabatier, 2 vols. (Manchester: University Press, 1928-31); translation by Leo Sherley-Price in *Omnibus*, 1103-1265
- Omnibus Marion A. Habig, ed., *St. Francis of Assisi, Writings and Early Biographies: English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of St. Francis* (Chicago, 1983)
- PL J.P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina*
- RH St. Francis of Assisi, *Rule for the Hermitages*. Latin text in *Opuscula Sancti Patris Francisci Assisiensis*, ed. PP. Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 3rd ed. (Quaracchi: Typo. S. Bonaventurae, 1949), 83-84. See critical text in Cajetan Esser, "Die 'Regula pro eremitoris data' des hl. Franziskus von Assisi," *FS* 44 (1962): 383-417; English translation in *Armstrong*, 146-48
- SacCom *Sacrum commercium beati Francisci cum domina Paupertate* (Quaracchi, 1929); translated by Placid Hermann in *Omnibus*, 1531-96

- SL *Scripta Leonis, Rufini et Angeli sociorum S. Francisci: the Writings of Leo, Rufino and Angelo, Companions of St. Francis*, ed. and trans. Rosalind B. Brooke (Oxford Medieval Texts: 1970)
- 3 Soc *Legenda trium sociorum, Acta SS.*, October, II (ed. 1866), 723-42; *Legenda S. Francisci Ass. tribus ipsius sociis hucusque adscripta, Redactio antiquior juxta cod. Sarnanensem*, ed. G. Abate in *MF* (1939), 375-432; English translation in *Omnibus*, 853-956
- Test *Testamentum S. Patris Francisci*, in *Opuscula Sancti Patris Francisci Assisiensis*, ed. PP. Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 3rd ed. (Quaracchi: Typo. S. Bonaventurae, 1949), 77-82; see also K. Esser, ed., *Das Testament des Heiligen Franziskus von Assisi* (Münster i. W., 1949), 38ff.
- VE *Vita Beati Fratris Egidii*, Latin and English translation in *Scripta Leonis, Rufini et Angeli sociorum S. Francisci: the Writings of Leo, Rufino and Angelo, Companions of St. Francis*, ed. and trans. Rosalind B. Brooke (Oxford Medieval Texts: 1970), 305-49

Biblical citations are based on the Latin text published by R. Weber, *Biblia Sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem* (Stuttgart, 2nd ed., 1975), 2 vols. The English generally follows the Douay rendering of the Vulgate.

The history, authorship and dating of key primary source texts are given in the footnotes at their first citation.

## Introduction and Review of Literature

The painted image of the crucified Christ moved its lips and spoke. Calling him by name it said, "Francis, go, repair my house, which, as you see, is falling completely to ruin" (fig. 1).<sup>1</sup>

Under the inspiration of this vision, Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) began a building campaign in 1205. It involved the renovation by his own hand of at least three churches in central Italy. Materially, it is possible to interpret Francis' architectural work as a well-meant but perhaps too literal obedience to the words from the crucifix. His true calling, according to his early biographers, emerged only in 1208, when he heard an excerpt from the Gospel of Matthew read at the church of Sancta Maria de Portiuncula. Its interpretation gave him his life plan: to imitate the poverty of Christ.<sup>2</sup> With this second vocational call, these writers considered his building years to be over, and it is here that they designated the start of his religious life

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<sup>1</sup>2 Cel 10. According to Théophile Desbonnets, St. Francis of Assisi "surpasses all the other medieval saints by the quantity of documents concerning him." *From Intuition to Institution: The Franciscans* (Chicago: Franciscan Press, 1983), 151. At least nine non-Franciscan sources were written before Francis' death. Although these sources are often fragmentary, in this paper they will take precedence in factual matters over Franciscan sources of the same period, due to their objectivity. Many of these are found in Leonardus Lemmens, ed. *Testimonia minora saeculi XIII de S. Francisco Assisiensi* (Quaracchi, 1926), 10-11, 16-19, 79-80; *Omnibus*, trans. Paul Oligny, 1601-13, 1829.

For sources produced within the order, the 1228-29 *Vita prima S. Francisci* by Thomas of Celano (cited here after as 1 Cel) remains "no doubt, the most important document concerning St. Francis and things Franciscan that we have;" Placid Hermann, introduction, *Omnibus*, 186. The *Vita prima* is found in *AF*, 10 (Quaracchi, 1926-41), 1-168; *Omnibus*, trans. Placid Hermann, 177-355. Written in the classical tradition of medieval hagiography for the canonization of the saint not two years after his death, it relies upon eye-witness reports, including Celano's own. His 1247-48 *Vita secunda S. Francisci* (cited here as 2 Cel) was written as a supplement to the first biography taking account of other writings and testimonials from Francis' companions. It is found in *AF*, 10 (Quaracchi, 1926-41), 269-330; *Omnibus*, trans. Placid Hermann, 356-543. Finally, in 1250-53, Celano wrote the *Tractatus de miraculis B. Francisci* (cited hereafter as 3 Cel) which gathered every known miracle of the saint, numbering over 200 entries; in *AF*, 10 (Quaracchi, 1926-41), 331ff; *Omnibus*, trans. Placid Hermann, 545-611.

<sup>2</sup>1 Cel 21-22.

proper. The rest, one could say, is history: the preaching tours, missions, poems, healings and other miracles, the founding of three religious orders, and the bestowal of the stigmata in 1224 upon his flesh, rendering him one of the most widely studied and revered saints across all religions.<sup>3</sup>

Even though this reading of Francis' biography was set down by his disciple and eyewitness, Thomas of Celano, his otherwise faithful narrative overlooks Francis' own account of his early years as dictated in his deathbed Testament.<sup>4</sup> Here, Francis divides his life between an earlier period of sin and a later one of penance. In 1205 or 1206, at the outset of the penitential period, Francis admits an early devotion to church buildings. Francis sustains his architectural interest until the chronology ends at 1226. He then addresses contemporary concerns beginning with architecture:

Let the brothers beware that they by no means receive churches or poor dwellings or anything which is built for them, unless it is in harmony with [that] holy poverty we have promised in the Rule, [and] let them always be guests there as pilgrims and strangers.<sup>5</sup>

According to Francis' own account, then, it is false to limit his architectural interests to the status of a temporary occupation or passing phase associated with a religious conversion

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<sup>3</sup>Assisi, for instance, was chosen as the host for the first world inter-faith conference in 1984. A brief glance at the latest *Bibliographia Franciscana* (published bi-annually in *CF*) would reveal the degree to which Franciscan scholarship has exploded in the late twentieth century. Close to a thousand books, articles, films and videos are produced each year concerning Franciscan topics.

<sup>4</sup>Test 1. The Assisi codex, MS. 338, dating to the second half of the thirteenth century and the Florence Ognissanti MS. 1/25 (ca. 1370) are the two most important sources for the writings of Francis. See *AFH* 5: 237-239 for a description of the Assisi codex by Benvenuto Bughetti. For a description of the Ognissanti MS. see Paul Sabatier, *Le Speculum Perfectionis*, vol. 2 (Manchester: The University Press, 1931), 8-17. The authenticity of thirty-three texts has been established, including five dictated letters which were transposed within the early biographies. In 1976, Cajetan Esser compiled the most rigorous critical edition to date, *Die Opuscula des Heiligen Franziskus von Assisi*, after consulting no fewer than 181 manuscript collections; (Grottaferrata: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1976). Esser's compilation stands within a long tradition of editions of Francis' writing including the important early work by Luke Wadding, *B.P. Francisci Assisiatis Opuscula* (Antwerp, 1623) and the first critical edition, the *Opuscula Sancti Patris Francisci Assisiensis* by the Fathers of St. Bonaventure's College (Quaracchi: Typo. S. Bonaventurae, 1949). See, as well, J.R.H. Moorman, *Sources for the Life of St. Francis of Assisi* (Manchester, 1940) and the introduction to *Omnibus*, 5-22. I rely on Esser's scholarship as translated and annotated in 1982 by Regis Armstrong and Ignatius Brady in *Francis and Clare: the Complete Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), hereafter cited as Francis.

<sup>5</sup>Test 24. "Pilgrims and strangers" refers to 1 Pet 2.11.



1. A late 13th c. fresco by Giotto, or the school of Giotto, in the Upper Church of S. Francesco in Assisi. It shows Francis kneeling behind the pulpitum receiving a message from the moving lips of the crucifix, "... go, repair my house, which as you see, is falling completely to ruin" (2 Cel 10).

experience. Architecture was an integral part of his spirituality and, after 1208, became a watershed issue for his budding order.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, if the binding charism of those who came after Francis was poverty, then buildings—their ownership, use and ornamentation—became the lightning rod of a poverty debate vicious enough to fragment the Order of the Friars Minor many times over. Francis had to address architectural issues directly, since architecture was one of the most visible manifestations of an order's adherence to their vow of poverty. It is my belief, whose proof I will demonstrate in this paper, that a unique, recognizable pattern of architecture was initiated by Francis in 1205 and had become identified with the Franciscans until approximately 1232; thereafter, in a less purified but no less recognizable form, it continued into the next century. However, a detailed legislative document for Franciscan architecture only appears in 1260, thirty-four years after Francis' death, by which time Franciscan convents and churches throughout Europe numbered in the hundreds.<sup>7</sup> How then did Francis and his early companions conceive of, legislate and promote an approach to building within the order that would express their specific form of poverty? Was this approach successful? What were its extent and its limits?

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<sup>6</sup>The symbolism of three churches in three years, and thereby the false confinement of Francis' architectural activity to only these years, was as important to Saint Bonaventure (d. 1274) in, for instance, LM, 2.8, as it has been to recent biographers such as John Moorman in *Saint Francis of Assisi* (London: SCM Press, 1950) and Omer Englebret in his *Saint Francis of Assisi*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, Franciscan Press, 1965).

In 1263, Bonaventure, the Franciscan Minister General, was asked by the order to write a definitive biography of their founder. It became the *Legenda maior*. A shorter version for liturgical use was called the *Legenda minor*. Both are found in *Doctor Seraphici S. Bonaventura S.R.E. episcopi cardinalis Opera Omnia*, ed. PP. Collegii S. Bonaventura, (Florentina, ad Claras Aquas, Quaracchi: 1882-1902), VIII, 505-64, 565-79. Previous biographies were ordered to be burned. The only manuscripts to survive the burning were those, such as Thomas of Celano's, which were owned by non-Franciscan monasteries. As a result of this purge, the *Legenda maior* became "one of the most widely disseminated texts of the Middle Ages," writes Ewert Cousins in the introduction to *Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God, The Tree of Life and The Life of St. Francis*, idem, trans. (London: SPCK, 1978), 41. The *Legenda* is a theological biography placed within a rigorous speculative structure and employing a complex array of symbolic images and numbers taken from the work of Augustine (d. 430). Since Bonaventure's works add little new information to previous biographies, but casts Francis in a new light more in keeping with Bonaventure's era, this source will have only limited use in this study.

<sup>7</sup>Architectural legislation appeared much earlier in the second largest mendicant order of the century, the Dominicans. See Richard A. Sundt, "*Mediocris domos et humiles habeant fratres nostri*: Dominican Legislation on Architecture and Architectural Decoration in the 13th Century," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 46, no. 4 (Dec., 1987): 394-407. For my discussion of the differences and similarities between the architecture of these two friar groups see chapter 7 and conclusion.

Researchers and historians have found Italian mendicant architecture—the architecture of the Franciscan, Dominican and other friar orders dedicated to the practice of poverty and apostolic mobility—enigmatic and difficult to understand.<sup>8</sup> Unlike the chronological, symbolic and philosophical unity found in French Gothic, mendicant construction seems to have defied logical progression, and is more often than not described as an awkward, less purified, over-exuberant and therefore a failed imitator of the Gothic. Richard Krautheimer, in 1925, was perhaps the most influential modern historian to attempt an encapsulation of mendicant buildings when he described them as "preaching barns."<sup>9</sup> This rather functionalist reading has continued to be endorsed more recently, for instance, by John White, Paul Frankl and Angiola Maria Romanini.<sup>10</sup> In 1991, Marvin Trachtenberg attempted to reevaluate mendicant architecture in Italy on its own terms, in contradistinction from French Gothic.<sup>11</sup> He finds that Italian medieval construction, unlike the *lavori moderni* of French Gothic, was always deeply historicist and eclectic. Each city-state seems to have demanded a purposeful originality in its architecture to distinguish their *urbs* from that of their immediate neighbours. Just as their Roman ancestors had drawn from the Greek, Etruscan and indigenous traditions, the Italians of the medieval era seemed equally eager to meld into their buildings Islamic, Byzantine, Roman and Romanesque, the vernacular as well as the Gothic, the *opus francigenum*, now rising north of the Alps. Trachtenberg calls for historians of Italian

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<sup>8</sup>See, for instance, Kurt Biebrach, *Die Holzgedeckten Franziskaner—und Dominikaner—Kirchen in Umbrien und Toskana* (Berlin, 1908); Richard Krautheimer, *Die Kirchen der Bettelorden in Deutschland* (Augsburg, 1925), 12; Paul Frankl, *Gothic Architecture* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1962), 121-25; Wolfgang Krönig, "Caratteri dell'architettura degli Ordini mendicanti in Umbria" in *Atti del VI Convegno di Studi Umbri* (Perugia, 1971): 176-77; P. Heliot, "Sur les Églises gothiques des ordres mendiants en Italie Centrale," in *Bulletin Monumental*, 130 (1972); Luigi Pellegrini, "Gli insediamenti degli ordini mendicanti e la loro tipologia. Considerazioni metodologiche e piste di ricerca," in *Les Orderes Mendiants et la ville en Italie centrale (v.1220- v. 1350)*, 89 (1977): 563-566; Louis Grodecki, *Gothic Architecture* (Milan: Electa, 1978); Angiola Maria Romanini, "L'Architettura degli ordini mendicanti: nuove prospettive di interpretazione," *Storia della Città*, IX (1978): 8-10; *Francesco d'Assisi: Chiese e conventi* (Umbria, 1982); Wolfgang Schenkluhn, *Ordines Studentes: Aspekte zur Kirchenarchitektur der Dominikaner und Franziskaner im 13. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1985); Angiola Maria Romanini, "Il francescanesimo nell'arte: l'architettura delle origini," in eds. M. Baldelli and Angiola Maria Romanini, *Francesco, il francescanesimo e la cultura della nuova Europa* (Firenze: Paoletti, 1986), 181-95; John White, *Art and Architecture in Italy 1250 to 1400*, 2nd ed. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1987), 21ff; Marvin Trachtenberg, "Gothic/Italian 'Gothic': Toward a Redefinition," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 50 (March, 1991): 22-37.

<sup>9</sup>Krautheimer, *Die Kirchen*, 12.

<sup>10</sup>White, *Art and Architecture in Italy*, 21ff; Frankl, *Gothic Architecture*, 121-25; and Romanini, "L'Architettura degli ordini mendicanti," 8-10.

<sup>11</sup>Trachtenberg, "Gothic/Italian 'Gothic'," 22-37.

medieval architecture to cease imposing idealist theories upon Italy and to return to the buildings themselves as microhistorical events. In so doing, however, Trachtenberg and his followers seem to dismiss the possibility of shared ideas, symbolism and architectural creativity, preferring formal analysis, local documentary research and the often myopic examination of single buildings or parts thereof.<sup>12</sup>

A pendulum swing between idealist and structuralist interpretations of mendicant construction may have been both inevitable and necessary. However, by approaching mendicant architecture in the manner of a phenomenologist, rather than the scientist, this paper attempts to find a centre through fresh insight.<sup>13</sup> In such an approach, my primary responsibility is to describe not only the material and social conditions surrounding a particular work, but the hidden, intuited and symbolic narratives implicit within it.<sup>14</sup> My

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<sup>12</sup>For instance see David Gillerman, "S. Fortunato in Todi: Why the Hall Church?," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 48 (June, 1989): 158-71.

<sup>13</sup>According to Max Scheler, Francis' wonderment, his desire to understand by "standing-under," is one of the key examples in history of a lived phenomenological engagement. See Scheler's *Selected Philosophical Essays*, trans. David Lachterman (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 86-87; and idem, *The Nature of Sympathy*, trans. Peter Heath (Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1970), 87ff. Likewise, the research undertaken in this paper relies upon a phenomenological intention to bring my questions—my genuine wonderment—before the source texts and buildings. Doing so, however, has demanded that I receive the sources exactly as they appear to my consciousness, complete with their *lacunae* and inconsistencies. Phenomenology insists upon an intentional analysis in which any being whatsoever primordially appears as itself in its immediate givenness. I apprehend that givenness by "wondering at what seems most familiar." On this see Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1960), 80, as referred to in Richard Schmitt, "Husserl's Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction," in *Phenomenology: The Philosophy of Edmund Husserl and Its Interpretation*, ed. Joseph Kockelmans (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., 1967). Wonder guarantees that my thinking tends towards reflection and as such, explanations give way to descriptions, and answers give way to more questions. As new questions arise, phenomenology directs the researcher to return "back to the things themselves" in order to rework the questions. Thus, as the scope of wonder adjusts to my ever-deepening engagement with the texts, I find myself more within its world than "on top of" it—relating more to the unity of Francis' world, for instance, rather than objectively categorizing it in any strict sense. On wonder and Francis, see Germain Kopaczynski, "Saint Francis and Philosophy," *American Catholic Philosophy Quarterly* 64 (1990): 249-260.

<sup>14</sup>By so doing, I am indebted to the iconology school of Aby Warburg, Erwin Panofsky, Emile Mâle, Walter Burckhardt, Ernst Gombrich, Günter Bandmann, Otto von Simson and others, hoping, however, to steer clear of the grand synthetic histories of Sedlmayr, or the simplistic cause-and-effect relationships that Panofsky, for instance, adopted in his *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism* (London: Meridian New American Library, 1951). On the contrary, my approach, which may be generally understood as phenomenological and hermeneutical, honours Warburg's more flexible definition of iconology as "an analysis which does not allow itself to be hemmed in by the border police," being "less interested in the neat solution than in the formulation of a new problem." See Aby Warburg, "Italian Art and International Astrology in the Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara," trans. P. Wortsmith in G. Schiff, ed., *German Essays on Art History* (New York, 1988), 234-54, esp. 246 and



interest is less the chronology or stylistic influences upon early mendicant architecture, than its meaning in its own context, and its interpretation as a hermeneutic negotiated across our shared horizon.<sup>15</sup> To this end, however, I propose to examine the largest and most influential of the early mendicant orders, the Franciscans, by returning to the origin of their architectural program, to Francis himself. My hope is that by initiating this study with an examination of Francis' architectural vision as it influenced the approach to construction within his order both before and just after his death, a more substantial understanding of Franciscan and mendicant architecture in thirteenth-century Italy may be gained.

The proposition of the direct architectural contribution of Francis of Assisi to the *duecento* has, more often than not, been dismissed by historians. Where Francis has been attributed influence, it has only been with regard to the overriding simplicity of mendicant architecture.<sup>16</sup> *Simplicitas*, I argue, has not only a specific symbolic presence in late medieval ecclesiastical and popular culture, but also a consistent expression in the architecture of the era's most widely imitated holy man, Francis. While architectural scholars may have given short shrift to the problem of Francis' contribution, ecclesiastical and political historians have

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250. On Warburg and the history of iconology, see Michael Ann Holly, "Unwriting Iconology," in Brendan Cassidy, ed., *Iconography at the Crossroads* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Paul Crossley, "Medieval Architecture and Meaning: the Limits of Iconography," *The Burlington Magazine* 130 (February 1988): 116-21; and the introduction to Cesare Ripa, *Baroque and Rococo Pictorial Imagery: The 1758-60 Hertel Edition of Ripa's Iconologia with 200 Engraved Illustrations*, ed. Edward A. Maser (New York: Dover, 1971), vii-xix. For recent research on Warburg, see H. Bredekamp, M. Diers and C. Schoell-Glass, eds. *Aby Warburg, Akten des internationalen Symposium, Hamburg, 1990* (Weinheim, 1991).

<sup>15</sup>Hermeneutical engagement begins with the belief that the distance between past and present is continuous and bridged by tradition. However, the dialectic engendered when past and present engage demands that I hold my cultural horizon ever before me, while, at the same time, remaining open to question its undisclosed tradition. As a result, my pre-conceptions, questions and assumed cultural prejudices are brought into play rather than operating beneath a veneer of objectivity, trusting that what may be inappropriate will be sifted out in the cross-cultural dialectic. As well, the prejudices and political deformations of the source texts themselves will undergo a similar sifting. Together, a conversation is intended to foster a "fusion of horizons" in which something expressed becomes not only mine or Francis', but shared and open to further communal participation. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 258; idem, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. and ed. by David E. Linge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976); and Alberto Pérez-Gómez, "Hermeneutics as Architectural Discourse," introduction to *History and Theory Graduate Studio, McGill School of Architecture* (Montréal, 1997), exhibition catalogue. One of the very few examples of such a hermeneutic approach to Franciscan artistic production is, perhaps, John Fleming's *From Bonaventure to Bellini: An Essay in Franciscan Exegesis* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982).

<sup>16</sup>e.g., Paul Frankl, *Gothic Architecture*, 121; W. Krönig, "Caratteri dell'architettura," 176-77; John White, *Art and Architecture in Italy*, 23; and Marvin Trachtenberg, *Architecture: From Prehistory to Post-Modernism: The Western Tradition* (New York: Abrams, 1986), 261.

taken special notice of poverty, as it both defined and eventually divided the order. An authoritative work on this issue is Malcolm Lambert's 1961 *Franciscan Poverty: the Doctrine of the Absolute Poverty of Christ and the Apostles in the Franciscan Order, 1210-1323*.<sup>17</sup> Lambert asked, "What did Francis intend his order to be?" and attempted to answer this question beginning with an examination of Francis' own way of thinking. By initiating a quasi-phenomenological exploration through the symbolic, visual and concrete thought-world of the saint, Lambert shifted the scholarship in this area away from legal discussions of the various rules of the order and their intertextual discrepancies.<sup>18</sup> Michel Mollat's 1962 work *Les Pauvres au Moyen Age* initiated a number of studies concerning the poverty of the friars in the structuralist method of the *Annales* school, where anthropology, sociology and economic-material factors form a conditioning environment necessarily preceding textual interpretation.<sup>19</sup> Mollat's research has enriched our social and political understanding of the

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<sup>17</sup>(London, S.P.C.K.), cited hereafter as Lambert. For an even wider perspective on poverty and asceticism see also Malcolm Lambert, *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation*. 2nd ed. (Oxford and Cambridge, Mass.: B. Blackwell, 1992). The issue of poverty in the order regained momentum among historians with Paul Sabatier's polemic, *Vie de St. François d'Assise*, trans. L.S. Houghton (London, 1926), which seemed to cast Francis as a misunderstood revolutionary. More moderate scholars who defer to Sabatier are A.G. Little, "Some recently discovered Franciscan documents and their relations to the Second Life by Celano and the *Speculum Perfectionis*," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 12 (1926): 147-78; idem, "Paul Sabatier, Historian of St. Francis," *Franciscan Papers, Lists and Documents* (Manchester, 1943), 179-88; John Moorman, *Sources*; and idem, *A History of the Franciscan Order from its Origins to the Year 1517* (Oxford, 1968).

<sup>18</sup>Employing a similar approach, although not specifically on the area of poverty, is Cajetan Esser, to whom all modern Franciscan research owes a significant debt. See, for instance, his *Das Testament des heiligen Franziskus von Assisi. Eine Untersuchung über seine Echtheit und seine Bedeutung* (Münster-i-W., 1949); and, idem, *Origins of the Franciscan Order*, cited hereafter as Esser.

<sup>19</sup>Michel Mollat, *The Poor in the Middle Ages: An Essay in Social History*, trans. A. Goldhammer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986). Scholarship emerging from a structuralist approach which bears upon Francis and Franciscan architectural research would include Jacques Le Goff, *La Bourse et la vie: Economie et religion au Moyen Age* (Paris: Hachette, 1986); idem, "The Usurer and Purgatory," in *The Dawn of Modern Banking* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), 22-52; Armando Saporì, *The Italian Merchant in the Middle Ages*, trans. Patricia Anne Kennen (New York: Norton, 1970); Robert S. Lopez, *The Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages, 950-1350* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); Lester Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978); idem, "Social Meaning in the Monastic and Mendicant Spiritualities," *Past and Present* 63 (1974): 4-32; R. I. Moore, *The Origins of European Dissent* (London: A. Lane, 1977); Raoul Manselli, *S. Francesco d'Assisi* (Rome 1980); David Burr, "Poverty as a Constituent Element in Olivi's Thought," in David Flood, ed., *Poverty in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1975), 71-79; idem, "Franciscan Exegesis and Francis as an Apocalyptic Figure," in E. B. King, J.T. Schaefer and W.B. Wadley, eds., *Monks, Nuns and Friars in Medieval Society* (Sewanee: Press of the University of the South, 1989), 51-63; David Flood, "The Domestication of the Franciscan Movement," *FS* 60 (1978): 311-27; idem, "Assisi's Rules and People's Needs. The Initial Determination of the Franciscan Mission," *Franciscan Digest* 2, no. 2

early mendicants. Unfortunately, structuralist critical theory often requires a large net in order to designate manipulative superstructures. Mollat is no exception here. Often slipping through the mesh is the context out of which his facts emerge and, more importantly, the symbolic domain which informs so much of the medieval thought-world.<sup>20</sup> The other problem with Mollat and his school, and Lambert for that matter, is that their study of architecture as it relates to poverty is relatively brief. I hope by undertaking this research to extend this inquiry and ask more specifically how Franciscan poverty emerged in the construction of the order, aiming at understanding not only its origin and career, but its meaning for architectural creation in general.

Focusing on the architectural nature of poverty raises the question, as it did for Malcolm Lambert, of what exactly was the mind-set, the particular vision—the inspiration for centuries of literature, art and architecture—of Francis himself.<sup>21</sup> Medieval people generally believed, following the teaching of Christ, that one's contemplative practice or interior life are reflected in one's exterior situation—that both good and evil acts originate primarily in the heart or soul.<sup>22</sup> Even though this paper reserves its main discussion for the architectural questions and

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(1992): 69-89; idem, "Francis' Assisi: Its Political and Social History, 1175-1225," *FSI* 34 (1974): 393-424; idem, "Peace in Assisi in the Early 13th c.," *Franciscan Digest* 1, no. 1 (1991): 1-20; and Robert Brentano, "Early Franciscans and Italian Towns," in King, et al., *Monks Nuns and Friars*, 29-50.

<sup>20</sup>By the words symbol and symbolic, I am referring to Paul Ricoeur's definition as that which precedes myth, language and all narrative. Ricoeur believes that the degree that an artifact or gesture exists as meaningful communication is the degree to which interpretation takes place within the poetic structure of its language. See "The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as Text," *Social Research*, 38 (1971): 529. But if language is the ground of all texts, then interpretation must include, if not begin, in the symbolic realm. Symbols, for Ricoeur, open up the common tradition across time through their characteristically open framework—they continuously invite questions and reveal the subconscious structures of domination and freedom. Symbols are signs, but not every sign is a symbol. Symbols have an inexhaustible depth, while the sign becomes depleted immediately. A symbol is primarily oneiric, existing at the most fundamental part of our psychic self; cosmic, in that the invisible hierophany is contained in it, and poetic in that it is creative and caught up in the event. As a "language in emergence," symbols initiate thought and thus require a less systematic interpretive approach, and one more tentative, trial and error, with the intention to honour, as a translator, the appropriate give and take of traditional symbolic participation. See Paul Ricoeur, "Herméneutique et critique des idéologies," in Enrico Castelli, ed., *Idéologie et démythisation* (Paris: Aubier, 1973), 72; cited in Josef Bleicher, *Contemporary Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics as Method, Philosophy and Critique* (London, Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 223. See also Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974); and idem, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 3-24, 347-57.

<sup>21</sup>Lambert, 31-67.

<sup>22</sup>See, for instance, the introduction to Jacques Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, trans. A. Goldhammer (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988), 1-17.

issues identified above, it is premised, in the first two chapters, upon an exploration, to the degree that sources permit, of Francis' architectural vision. I propose to come at this by addressing his approach to memory work and contemplation and their relationship to his creative expression and poetics with respect to ethics.

Since the concepts "ethics" and "poetics" do not derive directly from Franciscan sources but belong instead to a much wider philosophical heritage in which, I believe, the architectural approach of Francis participates, these terms need to be clarified. By ethics, I refer to the basic responsibility of the self for the other as developed in Greek and Judeo-Christian systems of thought. Ethics infers solidarity, social justice, and, at its most extreme, substitution. I distinguish ethics from rules and prescriptions for morality; ethics implies something more experimental and interpretive, and, if anything, serves as the precondition for morality. Such a view is presented, for example, by Aristotle when, in perhaps the earliest Western systematic discussion about ethics, he places it under the heading of *phronesis*, or practical wisdom.<sup>23</sup> *Phronesis* deliberates about actions and ends in a context where humans discover, perhaps playfully, the *ethos* binding them to others in a community, tradition or *polis*. *Ethos* is literally the "dwelling" alongside others in which the self finds itself as it cultivates value.<sup>24</sup>

By poetics, I understand, with Plato, the making visible or bringing into existence of what is otherwise invisible or non-existing, and, with Aristotle, any productive activity having an end or value beyond itself.<sup>25</sup> Plato set *poiesis* outside philosophical *logos* as a form of divine "inspiration" or "enthusiasm" (*entheos*, meaning "full of the god").<sup>26</sup> Aristotle placed both *poiesis*, understood as artistic production of everything from poetry to architecture, and *praxis*, or ethical action, outside *theoria*, since the former two were both more provisional, tentative and more informed by the trial-and-error, hit-and-miss contexts of lived experience and example. Plato and Aristotle both refer to Herodotus' earlier use of the term *poiesis* to refer to the "making" of Greek culture, as demonstrated by Hesiod and Homer through their making of stories about the birth, names, characters and actions of the gods.<sup>27</sup>

Paul Ricoeur shows how the inherent narrative form of making or poetic production has

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<sup>23</sup>*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1140a-1145a.

<sup>24</sup>*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103a.

<sup>25</sup>Plato, *Symposium*, 205e; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VI; *Politics*, 1254a, 13261.

<sup>26</sup>Plato, *Ion*, 533e; *Meno*, 99d; *Phaedrus* 245a. Note, however, that Plato takes the side of *logos* against *poiesis* in the tenth book of the *Republic*.

<sup>27</sup>Herodotus, Book II, 53.

an essentially ethical vocation.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, ethics for Aristotle was the *telos*, the final cause or end, of poetical production. *Praxis* requires *poiesis* in order to show itself as ethical action. Poetics, in Ricoeur's understanding, proposes to the imagination "thought experiments" which can link together ethical aspects of what is said. Our "free imaginative play" with the myths, dreams, fictions, metaphors and narratives of our culture enables us to make a habit of the virtues shared by that culture.<sup>29</sup> Mythopoeic imagination allows for the ethical and poetical envisioning of future communities of justice, of "worlds otherwise."<sup>30</sup> However, the inherent totalizing or fundamentalizing danger in the reception of any cultural narrative is kept in check through a certain critical distanciation which entails, in effect, a hermeneutic dialectic between belonging to and distancing from the given cultural myths.<sup>31</sup>

Poetic action may be understood, following Martin Heidegger, in a threefold sense of cultivating (*colere*), constructing (*aedificare*), and "letting dwell" by unfolding something into the fullness of its being (*producere*).<sup>32</sup> Heidegger draws *poiesis* close to the original Greek sense of *ethos* as "dwelling". Although for Heidegger the gods have since fled from our modern technological will-to-power, the poet is nevertheless charged with creating that space-of-waiting for their possible return. If Ricoeur's social imaginary could be grafted onto Heidegger's metaphorically architectural, but somewhat passive ethics, then architecture, as a fundamentally poetic act, could assume its inherently narrative function to imagine possible *u-topos*, ethical worlds otherwise. Similarly, the modern architect is invited to decline the Romantic role of objective or enlightened genius, and become an active participant in

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<sup>28</sup>By narrative I understand the act of imitating action which Aristotle calls *mimesis* and Ricoeur designates as referring to all accounts, literary and historical, that tell stories involving a temporal concordance of discordance—ranging from myths and legends to fiction and television stories; see Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984). In the strict sense, Ricoeur's narrative action excludes music, lyric poetry, painting and architecture. My definition includes these and all the arts which have a narrative intention.

<sup>29</sup>See, for instance, Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 3-24.

<sup>30</sup>Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* ed. G. Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), xxvii-xxxv and lecture 1.

<sup>31</sup>On distanciation, see Paul Ricoeur, "Science and Ideology" (1974), in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 222-46; and idem, "Myth is the Bearer of Possible Worlds: An Interview," in Richard Kearney, *Dialogues with Contemporary Thinkers: The Phenomenological Heritage* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 36-45.

<sup>32</sup>Martin Heidegger, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. A. Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 145-61.

*aedificare*, as a critical-hermeneutical midwife for cultural narrative.<sup>33</sup>

By exploring how Francis of Assisi worked out an approach to building as *aedificare*, the following thesis seeks to understand, through concrete example, how poetic vision may translate to architecture. What is ultimately at stake, and will be addressed in my final three chapters, is the duration of this vision and whether or not it could be sustained as an active tradition.

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<sup>33</sup>For a more extensive discussion than mine concerning the link between ethics and poetics see Richard Kearney, *Poetics of Modernity: Toward a Hermeneutic Imagination* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1995).



## The Education of Francis

The principle aim of medieval education, from a student's earliest school years, was the training of the memory. A well trained memory was understood to order, to physically form, the heart and soul. When carefully constructed, the memory would not only provide a way of securely storing thoughts, but also function as the faculty of imagination and creative activity. For instance, St. Augustine (d. 430), whose authority overshadowed the Middle Ages, believed that memory not only served to remember past things but to also represent present and future thoughts—creativity was an act of remembering.<sup>1</sup> As a result, memory implied much more than providing oneself with a means to converse and compose intelligently when books were not at hand, for it was in memory that one created character, ethics and sainthood.

"Ancient and medieval people reserved their awe for memory," says Mary Carruthers, "their greatest geniuses they describe as people of superior memories, they boast unashamedly of their prowess in that faculty, and they regard it as a mark of superior moral character as well as intellect."<sup>2</sup> For instance, Thomas Aquinas (1224-74) was a highly literate man in a highly literate group and yet his contemporaries reserved their greatest praise not for his books but for his memory. The entire *Summa Theologica* in fact, was composed mentally and dictated from memory with the aid of at most a few notes. The remarkable testimony of all his pupils and secretaries recounts how "he used to dictate in his cell to three secretaries, and even occasionally to four, on different subjects at the same time."<sup>3</sup> Often dictating in a trance-

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<sup>1</sup>Aurelius Augustinus, *De Quantitate Animae*, 33-34; and *ibid*, *Confessiones*, edited and translated by William Watts, corrected by W.H.D. Rouse, 2 vols, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960-61), bk. 10.

<sup>2</sup>Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, England; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 1.

<sup>3</sup>Antoine Dondaine, *Les Secrétaires de St-Thomas*, 2 vols. (Rome: Editori di S. Tommaso, 1956), 51.



like state, all the while claiming visitations and discussions with his ancient authorities, his words "ran so clearly that it was as if the master were reading aloud from a book under his eyes . . . he simply let his memory pour out its treasures."<sup>4</sup> Augustine described his school friend Simplicius who not only knew all of Virgil and much of Cicero, but could run backwards and forwards through any point in the text, all the while pulling passages out of context and aligning them under common topics.<sup>5</sup> And Francis' follower, St. Anthony of Padua (1195-1231), is said to have learned the whole Bible by heart merely from hearing it read aloud. Feats such as these could only have been possible when the memory was deliberately trained.

Francis, according to his biographers, had a phenomenal memory. "He was not a deaf hearer of the Gospel," says Thomas of Celano, "but committed all that he had heard to praiseworthy memory."<sup>6</sup> When a friar once offered to read the Scriptures to an ailing Francis, he replied:

It is good to read the testimonies of the Scripture; it is good to seek the Lord our God in them. As for me, however, I have already made so much of the Scripture my own that I have more than enough to meditate on and revolve in my mind. I need no more, son.<sup>7</sup>

And Celano tells us that,

although he had been educated in none of the branches of learning . . . whenever he read the Sacred Books, and something was once tossed into his mind, he indelibly wrote it in his heart. He had a memory for [whole] books because having heard something once he took it in not idly, but with continued devout attention his emotion-memory [*affectus*] chewed on it. This he said was the fruitful method for teaching and reading, not to have wandered about through a thousand learned discussions.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>*Biographical Documents for the Life of Saint Thomas of Aquinas*, trans. Kenelm Foster (Oxford: Blackfriars, 1949), 37-38, 51. Francesco Petrarca (d. 1374), whose memory power was legendary, claimed that Julius Caesar could dictate four letters at once, while writing a fifth in his own hand. See *Rerum memorandam libri*, ed. Guiseppe Billanovich (Florence: Sansoni, 1945), II.

<sup>5</sup>Augustine, *De natura et origine animae*, IV, vii, 9; idem, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, 60, p. 389, lines 7-19.

<sup>6</sup>1 Cel 22.

<sup>7</sup>1 Cel 105.

<sup>8</sup>2 Cel 102.

Due to his lack of compositional styling, Francis' Latin was criticized by his biographers as deficient.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, without immediate access to books himself, Francis dictated the majority of his letters, admonitions, rules, offices and poems—many of these composed when he was already blind near the end of his life—containing over 300 passages from the Old and New Testaments, as well as quotations from the likes of Saints Benedict, Bernard and Anselm.

Among the European nations Italy may have had the largest proportion of those outside of the learned clerical or noble classes who received an education. Nevertheless Assisi, Umbria and Europe in general still operated within a predominantly oral tradition.<sup>10</sup> By oral tradition, I am referring to cultures whose communal history relies more upon human memory as passed through the generations than upon the use of written or printed texts.<sup>11</sup> The

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<sup>9</sup>Eccleston, VI. The chronicle of Eccleston maps out the history of the English province of the Friars Minor from 1224-1258. He is especially valuable for information concerning the politics of the order and the demise of Brother Elias in particular. For an introduction to Eccleston, see Brooke, 27-45.

<sup>10</sup>Those who were truly literate in medieval Europe only constituted a tiny minority. As Brian Stock observed, "down to the age of print and in many regions long afterwards, literacy remained the exception rather than the rule." See Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy* (Princeton: University Press, 1983), 13.

Lay education was especially encouraged in Italy after Pope Innocent III, in 1199, allowed reading of the Scripture for a group of laypersons ("lest these simple people be forced into heresy"), and granted those laity who could read and compose in Latin, the *laici litterati*, the permission to preach in their communities, in the streets and in neighbouring churches—if the local clerics conceded. It may not be chance that the movement of the *Humiliati*, with its literate and articulate lay element, had a power base, as it were, in Lombardy. See D.L. D'Avray, *The Preaching of the Friars: Sermons Diffused from Paris before 1300* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 29, 32. Laymen were often able to hold important professional, academic and political positions alongside clerics and nobles. The greatest university in Italy, Bologna, permitted vacant chairs to pass to the sons of the professors. This indicates an entirely different situation from northern Europe where all but the clerics seemed to be excluded from educational opportunities and where the professions were hardly developed. See F.M. Powicke and A.B. Emden, eds. *Rashdall's Medieval Universities* (Oxford, 1936), i, 214. Even among merchants, non-professional groups of nobility and among some women who had no access whatsoever to the professions, a considerable knowledge of Latin prevailed. J.W. Thompson, *The Literacy of the Laity in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1939), 59.

<sup>11</sup>Only in the monasteries and the universities in the early thirteenth century, where the technology of writing and access to the written word were cultivated, did a truly literate sub-culture develop and eventually blossom into Scholasticism. The difference is less between an illiterate and literate culture than one in which a primarily interpretive oral interaction was beginning to be slowly displaced by a more fundamentalist textual culture. That is to say, in the context of orality, texts, whether written or oral, built or imagined are the *textus*, the "weave" which formed community through the ongoing interpretive adjustment of foundational beliefs, myths and laws to changing circumstances. For instance, "rhetoric," in its Greek original, *technē rhetorikē*, "speech art," was an entirely oral memory performance as indicated in *rhapsodein*, "to rhapsodize" meaning to "stitch songs together." See Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: Technologizing the Word* (London and New York: Routledge,

possessor of a great memory, typically the poet, bore the cultural responsibility for the narration of communal history, myths and beliefs. The poet, therefore, had to have a personal memory capable of ordering a massive vocabulary of set phrases in order to construct correct metrical lines according to a given theme.<sup>12</sup>

By the time Francis was in his early twenties, he was known for his poetic memory. Celano tells us that Francis was the *dominus* or master of a local band of revellers or troubadours who engaged in song, jokes, banqueting and drunken foolishness.<sup>13</sup> Francis even sang, recited poetry and begged in the courtly language associated with the troubadours, Provençal.<sup>14</sup> The troubadour poetic tradition originated in eleventh-century courtly circles in the south of France and spread across Europe until it waned in the late thirteenth century.<sup>15</sup> The Provençal word *trobador* derives, in part, from the Latin word for poet-composer, *tropator*, in Old French, *trouvère*. Relating directly to the function of medieval memory,

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1982), 9; cf. Munro Edmunson, *Lore: An Introduction to the Science of Folklore and Literature* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971), 323, 332.

<sup>12</sup>It is not surprising that Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory, among the most ancient of the Greek deities, was considered the mother of the muses, whose special providence was poetry. See James A. Notopoulos, "Mnemosyne in Oral Literature," *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 69 (1938), 473. M.A. Clanchy has found that, until the fourteenth century, "documents did not immediately inspire trust," instead, the memory of witnesses present at any event, lecture or transaction was always the final arbiter of truth. Whereas the written word could be forged or miscopied and always remained silent under scrutiny, the human memory, especially when trained, was considered entirely secure, more accurate than writing, and able to answer all its detractors. See M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England, 1066-1307* (London: Arnold, 1979), 160, 230.

<sup>13</sup>1 Cel 2, 2 Cel 7. Francis' earliest reputation, according to the *Legenda Trium Sociorum*, rested on his refusal to use coarse language and that, as is often said of memory practitioners, his words "came spontaneously from his heart." Cited hereafter as 3 Soc, this text is a fourteenth-century manuscript compilation of stories concerning Francis. It contains an important section which can be dated to 1246 containing the eye-witness reports of three companions of Francis which were eventually incorporated into 2 Cel. Some of these earlier passages have been stitched into Rosalind Brooke's *Scripta Leonis* (see chapter 2, note 38). See Théophile Desbonnets' introduction to the text in *Omnibus*, 853-84; cf. Rosalind Brooke, "The Lives of Saint Francis," in T.A. Dorey, *Latin Biography* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 177-198, esp. 188.

<sup>14</sup>2 Cel 13, 127; 1 Cel 2; 2 Cel 7; 3 Soc 1; See also F. X. Cheriapattaparambil, *Troubadour Influence in the Life and Writings of the Man Saint of Assisi* (Rome, 1985). The French tongue may have been taught to him by his mother, Pica, whom legend designates as French in origin. A more likely source, however, was the result of Francis accompanying his father from an early age on some of his frequent trade journeys to the Champagne textile market. Both Francis and his father loved everything French, Francis always longed to die in France; his father sold French cloth and even coined the rather original name "Francesco" on his son after a particularly lucrative trip; 2 Cel 1. See Fortini, 87-89.

<sup>15</sup>Roger Boase, *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love: A critical Study of European Scholarship* (Manchester: University Press, 1977), 3-24.

*tropare* in Latin meant "to find, invent, devise or compose." Similarly, the troubadour was considered to be one who invented and memorized poems, verse forms and melodies for his lyrics.

The troubadour was typically accompanied by an apprentice jongleur who was a minstrel charged with interpreting and executing the troubadour's works (fig. 2). The jongleur was often a variety artist, that is, a *joculator* or jester whose talents included singing hymns about the Virgin Mary, juggling and tumbling, and reciting *chansons de geste*. Since the accomplished jongleur aspired to be a troubadour, the troubadour was usually a former jongleur and, on his own, would often perform the duties of both.<sup>16</sup> This may have been the case of Francis, who, as *dominus* of his troubadour group and later as leader of the religious order which he sometimes referred to as *ioculatores Dei*, "the jongleurs of God," certainly demonstrated a lifetime of both composing and performing his poetic vision.<sup>17</sup>

Thomas of Celano tells us that Francis first learned to read at the church of S. Giorgio in Assisi.<sup>18</sup> The canons at S. Giorgio seem to have been responsible for the education of Francis' more literate contemporaries such as St. Clare, author of her own Testament, Form of Life and a number of letters, Brother Giles, author of at least one extant poem, and the poet Brother Pacificus, nicknamed the "King of Verse."<sup>19</sup> Clare and Giles were both baptized at the same font as Francis, and were likewise connected with S. Giorgio—Clare having once heard Francis preach there. Clare was known for her own memory powers, quoting authorities

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<sup>16</sup>Cf. L.T. Topsfield, *Troubadours and Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 2; and R.T. Hill and T.G. Bergin, *Anthology of the Provençal Troubadours*, II (New Haven and London, 1973), 237.

<sup>17</sup>According to David Jeffrey, *ioculatores Dei* were a particular subset of jongleurs, who, "with more devotion than art, framed rude songs or dramatic pieces on the chief events of the Gospel story." David Jeffrey, "Franciscan Spirituality and the Growth of Vernacular Culture," in idem, ed., *By Things Seen: Reference and Recognition in Medieval Thought* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1979): 146. Both the rise of medieval drama and poetry in the vernacular can be attributed mostly to Franciscan traditions; idem, "Franciscan Spirituality," 155-57. Even Dante admits that his treatise of vernacular language, *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, was fostered during his education under the Franciscans at Santa Croce in Florence. T.B. Chubb, *Dante and his World* (Boston, Toronto: Little, Brown, 1966), 224-27.

<sup>18</sup>1 Cel 23, 116-118; LM 4.4, 15.5.

<sup>19</sup>For Pacificus, see LM 4.9. For Giles see VE, introduction, p. 307-317. The *Vita beati Fratris Aegidii* (1263-71), cited here as VE, was probably written by Br. Leo after Giles' death. It is a small but interesting source of documentation concerning the early order. For Clare's education and memory see *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents*, ed. Regis Armstrong (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 1993), 25.

freely in her dictations even though books, in the early years, were not kept at her monastery.<sup>20</sup> The canons of S. Giorgio obviously supported active *laici litterati*.

Judging from the evidence of his written and dictated texts, Francis' mastery of style and composition in Latin, compared to his contemporaries such as Celano, was modest. Francis considered himself an *idiota*, meaning, in medieval language, one who was neither of the ecclesial or courtly class and who had thus not mastered Latin fluently.<sup>21</sup> His education was probably geared towards the practicalities of working in his father's cloth business, where Latin proficiency was helpful but not essential.<sup>22</sup> Francis, according to his biographers, remained in school until about fourteen years of age; this was the prevailing custom for merchants' sons intent on joining their relatives in the shop.<sup>23</sup>

Francis' command of Latin may have been faulty, but his mnemonic powers were considerable in a culture that valued memory. This ability was not simply the consequence of his natural talents but the hard-won prize of deliberate training and constant practice.

Francis' teachers were members of the *ordo canonicus*, that is, deacons and priests gathered under a bishop and attached to an urban cathedral. They lived either in religious cloister of varying strictness or alone *in civitate*. While communal life at cathedrals existed since the fifth century, a reform movement in the eleventh century, led by Pope Urban II and the Umbrian hermit Peter Damian, resulted in more canon groups living in cloister under an ascetic regime which included fasting, wearing coarse woolen habits, chanting the office and practicing chastity, silence and poverty. The reform, however, simultaneously inspired an apostolic thrust towards the urban laity, encouraging canons to educate youth and open

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<sup>20</sup>Two other early companions, Br. Silvestro and Br. Peter Catanii were once canons of S. Giorgio themselves. On Br. Silvestro, see 2 Cel 109. On Peter Catanii see 24 Gen, 4; Bartholomew of Pisa, *AF*, IV, 203; and Brooke, 57, n.

<sup>21</sup>G. Lauriola, "La formazione culturale di Francesco," *L'Italiana Francescana* 56 (1981), 371-72. 1 Cel 89; LM 14.1; Eccleston, VII, 28; see Raoul Manselli, *Saint Francis of Assisi*, trans. Paul Duggan (Chicago: Franciscan Press, 1988), 122.

<sup>22</sup>Throughout a number of *Annales* articles by Henri Pirenne, a demonstrated link can be made between education and the success of the merchant class in thirteenth-century Europe. Merchant fathers are recorded as sending their boys to masters to learn letters as well as good morals. One could assume that they would be expected at the very least to perform sums, if not being able to draw up detailed business contracts. Since Francis' family was one of the leading merchant families in Assisi, it is likely that the education of Francis and his brothers went hand in hand with their families' rise in prestige. Henri Pirenne, "L'Instruction des marchands au Moyen Âge," *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale*, 1 (1929): 13-28; cf. A. Murray, *Reason and Society in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1978), 189-94; and D'Avray, *Preaching*, 38.

<sup>23</sup>3 Soc 2; LM 1, 1; Fortini, *Saint Francis*, 109.

hospitals.<sup>24</sup> Unlike the rurally-based monastic orders, the canons were situated in the centre of bustling cities whose cathedral forecourts often doubled for markets. The reform drew them to serve those caught up in the new mobility of goods, financial transactions and secular entertainments, yet instituted communal practices which strove to keep them untainted by these worldly pursuits. Behind these reforms were the revival and adaptation among the regular canons of the late sixth-century *Regula Sancti Augustini* whose aim was to recreate the pre-Constantine *ecclesia primitiva*, that is, the first community of Christian apostles of Acts 4.32ff, whose tradition stretched back, so the canons claimed, to Aaron and the Levites.<sup>25</sup> Both of these sources stressed the importance of a full common life serving an urban populace while committing themselves to total personal poverty. It must have been astonishing for the laity to see a type of monastic spirituality not hidden away in a far-off cloister but actually woven into their own urban existence.

Two of the most important reform or regular canon groups resided at San Frediano in Lucca and Santa Croce at Mortara from where they spread their influence across central Italy.<sup>26</sup> It is almost certain that the Assisi group were reformed regular canons as well; the city was in direct contact with Peter Damian, the canons lived in cloister and S. Giorgio was a parish church which administered both a school and hospital.<sup>27</sup>

Through their ascetic discipline and charitable works, the canons breathed new life into the European church: lay groups were beginning to gather, pray and organize on their own initiative, and the ranks of the canons bulged. Marie-Dominique Chenu attributes to the influence of the regular canons an awakening of consciousness throughout Europe—a new self-awareness characterized by the simultaneous cultivation of the individual conscience and an internalization of Christian morality.<sup>28</sup> Under the inspiration of Peter Damian and Bernard of Clairvaux, their commitment to the ideal of a revived *ecclesia primitiva* even sparked

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<sup>24</sup>Little, *Religious Poverty*, 105-12.

<sup>25</sup>Charles Dereine, "L'élaboration du statut canonique des chanoines réguliers spécialement sous Urbain II," *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 46 (1951): 534-65; and Caroline Walker Bynum, "The Spirituality of the Regular Canons," in *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 29.

<sup>26</sup>Little, *Religious Poverty*, 105; Fortini, 107.

<sup>27</sup>On Peter Damian's relationship to Assisi, and possible influence on Francis, see Raphael Brown, *The Roots of St. Francis* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1982), 153-58.

<sup>28</sup>M.-D. Chenu, *L'éveil de la conscience dans la civilisation médiévale* (Paris, 1969); cf. Lester Little, "Social Meaning in the Monastic and Mendicant Spiritualities," *Past and Present*, 63 (1974): 19.

discussion concerning the political authority of the papacy and the degree to which true Christian communities had to bend a knee to feudal power.<sup>29</sup> A few radical groups eventually splintered off from the canon chapters and established themselves in the wilderness, and some individuals left to become wandering preachers or hermits. In one notable case, Arnold of Brescia, once the prior of a canon chapter, drew a vast following of mendicant students, directly challenged papal wealth, and promoted division of church and state.<sup>30</sup>

In a recent essay, Caroline Walker Bynum has proposed that the key difference between secular clerics and monastic orders, on the one hand, and the regular canons on the other was the canons' oft-repeated dictum: to live a life by word and example.<sup>31</sup> Whereas the monks saw themselves as life-long students, the canons saw themselves as both learners and teachers. Specializing in educating for the art of preaching, the goals of their asceticism went beyond monastic penance and purification to become a necessary preparation for apostolic work.<sup>32</sup> The canons understood there to be a direct connection between personal poverty and the impact of what was said in their preaching. Preaching by example became an ideal. Besides their hospitals and schools, they were well known for charitable works ranging from feeding the poor to writing tracts on medicine, and even bridge-building.<sup>33</sup> The apostolic life of the Gospels, and the tract on *Pastoral Care* by St. Gregory the Great (d. 604), prompted the regular canons to place themselves at the service of those who lacked health, sustenance, education, or, a means of travel for pilgrimages.

Educating the memory for contemplation and preaching led the regular canons to develop a detailed mnemonic pedagogy. This pedagogy was developed at their school of St. Victor outside Paris. After its foundation in 1108, many an important teacher resided there including the renowned mystical author Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173), the literal-historical exegete Andrew of St. Victor (d. 1175), the liturgical poet Adam of St. Victor (d. 1192), and the

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<sup>29</sup>Glenn Olsen, "The Idea of the *Ecclesia Primitiva* in the Writings of the Twelfth-Century Canonists," *Traditio*, 25 (1969): 83; G. Miccoli, "Ecclesiae Primitivae Forma," in *Chiesa Gregoriana: Ricerche sulla Riforma del Secolo XI* (Florence, 1966), 225-99.

<sup>30</sup>In 1147 he even led an anti-papal uprising in Rome, and was subsequently captured, tried, excommunicated, hanged and burned. Otto of Freising, *Gesta Friderici I Imperatoris*, ed. Waitz (1928), ii.28, p. 154; as cited in Little, *Religious Poverty*, 110.

<sup>31</sup>Bynum, "Spirituality of Canons," 53-55, 57.

<sup>32</sup>Little, *Religious Poverty*, 108.

<sup>33</sup>Mollat, *Les Pauvres*, 90-93. Even though records of bridge building concern France more than Italy, it is possible that the consideration of construction as a possible charitable work may have been passed on to Francis as the canons promoted their tradition among their students.

philosopher-cosmologist Godfrey of St. Victor (d. after 1194). All, however, considered themselves the disciples of their famous teacher and prior, Hugh of St. Victor (d. 1141). Hugh's exceptional scholarly achievement gained him recognition as a leading master in Paris by the mid-1120's. Friend of St. Bernard and Abbot Suger, he wrote texts on philosophy, biblical exegesis, theology and contemplation, making significant contributions to each of these fields. One of Hugh's great legacies to medieval scholarship was his monumental *Didascalicon* which drew together all of the liberal arts into a vast pedagogy that placed a new emphasis on the literal and historical sense of Scripture.<sup>34</sup> For these ideas, indeed his entire philosophy, Hugh drew upon Augustine to the point of being tagged *alter-Augustus*. Hugh's two widely distributed treatises, *De arche Noe mystica* and *De archa Noe morali*, continued his interest in education as that which is founded on the proper training of the memory and aims toward mystical contemplation and vigorous ethical action. Historians Mary Carruthers, Ivan Illich and Howard Zinn all designate Hugh as the great compiler of a thousand years of monastic mnemonic practices and one of the last great thinkers to emerge from and epitomize Western oral tradition.<sup>35</sup>

If for Augustine and Hugh, memory was the basis of creative action in the future, then it is in the memory of Francis, educated in their tradition, where his architectural intentions would lie. Since direct access to the inner contents and operation of Francis' memory would be the preserve of Francis himself, we must infer its nature through its representation in words and actions. The next chapter, therefore, begins with an example of one of Francis' better known sermon-performances which Thomas of Celano presents as a demonstration of Francis' mnemonic ability. This example, and lessons from Hugh of St. Victor's pedagogy, will shed light on the contemplative, interpretive, interactive and ethical aspects of Francis' memory-training as it will bear upon his architectural vision.

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<sup>34</sup>See Ivan Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text: A Commentary to Hugh's Didascalicon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

<sup>35</sup>Carruthers, 80-83; Illich, *Vineyard of the Text*, 1-28; Grover Zinn, "Hugh of Saint Victor and the Art of Memory," *Viator*, 5 (1974): 227.





## Memory and Vision

In the *Prima Vita*, Thomas of Celano reports that Francis would continually bring to his memory, with directed concentration, the birth and death of Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> In order that he may illustrate the exterior effects of this interior labour, Celano recounts the 1223 Christmas eve mass organized by Francis for the residents of Greccio in the mountains above the town. Before the mass, Francis asked a local man to construct a nativity scene in a cave with a manger, hay and live animals, in order to illustrate the poverty of the nativity. Before his friars and the Greccio residents on Christmas eve, Francis delivered a sermon which involved immersing himself emotionally and sensually into this nativity set-up.<sup>2</sup> The sermon, according to Celano, became stamped upon the participants' memories such that visions and miracles were witnessed among them. (fig. 3).<sup>3</sup>

If this event demonstrates Francis' mnemonics, then one of its results—the construction of the first Christmas *presepio* or crèche in the history of Christendom—seems to make a direct relationship between memory and a type of architectural invention. Moreover, if the humility of the nativity was, as Christians believe, a virtue worthy of imitation, then Francis' interaction with this construction imparted an ethical exemplar by impressing a vision of humility upon the memory of those present. By fleshing out Celano's description of this sermon-performance, with reference to Hugh of St. Victor's mnemonics as a pedagogical tradition shared by Francis' regular canon teachers, my aim is to investigate how Francis' memory and creativity translated into architecture and ethics.

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<sup>1</sup> Cel 84.

<sup>2</sup> Cel 86.

<sup>3</sup> Cel 86.

a. *The Sensual Word*

As a prelude to the events at Greccio, Celano tells us that Francis

would recall Christ's words through persistent meditation and bring to mind his deeds through the most penetrating consideration. The humility of the incarnation and the charity of the passion occupied his memory particularly, to the extent that he wanted to think of hardly anything else.<sup>4</sup>

Intense concentration, according to Hugh of St. Victor, was the cornerstone of memory work.<sup>5</sup> Training the memory began on the first day of a child's education with a type of contextualized memorization, typically consisting of verses from the psalms or maxims from Cato's *Distichs*.<sup>6</sup> For example, the psalm manuscripts were, unlike the rest of the Bible, presented to the students neither numbered nor in verse form. The only divisions in an otherwise solid block of text were indicated by coloured initials: typically alternating red and blue for the verses, and both colours for the beginning of a particular psalm.<sup>7</sup> The pupils' first lesson, therefore, was how to remember a verse in its unique visual context: its exact position on the page, the colour of its initial, the lines above, below and beside it (fig 4). But one did not stop there; the context extended to the specific day, hour, classroom, weather or anything that could jog the mind of the unique occasion when it was first committed to memory.<sup>8</sup> Together with singing the verse silently, and smelling and tasting the imagery it evoked, each

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<sup>4</sup>I Cel 84.

<sup>5</sup>Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon* 3.11; and *De tribus maximis circumstantiis gestorum*, 490, lines 39-41.

<sup>6</sup>See Pierre Riché, *Education et culture dans l'occident barbare, VIe-VIIIe siècles* (Paris: Seuil, 1962); trans. by J.J. Contreni as *Education and Culture in the Barbarian West, Sixth Through Eighth Centuries* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1976), 460 ff.

<sup>7</sup>Dating, signatures, alphabetical indexing, footnoting, cataloguing and even the practice of placing spaces between words are all late medieval developments in a textuality geared to a culture of increasingly silent readers, whose memory formation was coming to rely less on the auditory or gestural and more on the visual. Before the thirteenth century, however, books, manuscripts and written documents were less narrative monologues than *thesauri* or treasure-boxes of past memory performances as prompts for similar events in the future. This is why in early documents one will often find, as in an oral performance, slightly misworded quotations gathered from every possible source and woven seamlessly together under broad topics. Ivan Illich, *Vineyard of the Text*, 91.

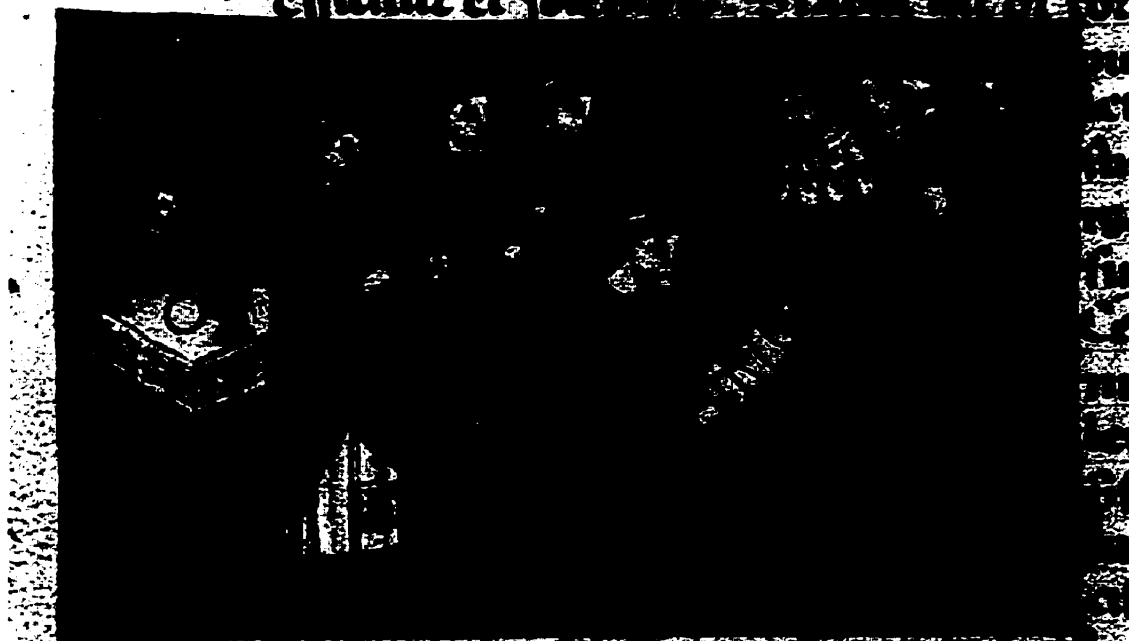
<sup>8</sup>Carruthers, 94.

2. Two jongleurs. From an 11th c. St. Martial tonary. Paris, B.N. lat. 1118, fol IIIV (photo Bibl. nat. Paris). As reproduced in Kendrick, *The Game of Love*, 56.



3. Francis reenacts the nativity at Greccio in 1223. He employs both a live baby and animals before his audience of friars (on the left), and townspeople (on the right). Miniature from St. Bonaventure, *Legenda maior* (Rome: Museo Francescano, Pergamenaceo Codice, 1457, inv. nr. 1266.)

nat filius uo- claus. Laudibus honoris et dignitas et  
 et uiribus efficiatur et solenniter celebratur in die con-



et et in die. Per hunc modum et in die  
 de naturae simplici reus. que et in

verse was to be received in a total interior synaesthesia (fig. 5).<sup>9</sup> Within Hugh's genealogy of time the students continually had to find their unique place: a psalm's praises and laments became their own, its characters sitting next to them, and its setting, their monastery.<sup>10</sup>

For the sake of memorization the initials and margins of the psalters incorporate vivid pictures of, for instance, jewels, coins, birds, bees, fruit and flowers.<sup>11</sup> Both pictures and text refer to words (as sounded out), which in turn refer to the things themselves.<sup>12</sup> An eagle illustrated in a psalter indicates the written word "eagle," encompassing the entirety of its metaphorical implications, and only coming to life by being spoken aloud by the reader. While the reader speaks the word of the illustration, the picture, in turn, may speak to the reader. An illustration not only serves to contextualize a passage on a page, but may also provide a spoken gloss on the adjacent text if designated to do so by the master or reader.<sup>13</sup> For instance, in the thirteenth-century Cambridge Trinity Apocalypse, an illustration of speaking angels, complete with talk balloons and a "listening" John of Patmos, provide a late example of just such a textual dialogue between reader and picture (fig. 6). Hugo de Folieto's bestiary, *De avibus*, attributed until the eighteenth century to Hugh of St. Victor, provides a picture of a hawk and a dove which is meant to speak and summarize the text surrounding it (fig. 7). In another treatise of Hugo's, "The Wheels of True and False Religion," the wheel images are labelled "chapter 1" indicating that they are not illustrations or even a diagram of the text, but a portion of the text itself. Without paying attention to these images, modern

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<sup>9</sup>Scribes themselves typically mumbled as they wrote just as the medieval reader had to speak each word out loud in order to release its meaning: the scriptorium was the noisiest chamber in the monastery. The complex training of the scribe, as M. T. Clanchy has shown, was entirely separate from that of the composing author. Clanchy, *Memory to Written Record*, 89-115.

<sup>10</sup>"Hugo of St. Victor: *De tribus maximis circumstantiis gestorum*," trans. W. M. Green, *Speculum* 18 (1943): 484-93, esp. 491, lines 3ff; and Zinn, "Art of Memory," 227. History for Hugh not only means the historical sense of the text but also a discipline of study which must be mastered, with appropriate sources and techniques. See Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1952), ch. 3 and M.-D. Chenu, *Nature, Man and Society in the Twelfth Century*, trans. J. Taylor and L.K. Little (Chicago, 1968), 99-145.

<sup>11</sup>These items stood for the contents of memory by inferring their respective containers as memory metaphors: treasure boxes, purses, nests, cells, trees and plants.

<sup>12</sup>In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, scribes were often called painters. For instance a monk, Isadore, in an 1170 Paduan manuscript is called its painter even though he is illustrated as writing. See these and other examples in J.J. Alexander, "Scribes as Artists: The Arabesque Initial in Twelfth-Century English Manuscripts," in M.B. Parkes and A.G. Watson, eds. *Medieval Scribes and Libraries: Essays Presented to N.R. Kerr* (London: Scolar Press, 1978), 107-109.

<sup>13</sup>Carruthers, 223-24.

editors would be essentially deleting chapters from this work.<sup>14</sup>

Words are the building blocks of thought, and thought, according to Augustine's Neoplatonism, mediates between visible things and their true invisible reality: the sounding of temporal words leads our mind upward to the logos or timeless Word.<sup>15</sup> This is the guiding concept behind the beginner's reference book, the bestiary. Popular since Alexandrine Greece, bestiaries are anthologies that provide moralized illustrations of hundreds of animals, both real and imagined, but almost never displaying actual pictures of them. Their contents were considered *voces animantium*, literally animal sounds, to be used as mental *aides-mémoire* when memorizing a text. Since only written descriptions were given, the student was forced to imagine his or her own striking creation, either from invention or from an actual encounter with the beast. The imagined animal or bird forms remain forever plastic, now displaying this characteristic, now mouthing that word, according to the particular situation in which the contents of the student's memory were required.<sup>16</sup>

At the most elementary level of a child's education a pupil such as Francis first learned that the understanding was entirely dependent on cultivating the imagination. All the senses had to be employed to imagine and imprint the word as a new and personal experience upon the memory. The memory was geared toward performative interaction with the words by absorbing the given text and illustrations, and by interiorly imprinting the context in which the text was received. Francis' "penetrating consideration," therefore, seems to have been a necessary labour, an unavoidable first step, if he desired to communicate the life of Christ to those around him.

#### *b. Constructing the Res*

Francis asked a local Greccio resident to gather together those things "that will recall to memory the little child who was born in Bethlehem and set before our bodily eyes in some

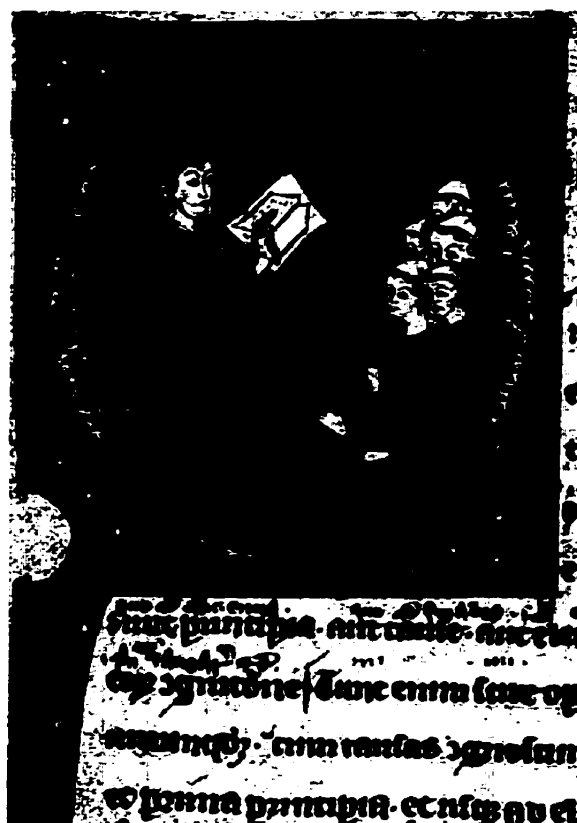
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<sup>14</sup>Carlo de Clercq, "Hugues de Fouillo, Imagier de ses propres oeuvres?" *Revue du Nord* (Université de Lille) 45 (1963): 31-42.

<sup>15</sup>*Confessions*, 11, 5; Robert J. O'Connell, *Art and the Christian Intelligence in St. Augustine* (Oxford, 1978), 100.

<sup>16</sup>On bestiaries in general see Florence McCulloch, *Medieval French and Latin Bestiaries* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962).

4. A 12th c. monastery classroom. Note that students are not taking notes, but discussing points and imprinting on their memories the master's teaching. From Aristotle's *Physica*, Plut. 14 sin.1, c. 1 (BML). As reproduced in Massimiliano G. Rosito, ed. *Santa Croce, nel solco della storia* (Florence: ed. Città di Vita, 1996), 61.



5. Lady Memory takes her place between the Doors of Sight and Hearing. Miniature from Richard de Fournival, *Bestiaire d'amour* (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, MS. fr. 1951, fol. I.)



6. John of Patmos witnesses the rejoicing in Heaven. John, on left, lifts his hood to hear the angel, above, speak the words in the "talk balloon". Miniature, 12th c. (Cambridge: Trinity College, MS R.16.2, fol.22. Courtesy of the Master and Fellows of Trinity College, Cambridge.)



7. Hawk and dove, in left and right arches, respectively—figures which stand for the texts around them. Miniature, 12th c. Hugo de Folieto, *Concerning the Dove and the Hawk* (Oxford: Bodleian Library MS. Lyell 71, fol. 4r.)



way the inconveniences of his infant needs."<sup>17</sup> On Christmas eve, under a rocky mountainous overhang (indicated by Celano and soon after enshrined by the present day chapel), Francis set down a manger and some hay, led in an ox and an ass, and welcomed the inhabitants of Greccio bearing candles and torches "to light up that night that has lighted up all the days and years with its gleaming star."<sup>18</sup> So new was this use of location, audience participation, animals and farm objects for the nativity mass, that Francis, according to Bonaventure's 1263 biography *Legenda maior*, had to seek a special papal dispensation a few weeks earlier for fear of being accused of innovation.<sup>19</sup> The necessity of this composition for Francis may be understood in terms of medieval memory training.

Francis was taught to use simple images, such as animals or symbolic items, to organize the mass of data one has begun to place in the memory. In order to progress from the maxims or psalms to memorizing the Bible proper, the pupil would need to learn these more advanced mnemonic skills. This involved the practice of dividing a text into manageable pieces—usually about seven words or bits of information—and keying these chunks according to a series such as the Latin or Greek alphabet, numbers, animals of the bestiary, the zodiac, a calendar or a combination of these.<sup>20</sup> The pupil is advised to leave plenty of space in this memory lexicon for digression or addition and to imagine the area evenly lit so that every item can be clearly seen. Once the sections are addressed and filed, the student is able to both cross-reference the information and re-combine the text in order to meditate on a theme or fashion a composition. It is important to have a clear beginning to the chosen series, for when it comes time to retrieve something one simply has to run up and down the list for the item needed. As well, by developing a personalized ordering system, the student then has a secure set of mental file folders ready to receive data not only seen but heard, such as matter from a sermon or lecture. Every piece of information received by the ear, however conceptual, must be transformed into words and then made into sensual images visible and tactile to the mind's eye and hand. If the pupil cannot perceive it concretely in his list or ordering system, it will certainly be lost forever.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>1 Cel 84.

<sup>18</sup>1 Cel 85.

<sup>19</sup>LM 10.7.

<sup>20</sup>Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon*, trans. Jerome Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), III. II, p. 93; Zinn, "Art of Memory," 221; Carruthers, 83-85

<sup>21</sup>Kathryn L. Lynch, *The High Medieval Dream Vision: Poetry, Philosophy, and Literary Form* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1988), 34; Carruthers, 95.

At an even more advanced level, students were encouraged to place their gathered bits into *topos*, *sedes* or *locus*, meaning variously "a place set apart, a region" or "a point in time," as well as "a part of the body." When these *loci* were arranged into a compact image, called a *res*, the file folders, so to speak, were placed in their filing cabinet. But unlike a modern filing cabinet or a computer memory, the *res* itself would serve as an all-encompassing metaphor whose simplicity ensured its mobility and flexibility to be recalled in varying situations. Hugh of St. Victor's most striking example of such a *res* was Noah's ark. It evoked the primordial order delineated by God himself, securely negotiating the flow of the world's watery chaos. The ark was the *thesaurus sapientiae*, the book of life, the ark of the covenant, the temporary storehouse for all of creation whose every element was fastidiously labelled, filed and addressed for easy retrieval. Noah withdrew from the world to construct his ark from the measurements—the essential numbers—ordained by God. "I give you the ark of Noah," says Hugh, "as a model of a spiritual building, which your eye may see outwardly so that your soul may build inwardly in its likeness."<sup>22</sup>

Among the dozens of extant manuscript copies of Hugh's text, not one provides an illustration of the ark. While modern scholars such as Grover Zinn take for granted that it is missing, Mary Carruthers believes that the ark was never depicted.<sup>23</sup> Even though the image Hugh describes seems to have a certain precision, he contradicts himself and refashions biblical texts often enough that they evade illustration.<sup>24</sup> The picture that Hugh holds before his students was probably painted in words deliberately to force his students to imagine and continuously renovate their own personalized ark. By avoiding prescription, the ark remained personal, creative, and dynamic.

The shaping of the *res* relies on earlier lessons concerning the emotive and sensual immersion into the content to be memorized. In his twelfth-century *Poetria Nova*, Geoffrey

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<sup>22</sup>I, 2; PL 176, 622B. Later thirteenth century examples would include the crucifix or Tree of Life as well as the Book of Memory. The Franciscan Jordan of Saxony, for instance, advised keeping the crucifix "ever in your mind's eye . . . where you look upon Jesus our Saviour stretched out on the cross as a parchment, written in purple, illuminated in his holy blood." See "Intentio Regulae," in L. Lemmens, ed., *Documenta Antiqua Franciscana* (Quaracchi, 1901), 93; as cited in Suzanne Lewis, "The English Gothic Illuminated Apocalypse, *Lectio divina* and the Art of Memory," *Word & Image* 7 (1991): 1-32, esp. 4, n. 13.

<sup>23</sup>Grover Zinn, "Hugh of St. Victor and the Ark of Noah: A New Look," *Church History*, 40, no. 3 (1970), 261-62; Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 231.

<sup>24</sup>Ivan Illich estimates that 220 square feet of paper would be required for a still-readable blueprint of the ark with all its historical interrelationships. *Vineyard of the Text*, 38.

of Vinsauf portrays an inner hand of the artisan that sculpts the imagination when enlightened by the memory:

[The mind,] as if it were a lump of wax, at first is hard to the touch; if diligent care ignites the imagination [*ingenium*] suddenly the material softens under the fire of imagination and then follows it wherever the inner hand summons, docile to anything. The hand of the inner man leads [the *ingenium*], in order that it may amplify or compress the material.<sup>25</sup>

For Hugh, the product of the inner hand was an ark wherein every cubicle, every roof beam, every rung of every ladder was crammed with numbers, colours, inscriptions, gesturing animals, or personified and talking virtues and vices, all floating on ellipse-shaped oceans forming a *mappa mundi* encircled by the arms of Christ.

The location, items and animals that Francis chose for the nativity at Greccio seem simple enough. But if the all-encompassing *res* was the nativity itself, the collection of items and animals can be considered the memory's various *loci* rendered in unforgettable reality. The hay, manger and animals came directly from local use, thereby ensuring strong personal resonances for the people in attendance. Their placement in the cave at night, their smell, texture, noises and, especially in the case of the ox, their looming presence, would have been highly memorable. But take this entire set-up and invite it into the sacred time and precinct of the mass, if not on the eve of the Church's second most holy celebration, and the event must have been luminous for those in attendance.

Even though the annual construction of a crèche became normative in Christian tradition, its first set-up at Greccio reads as a rather idiosyncratic interpretation by Francis of the nativity. There are no kings, no gifts, no shepherds, not even Mary or Joseph. The choice of

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<sup>25</sup>As cited in Edmund Faral, ed. *Les Arts poétiques du XII<sup>e</sup> et du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1924), 203. Isidore of Seville says that the man who has the faculty of *ingenium* is capable of bringing forth much art. *Etymologiae*, ed. W.M. Lindsay, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), 213; Petrarch, *Secretum*, trans. Ugo Dotti (Roma: Archivio Guida Izzi, 1993), 70; cited in Lynch, *Dream Vision*, 37. Hugh of St. Victor uses the same analogy in connection to goodness or ethics: "For, [when a seal is stamped] a figure that is raised up in the seal appears depressed in the impression in the wax, and that which appears cut out in the seal is raised up in the wax. What else is shown by this, than that we who desire to be shaped up through the examples of goodness as if by a seal that is very well sculpted, discover in them certain lofty traces of deeds like projections and certain humble ones like depressions." *PL* 176, 933B, translated by Caroline Walker Bynum in "Spirituality," 71.

a rocky niche appears nowhere in the Gospel accounts, nor do hay, an ox or an ass. Even though some of these may have been commonplaces in sermons of the time, no one before Francis sought to interpret and depict the nativity in such detail during a mass that it would actually come alive.

Vivid, local and personalized symbols form the foundation of Francis' creative works. They unpack their meaning for, and instill their presence upon, collective memory to the degree that they invite the intense concentration and sensual immersion into prayer, contemplation and mnemonics.

*c. Character and Ethics*

The nativity mass began with joyful singing as the Greccio residents carried in their torches and candles. Francis, meanwhile, "stood before the manger, uttering sighs, overcome with love, and filled with wonderful happiness."<sup>26</sup> During the mass, Francis, who was a deacon (that is, one who was ordained to preach but not preside, as a priest does, over the rite of the mass),

spoke charming words concerning the nativity of the poor King and the little town of Bethlehem. Frequently too, when he wished to call Christ "Jesus," he would call him simply the "Child of Bethlehem," aglow with overflowing love for him; and speaking the word "Bethlehem," his voice was more like the bleating of a sheep. His mouth was filled with more sweet affection than with words. Besides when he spoke the name "Child of Bethlehem," or "Jesus," his tongue licked his lips, as it were, relishing and savouring with pleased palate the sweetness of the words.<sup>27</sup>

Without an impassioned relationship with the contents of one's memory, the student was

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<sup>26</sup>1 Cel 85.

<sup>27</sup>1 Cel 86.

considered to be in danger of failing to form a character which was habitually ethical.<sup>28</sup> That is, once the bits of data, the ethical maxims and holy deeds, have been divided out, placed in their *loci*, and filed in their *res*, the entire edifice had to be frequently reviewed in detail, with feeling. Good deeds were rehearsed, as it were, in the mind. Hugh of St. Victor calls this action *meditari*, which the historian Jean LeClercq defines, according to its twelfth-century secular use, as meaning

to think, to reflect, as does *cogitare* or *considerare*; but, more than these, it often implies an affinity with the practical or even moral order. It implies thinking of a thing with the intent to do it; in other words, to prepare oneself for it, to prefigure it in the mind, to desire it, in a way, to do it in advance—briefly, to practice it. The word is also applied to physical exercises and sports, to those of military life, of the school world, to rhetoric, poetry, music, and, finally, to moral practices. To practice a thing by thinking of it, is to fix it in the memory, to learn it.<sup>29</sup>

Through meditation, according to Grover Zinn, Hugh's insistence on order within the memory became "an existential concern touching the very core of life, whether in the classroom, cloister or choir. Through the proper ordering of thought in the mind, a beginning of order and stability in life may be affected."<sup>30</sup> When the most imitation-worthy thoughts and deeds found during the course of one's studies were carefully divided and properly placed, the foundation for ethical action had been laid. Its completion and perfection were approached only when those crucial foundation stones had become one's *habitus* and character.

Ethical excellence or character, says Aristotle, results from repetition and habituation (the Latin *habitus* or Greek *hexis*, meaning a "physical" memory). The Greek word *charaktér* means literally "the mark engraved or stamped" on a coin or seal; in time it, and its Latin counterpart *forma* (as in a brick form or mold), came to be understood as a "distinctive mark

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<sup>28</sup>Hugh of St. Victor, "De institutione novitiorum," *PL* 176, 933B, translated by Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 97-98. See also, Green, "Hugo of St. Victor," 484-93, esp. 489. See also, "Hugo of St. Victor: *De tribus maximis circumstantiis gestorum*," trans. W. M. Green, *Speculum* 18 (1943): 484-93, esp. 489.

<sup>29</sup>Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God; A Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. Catharine Misrahi (New York: Fordham University Press, 1961), 16.

<sup>30</sup>Zinn, "Art of Memory," 220.

or quality" of a person.<sup>31</sup> Thus, a person's character was considered to be a compilation of the deeds of the ancient martyrs and heroes integrated into one's own experiences and context. A medieval *auctor* or author, for instance, would typically depict himself as a reader of an old book or a listener to an old tale which would be recalled by retelling. *Auctoritas*, or authority, derives from the word *auctor*, said Hugutio of Pisa in about 1200, and was defined as a "saying worthy of imitation."<sup>32</sup> An author, or one composing one's life, was considered one who is full of authorities. Even though medieval quotations were seldom precise and never footnoted, authors such as Francis or Celano often strove to compose documents which chained quotation to quotation such that their combined authority illustrated the subject at hand. A text, says Gregory the Great, is not a collection of rules for what we *ought* to be, but images of what we *are*, "our own beauty, our own ugliness."<sup>33</sup> (This may be behind what modern scholars often see as the medievals' apparent lack of interest in historical philology or archeology: past lives were so continuous with daily existence that medieval thinkers were unable to objectify them. Just as ancient and biblical figures in medieval illustration constantly appear in medieval dress, the omnitemporality of medieval thought invaded all aspects of medieval public life, from politics to architecture.)<sup>34</sup>

Written compilations of ethical maxims from ancient authorities, sometimes called *sophismata* or *dicta*, can be seen in the medieval florilegium. Vices and virtues, ethical topics and socially useful habits were arranged alphabetically or by topic. Protagoras, wrote Cicero, was the first to compile *communes loci*. Aristotle distinguished between these and *eithê* (from the same root as the word for ethics) because the *communes loci* belonged to the practical life of civic duty and the rhetoric of political life.<sup>35</sup> For late medieval preachers these served as promptbooks for composing sermons, but in the milieu of the regular canons, these *dicta* were considered the primary guideposts to personal ethical behaviour.<sup>36</sup> At the turn of the thirteenth century, ethics, and justice for that matter, had yet to become, as it would for the Scholastics of the late thirteenth century, a set of categories from which to deduce how one

<sup>31</sup>Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), s.v. *Χαράκτηρ*.

<sup>32</sup>The etymologies and distinctions of *auctoritas* are described in M.-D. Chenu's essay "Auctor, actor, autor," *Bulletin Du Cange* 3 (1927): 81-86.

<sup>33</sup>*Dialogi*, PL 77, 127-430, esp 140; Carruthers, 182.

<sup>34</sup>Erich Auerbach was the first to coin the term and develop the idea of medieval "omnitemporality" in *Literacy, Language and its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (Princeton: University Press, 1965), 15-34.

<sup>35</sup>Cicero, *Brutus*, 12, 47; Carruthers, 174, n. 73.

<sup>36</sup>Carruthers, 174, 177.

should act in a particular situation. Practical ethics was guided instead by a web of stock situations.

The rehearsal of just acts would have been a key function of memorial practice for a student such as Francis. To that end, the act of dividing and compiling required *affectus*, that is, an emotional investment in the maxims. It wasn't enough to know them by rote, but they had to be written into the flesh as performance so they became habitual responses to particular lived situations that parallel the ancient *dicta*. Francis' emotional relationship with the nativity scene at Greccio allowed him to not only bleat out its poverty with the sheep, share joyful tears with Mary over the birth of the son of God, and mimic the infant Jesus' babble, but to substitute himself, as far as he could, for a Bethlehem sheep, or the poor Christ or his mother. Images of the event typically show Francis substituting for the mother Mary by holding the child Jesus in his arms (fig. 3).<sup>37</sup>

If ethics, as in this case, was able to approach the heights of voluntary substitution, practice in solitude would be essential.<sup>38</sup> In a silent and private place one's *res* could best be run through mentally as well as physically. Francis is recorded to have insisted on the same, saying,

brother body is our cell and our soul is the hermit, which remains inside its cell, praying to God and meditating. Thus, if the soul does not remain in quietness and solitude within its cell, of little good to the religious is a cell made with hands.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>David Jeffrey sees Francis' and Franciscan affective piety as the primary difference between Franciscans and Dominicans; "Franciscan Spirituality," 151. St. Bernard of Clairvaux may have developed affective piety decades earlier, but it was Francis "who took the new sensibility to the people"; see T. Verdon, "Christianity, the Renaissance, and the Study of History: Environments of Experience and Imagination," in T. Verdon and J. Henderson, eds., *Christianity and the Renaissance: Image and Religious Imagination in the Quattrocento* (Syracuse, 1990), 12.

<sup>38</sup>Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon*, 6.4, p. 140-41.

<sup>39</sup>SL 80. In 1244, the newly elected Minister General of the Franciscans, Crescentius of Jesi, ordered his friars to submit to him any information they may have "about the life, signs and wonders" of Francis. Two years later, three companions of Francis, Leo, Rufino and Angelo, submitted a substantial collection of eye-witness accounts and sayings of Francis picked "as it were from a field of flowers" those they themselves judged most beautiful. They soon became the lightning rod of the *question franciscaine*. Their dating, oral and textual sources and influence have been debated for the past century and have finally yielded a degree of agreement among scholars. In 1970, Rosalind Brooke reconstructed these into her book, *Scripta Leonis, Rufini et Angeli sociorum S. Francisci: the Writings of Leo, Rufino and Angelo, Companions of St. Francis*, ed. and trans. Rosalind B. Brooke (Oxford Medieval Texts: 1970), hereafter cited as SL, according to the most reliable manuscripts. Although this collection seems casually arranged by diverse hands, it can nevertheless be considered one of the more authentic and first hand accounts of the founder and his intentions. The early

In Francis' practice, this inner work demanded all of his effort. Before his conversion, Francis was known to pray in a cave near Assisi where he,

withdrew for a while from the bustle and the business of the world and tried to establish Jesus Christ dwelling within himself . . . he sought counsel with God alone concerning his holy proposal. . . . He bore the greatest sufferings in mind and was not able to rest until he should have completed in deed what he had conceived in his heart. . . . Consequently, when he came out again . . . he was so exhausted with the strain, that one person seemed to have entered, and another to have come out (fig. 8).<sup>40</sup>

Visualization was considered so integral to the development of character that memory was thought to occupy a physical space in the heart or stomach. St. Augustine, for instance, considered the memory as the "belly of the mind": if one wished to know something "by heart," one only needed to perform *ruminatio*, "to ruminate" or chew over, like a cow chews its cud, digesting sounds into easily regurgitable visuals.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, Birger Gerhardsson points out the essential mnemonic practices of the swaying of the upper body and vocal cantillation within the earliest rabbinic memory practices.<sup>42</sup> The action or posture associated with an ethical maxim serves to personalize the text, stamp it on the flesh, and ready it for one's particular context.<sup>43</sup>

Silence, solitude and posture allow one to train the memory physically, but repetition ensures its preservation by making them habit. Francis and his companions sang, echoed and repeated the hours of the breviary according to yearly, weekly and hourly calendars. Together with kneeling, standing, or swaying, the perpetual cycle ensured—just as musicians claim to

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companions, however, formed the core group from which the spiritual movement began. Their interest, therefore, focuses on Francis himself rather than on the needs of the growing order in the mid-thirteenth century. As a result, the collection contains a considerable amount of material concerning the Portiuncula, poverty and rules for building which will prove valuable for our discussion.

<sup>40</sup>1 Cel 6.

<sup>41</sup>*Confessions*, 10.8.

<sup>42</sup>Birger Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript; Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity*, trans. Eric J. Sharpe (Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1964), 163-67. Marcel Jousse, in his *L'anthropologie du geste* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974) demonstrates that remembrance means the triggering of a well established sequence of muscular patterns to which utterances are tied. See also his "Le bilatéralisme humain et l'anthropologie du langage," *Revue anthropologique*, Aug.-Sept (1940): 1-30; and Ilich, *Vineyard of the Text*, 61.

<sup>43</sup>Francis himself seems to have preferred praying while kneeling or standing upright, arms outstretched and hood down, i.e., in the form of a tau-cross; SL 95. See chapters 3, n. 60; and 5.



remember musical scores in their fingers—a motor-muscular memory of the sacred texts. The intention was never to become caught in a lapse of memory where any hesitation would cause even the slightest pause from ethical behaviour.<sup>44</sup> When that ideal is reached the properly divided maxims have not only become *habitus* (through repetition), but one's recognized public character.

By immersing himself in the animals and objects and imaginary persons assembled for his Christmas eve mass, Francis demonstrated how his nativity set-up was to be engaged. Thus, architecture, for Francis, had to invite a concentrated, sensual union such that its visitors or occupants would substitute themselves for its implied narrative personae. The degree that those personae are worth of imitation is the degree to which architecture participates in ethical action.

#### *d. Forming Communal Vision*

Celano tells us that through the mass of the nativity at Greccio "simplicity was honoured, poverty exalted, humility commended, and Greccio was made, as it were, into a new Bethlehem."<sup>45</sup> Francis' emotional and physical sermon on the birth of Christ, "invited all to the highest rewards." The Greccio residents "were filled with new joy over the new mystery . . . the whole night resounded with their jubilation."<sup>46</sup> As a result, "the gifts of the Almighty were multiplied there."<sup>47</sup> Celano reports that hay gathered up after the mass and either fed to ill animals or placed upon people who were sick, restored them to health. Women in danger of long labour gave birth safely after the hay was placed upon them.<sup>48</sup> Celano also describes a *visio*, a miraculous vision, which "a certain virtuous man" saw during the mass:

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<sup>44</sup>It is well known that St. Anselm regularly went without food or water in order to jog his mind, and Thomas Aquinas was known often to lie prostrate, weeping, in the effort of solving intellectual complexities. Bernardo Gui, "Life of St. Thomas of Aquinas," cap. 14. Latin text edited by D. Prümmer, q.v. Trans. Kenelm Foster, q.v., p. 37; Carruthers, 201.

<sup>45</sup>1 Cel 85.

<sup>46</sup>1 Cel 85.

<sup>47</sup>1 Cel 86.

<sup>48</sup>1 Cel 86.

he saw a little child lying in the manger lifeless, and he saw the holy man of God go up to it and rouse the child as from a deep sleep. This vision was not unfitting, for the Child Jesus had been forgotten in the hearts of many; but, by the working of His grace, he was brought to life again through His servant St. Francis and stamped upon their fervent memory.<sup>49</sup>

How was Francis' enactment a mnemonic for those present such that miracles and visions could result? An obvious answer comes straight from the teaching of the regular canons: Francis communicated his memory *verbo et exemplo*. But what may be missing from the canon tradition, and Hugh of St. Victor for that matter, is that Francis sought to combine the two at once. His sermons, according to eye witnesses, were not quite sermons, nor his example enacted without a considerable degree of exaggeration.

Celano describes Francis' approach to preaching as that which was directed to

unlearned people through visible and simple things, in as much as he knew that virtue is more necessary than words, nevertheless among spiritual men and men of greater capacity he spoke enlivening and profound words. He would suggest in a few words what was beyond expression, and using fervent gestures and nods, he would transport his hearers wholly to heavenly things. He did not use the keys of philosophical distinctions; he did not put order into sermons, for he did not compose them ahead of time. Christ, the true Power and Wisdom, gave "to his voice the voice of power."<sup>50</sup>

What seems immediately to emerge from this description, and is verified by eyewitness reports throughout his life, are four key points: Francis' sermons did not employ the categories and distinctions of those who were theologically trained; he had a poetic economy of words; he made generous use of gestures; and his sermons came across as if improvised. Once, when confronted in the *piazza publica* by the entire population of an academic town such as Bologna, a non-Franciscan eyewitness records that,

the themes of [Francis'] sermon were angels, men and devils. And he spoke so well and

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<sup>49</sup>1 Cel 86.

<sup>50</sup>2 Cel 107; Ps 67.34.

so wisely of these three rational spirits that to many learned men who were there the sermon of this ignorant man seemed worthy of no little admiration, in spite of the fact that his discourses did not belong to the genre of sacred eloquence: rather they were harangues. Indeed, the whole manner of his speech was calculated to stamp out enmities and to make peace. His tunic was dirty, his person unprepossessing.<sup>51</sup>

His harangue, or emotional street exhortation, coupled with his shabbiness, inspired the crowd to such great devotion on this occasion that they were incited to swarm him, tearing off his clothing as relics.<sup>52</sup> As opposed to the preaching methods endorsed by Bologna and other university towns, where designated subject categories were methodically dissected and brought to logical and moral conclusions, Francis' harangues seemed to be composed without a linear structure. He was frequently repetitious, often diverging from the subject and stringing disparate topics together with an endless series of "et"s.<sup>53</sup> As Malcolm Lambert has noted, Francis' mind ranged from image to image, rather than concept to concept, his content always immediate, personal and concrete.<sup>54</sup>

Francis' preaching as well as his writing (which was usually done by dictation to scribes), seems to have been the product of an intense journey through his memory *res* as he responded to the situation at hand. Celano records that before the pope and cardinals Francis once spoke "without restraint whatever the Spirit suggested."<sup>55</sup> The Holy Spirit (the *animus*, the breath of orality) so infused his body during these apparently ecstatic performances that at yet another papal audience,

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<sup>51</sup>Thomas of Spalato, *Historia Salonitanarum*, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, 29 (1928), 580; trans. in Omnibus, 1877.

<sup>52</sup>Thomas of Spalato, Omnibus, 1877.

<sup>53</sup>The frequent use of "et" appears within Francis' own writings and early Franciscan meditational literature. Along with the sentence structure, brevity of words and the use of the present tense for historical narrative, the literary feel is almost equivalent to the paratactic prose of the Gospels. See, Denise Despres, *Ghostly Sights: Visual Meditation in Later Medieval Literature* (Norman, Oklahoma: Pilgrim Books, 1989), 40. Francis, according to Octavian Schmucki, "did not so much quote the Bible as to speak in the language of the Scriptures;" see, "The Passion of Christ in the Life of Saint Francis," *Greyfriars Review* 4, Supplement (1990): 1-101, esp. 101.

<sup>54</sup>Lambert, 32-38. The testimony of a learned medical doctor of the time seems to attest to the "image to image" metaphorical flexibility of Francis' preaching, such that the subject matter had to be interpreted and personalized by the listeners: "While I can retain the preaching of others word for word, only the things that Francis speaks elude me. If I commit any of them to memory, they do not seem to be the same that dropped from his lips before." 2 Cel 107.

<sup>55</sup>2 Cel 25.

he began to speak fearlessly. Indeed, he spoke with such great fervour of Spirit, that, not being able to contain himself for joy when he spoke the words with his mouth, he moved his feet as though he were dancing, not indeed lustfully, but as one burning with the fire of divine love, not provoking laughter, but drawing forth tears of grief.<sup>56</sup>

Conversely, if Francis received no inspiration he would simply stand silent before the waiting crowd, eventually dismissing them with a short blessing.<sup>57</sup>

Brevity was held in such regard by Francis that he placed it in his Earlier Rule of 1221, which states that the friars should speak only briefly "because our Lord himself kept his words short on earth."<sup>58</sup> Simplicity of word and life, for Francis, was his school in wisdom:

Hail Queen Wisdom! The Lord save you, with your sister, pure, holy Simplicity. . . . Pure and holy Simplicity puts all the learning of this world, all natural wisdom, to shame;<sup>59</sup>

. . . the Lord told me that he wished me to be a new kind of simpleton in this world, and he does not wish us to live by any other wisdom than this.<sup>60</sup>

This, according to Francis, was because, "God's communication is with the simple."<sup>61</sup> For Francis, simplicity even prohibited speculation on his Rule:

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<sup>56</sup>1 Cel 73. "The crown of all our study," said Hugh of St. Victor's authority Quintilian, "and the highest reward of our long labours is the power of improvisation." *Ex tempore dicendi* was not for Quintilian an unprepared spontaneity but the fluency of a subtle memory emotionally moved to composition through *phantasiai*. To speak off the cuff, the orator should disdain the use of notebooks or tablets to jot outlines, but instead rely upon the spirit-inspired *animus* within oneself in order to dwell entirely in its *phantasiai*, its emotionally powerful images. *Institutio*, vi, 2, 29.

<sup>57</sup>1 Cel 72.

<sup>58</sup>LR 9.3 Perhaps such brevity connects to Francis' desire for "littleness" in all things, including, perhaps, architecture. The medieval practice *verbum abbreviatum* ultimately derives from Augustine's *De Disciplina Christiana* II (PL 40, 670); cf. Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse Médiévale* (Paris, 1959), II, 1, p. 181-97.

<sup>59</sup>*Salutation of the Virtues*, in Armstrong, 151.

<sup>60</sup>Mirror of Perfection, 67. Cited hereafter as MP, the Mirror of Perfection was compiled in 1318 from extracts taken from earlier legends and testimonies concerning Francis' life, such as those from which 2 Cel borrows. Some of these sections have been incorporated into Rosalind Brooke's *Scripta Leonis*, cited here as SL. Even though the collection has a polemic overtone which attempts to recast Francis as an ascetic revolutionary, it remains a valuable source of early stories concerning Francis. See *Speculum Perfectionis ou Mémoires de frère Léon*, ed., Paul Sabatier, 2 vols. (Manchester: University Press, 1928-31); translation by Leo Sherley-Price in *Omnibus*, 1103-1265.

<sup>61</sup>2 Cel 191; cf. Prv 3.32.

I strictly forbid any of my friars, clerics or lay brothers, to interpret the Rule or these words, saying, "This is what they mean." God inspired me to write the Rule and these words plainly and simply, and so you too must understand them plainly and simply, and live by them, doing good to the last.<sup>62</sup>

While barring interpretation by his followers on the one hand, Francis freely interpreted his memory *res* on the other, albeit without many words and often in mime. For instance, when once asked to preach on the topic of humility at the convent of San Damiano for Clare of Assisi and her sisters,

he raised his eyes to heaven, where his heart always was, and began to pray to Christ. He then commanded that ashes be brought to him and he made a circle with them around himself on the pavement and sprinkled the rest of them on his head. But when they waited for him to begin and the blessed father remained standing in the circle in silence, no small astonishment arose in their hearts. The holy man then suddenly rose, and, to the amazement of the nuns, recited the *Miserere mei Deus* in place of the sermon. When he had finished he quickly left.<sup>63</sup>

The effect among the sisters was tears of contrition for their sins, and the desire to mortify themselves.<sup>64</sup> These "symbolic sermons," as Celano calls them, "made a tongue of his whole body." As symbols, Francis made his sermons the visible presence of invisible realities—icons, one may say, not simply to invite passive observation but active if not ritual participation.<sup>65</sup> Francis, in fact, makes the comparison himself. While speaking on the topic

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<sup>62</sup>Test 39. In another story, when protest arose concerning the strictness of the Rule, the voice of God, responding to Francis' request, answered those friars saying, "I want the Rule to be observed as it is to the letter, to the letter, to the letter, and without gloss, without gloss, without gloss." Francis then spoke: ". . . do you hear? do you hear? Would you like me to have it said to you again?" SL 113.

<sup>63</sup>2 Cel 207.

<sup>64</sup>2 Cel 207.

<sup>65</sup>In this way Francis seems to demonstrate the ancient mnemonic rule for which the orator was advised "not so much to narrate as to exhibit [*ostendere*] the actual scene" by generating *visiones* which would place the audience "at the actual occurrence." See Quintilian, *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*, VI.ii.32; and Jody Enders, "Visions with Voices: Rhetoric of Memory and Music in Liturgical Drama," *Comparative Drama*, 24 (1990-91): 44. Aviad Kleinberg believes, and this cannot be entirely discounted in some situations, that Francis often forced others to imitate him or interact with him through a manipulative use of shame, i.e. by overdoing what was right; *Prophets in the Own Country* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 135. Concerning the production and meaning

of humility, Francis once said:

In pictures of God and the Blessed Virgin painted on wood, God and Blessed Virgin are honoured and God and the Blessed Virgin are held in mind, yet the wood and the painting ascribe nothing to themselves, because they are just wood and paint; so the servant of God is a kind of painting, that is, a creature of God in which God is honoured for the sake of his benefits. But he ought to ascribe nothing to himself, just like the wood or the painting, but should render honour and glory to God alone.<sup>66</sup>

Francis' composition at Greccio began a few weeks before by inviting the participation of the papal authorities in approving the performance, and a local resident to invite others to lend animals and objects. All those who were coming "prepared with glad heart, according to their means, candles and torches to light up that night," and walked up the mountainside singing in procession.<sup>67</sup> In this way Francis sought to implicate his audience from the outset, to paint them into the picture, such that they became, in effect, residents of Bethlehem, the stars in the nativity sky, or singing angels. The Gospel stories and parables were not simply read aloud and passively received, but become a shared script where everyone present would take their part. Similarly, throughout his life Francis would rapidly adjust his sermons to include jokes, songs or dance steps which were common currency among his listeners, rendering him, and his friar followers, among the most original of medieval populists.<sup>68</sup> By heightening that which was ordinary, the ordinary townspeople strove to ethically elevate his or her own life and honour the sacredness of that which they may have once taken for granted.

Medieval theatre began in the tenth century as a small scripted exchange between priests during the eucharist. By the time of Francis, it was pulling away from the mass and becoming its own performance in the church square. Francis seems to be inviting theatre, if not the

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of icons in the West during this time see Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 26, 308, 312, 348.

<sup>66</sup>SL 104.

<sup>67</sup>1 Cel 85.

<sup>68</sup>All sources agree that Francis' way of announcing the Gospel message was absolutely original. See R. Zerfaß, *Der Streit um die Laienpredigt* (Freiburg, 1974), 230-45, 282-300; and Servus Giebon, "Preaching in the Franciscan Order," in *Monks, Nuns, Friars in Medieval Society* ed. E.B. King and J.T. Schaefer, W.B. Wadley (Sawnee, Tenn.: Press of the University of the South, 1989), 4.

troubadour or fool, to enter back into the mass.<sup>69</sup> The result, however, is that Franciscan performance-homilies, unlike theatre, gained not so much by the attention or appreciation of an audience as by the direct approval of God in the form of visions and miracles among the participants.

In medieval documents and illustrations the term "vision" embraced both the seen and unseen. The frequent appearance of the word *ecce*, "Behold!" throughout medieval literature, for instance, testifies to the degree to which miraculous images and daily life were woven of the same cloth. Sudden appearances—unusual natural configurations, visual portents, dream messages from the dead, divine and infernal warnings, intellectual illuminations, visions of the future—everywhere complemented ordinary sight. To Augustine, all visible things were the shadows, vestiges or images of invisible realities. Corporeal and noncorporeal beings, animate and inanimate objects, all had their place within a divinely ordered chain of being. Those beings which had the ability to reason and were less material, such as angels and saints, were closer to God than those that were not. "Compared to the multitude of supernal and angelic beings," St. Jerome (d. 420) said, "the mass of humanity is as nothing."<sup>70</sup>

Access to invisible realities depended less on physical sight than on intellectual or spiritual vision that could penetrate the materiality of the given world. In general, sight was considered a form of creative energy rather than a passive recording of experience.<sup>71</sup> This energy was strengthened by training the memory to hold holy thoughts and deeds. The work of memory polished the glass of the eye, and spiritual sight, in its turn, verified the holiness of certain thoughts and inspired their manifestation as just acts. Medievals would surely subscribe to Tertullian's claim that, "most men owe their knowledge of God to visions." Indeed, miracles, or *mirabilia*, typically acted as the final arbiter of truth.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>When theatre eventually moved to the urban forecourts of churches, the town members often continued to play a role in mystery plays, as they did in the mass, as "the crowd." On the history of medieval theatre in relation to the mass see O.B. Hardison, *Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages: Essays in the Origin of Modern Drama* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), 35-79.

<sup>70</sup>*In Isiam*, Lib. xi, ch. 40.

<sup>71</sup>Indeed, it was human visual capability, Macrobius (d. 422) wrote, that determined the degree of participation in the divine mind. *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, trans. William Stahl, Records of civilization XLVIII (New York, 1952), 143; see also Carolly Erickson, *The Medieval Vision: Essays in History and Perception* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 13.

<sup>72</sup>*De anima* 47.2.

Without the vision of the infant Jesus or the miraculous healing with the hay, the Greccio nativity mass may not have been so worthy of recall as Celano claimed it was. We cannot, of course, disregard the possibility of psychosomatic delusion or the wish-fulfilment of the oppressed, but if we are to remain within the thought-world of our sources, Celano speaks in terms of memory work and the grace of God. Francis' invitation to the participants to enter into a mnemonic Bethlehem and the nativity mass ushered them into a sacred zone where God was born, angels appeared and bread and wine became flesh and blood. As their mountain, farm objects and animals transformed into the Christmas story before them, what would exclude the possibility of other things transforming in this holy place: that the ill could become healthy or that a baby could appear in the manger after Francis' sermon?

The verification of *mirabilia* depended upon their source—either human deception, the devil or God. When a miracle was deemed authentic, cathedrals could be built, war declared, or the course of many lives changed. Even with all the evidence for an unnatural occurrence carefully noted, with witnesses brought forward and comparisons made with similar occurrences in Scripture or in the lives of the saints, a fairly wide girth for the determination of a miracle's cause nevertheless remained. Thomas of Celano depicts a young Francis experimenting with contemplation and memory work between 1204 and 1208. The visions and dreams that resulted seem to have been interpreted by Francis without recourse to either a spiritual director or an oneiromancer. Francis demonstrated an early independence from church prohibitions on dream interpretation and prophetic dreams; he held a belief, bold for his era, that God wished to communicate to him His personal will.<sup>73</sup>

Francis' approach to creation, from his improvised words and gestures to his interaction with visions and found objects, thrusts the case for orality and interpretation upon a world largely controlled by clerics, nobles and professionals who often used their literacy as a device to exclude and prescribe. If Francis was championing the possibility of hermeneutics, ethics and holiness among those otherwise marginalized, what was the imaginative material he offered them to meditate upon and act out? To answer this it would be essential to consider the foundational narrative of Francis' memory as it may be derived from his earliest recorded

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<sup>73</sup>Christianity did away with dream interpretation and oneiromancers in 314 in canon 23 of the First Council of Ankara. By Francis' time, dreams were generally to be feared as the work of the devil. For instance, the young Cardinal Giovanni Lotario (who later became Pope Innocent III) devoted a chapter of his *De contemptu mundi* (ca. 1196) to the "fear of dreams." See Le Goff, *Medieval Imagination*, 193-241.



visions and dreams.

In 1204-05, Francis experienced a vision whose effect rendered him temporarily deaf, dumb and immobile as an *affectio spiritualis* carried him away in "a rapture among things invisible."<sup>74</sup> Francis described the experience as the reception of a great hidden treasure, the feeling of love for a beautiful bride, the entrance of the Holy Spirit, and an indelible understanding of the worthlessness of all earthly things. On the basis of this vision he decided to abandon the leadership of his troubadour group and his plan to become a soldier in Apulia.<sup>75</sup>

Afterwards, Francis "withdrew for a while from the bustle and the business of the world and tried to establish Jesus Christ dwelling within himself."<sup>76</sup> Celano parallels the experience to Mt 13.44 where the kingdom of heaven was likened to a treasure hidden in a field. He who finds the treasure hides it, joyfully sells all his possessions, and buys the field. The treasure Francis received in his rapture was now being sought after in his inner heart, the seat of his memory. In his *meditatio*, Francis

would pray to his Father in secret . . . he sought counsel with God alone concerning his holy proposal. He prayed devoutly that the eternal and true God would direct his way and teach him to do His will. He bore the greatest sufferings in mind and was not able to rest until he should have completed in deed what he had conceived in his heart.<sup>77</sup>

Celano tells us that for Francis "various thoughts succeeded one another and their importunity disturbed him greatly."<sup>78</sup> Francis had a vision where a local woman who was hunchbacked appeared to him along with a threat from a demon that he would grow a hunchback like her if he continued his meditation (fig. 9):

"Francis," God then said to him in spirit, "what you have loved carnally and vainly you should now exchange for spiritual things, and *taking the bitter for sweet*, despise yourself,

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<sup>74</sup>2 Cel 7.

<sup>75</sup>1 Cel 7; 2 Cel 7, 9.

<sup>76</sup>1 Cel 6.

<sup>77</sup>1 Cel 6.

<sup>78</sup>1 Cel 6.

if you wish to acknowledge me; for you have a taste of what I speak of, even if the order is reversed."<sup>79</sup>

Immediately he felt compelled to obey the divine command. He was soon given the chance to "reverse the order of his senses." He met a leper one day while travelling. Francis was so horrified by lepers that he was unable to look at them, never venturing closer than two miles from their houses, all the while holding his nose.<sup>80</sup> On this day, however, he forced himself off his horse and gave the leper both a coin and a kiss (fig. 10). After remounting, Francis looked back and the leper miraculously vanished. "Filled with wonder and joy," he went directly to the local *leprosarium* and gave every leper a coin and kissed their hands and mouths, thereby trading the "bitter for the sweet."<sup>81</sup> With a kiss, Francis entered directly into what was believed to be a living purgatory: to live among those "who should deny themselves the comfort of medicine," says Francis quoting Acts 13.48, since they were purifying themselves "for eternal life."<sup>82</sup>

Accepting the reversal of his senses marked the beginning of Francis' life of penance. His next recorded vision, at the ruined church of San Damiano in 1205, invited Francis to engage

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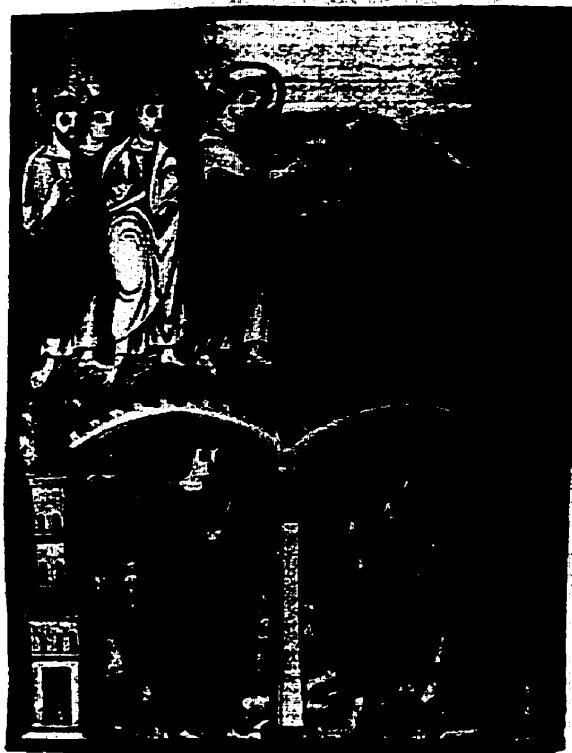
<sup>79</sup>2 Cel 9. The italics are mine.

<sup>80</sup>LM 1.5; 3 Soc 11; Test 1; cf. SL 22-23. A homily given by St. Gregory of Nazianzus in 379 offers a description of the life of lepers that may be held true throughout the Middle Ages. Lepers were considered "already dead except to sin; often dumb, with festering bodies whose insensible limbs rotted off them; heartbreaking and horrifying spectacles of human ruin; objects of repugnance and terror; driven from the house, the marketplace, the village and the fountain; persecuted even by their parents; disfigured, unrecognisable, identified only by their names; avoided, shrunk from, detested, despised by relatives, fathers, mothers, spouses, children; wandering night and day, naked, destitute, exposing their loathsomeness to the gaze of passers-by to move them to obtain alms." *Oratio XLIII: In laudem Basilii Magni*, in PG 36, 579.

<sup>81</sup>2 Cel 9.

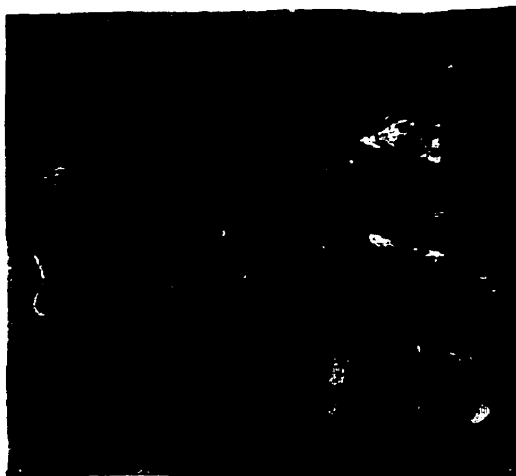
<sup>82</sup>ER 10. According to medieval Italian custom, Francis would have legally bound himself in blood by kissing strangers, in this case considered an "instant death." See Mary Brown Pharr, "The Kiss in Roman Law," *The Classical Journal* 42 (1946-47): 393-7. By 1096, leprosy was considered more of a living purgatory, rather than a living hell, after the holy crusaders returned from their episcopally blessed tour of duty with leprosy. See Saul N. Brody, *Disease of the Soul: Leprosy in Medieval Literature* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1974), 103. In 1179, the Third Lateran Council issued a decree which urged that the segregation of lepers from society be accompanied by an appropriate ritual. The *separatio leprosum* differed little from the office of the dead, for, even in the church, the leper was considered no longer one of the living. The leper was required to kneel before an altar beneath a black awning with his or her head covered by a black veil, and three times during the mass the priest threw a spadeful of earth from the cemetery over the leper (in Amiens and elsewhere the service required the leper to stand in a grave). See Brody, *Disease*, 67; and Ann G. Carmichael, "Leprosy" in *Cambridge World History of Disease*, Vol. VIII (Cambridge, 1989), 838.

8. Francis and his early companions contemplating with emotion before crucifixes in their wilderness caves. Anonymous of Umbria, second half of the 16th c. Miniature from *Francheschina di Santa Maria degli Angeli* (Santa Maria degli Angeli. Archivio della Porziuncula.)



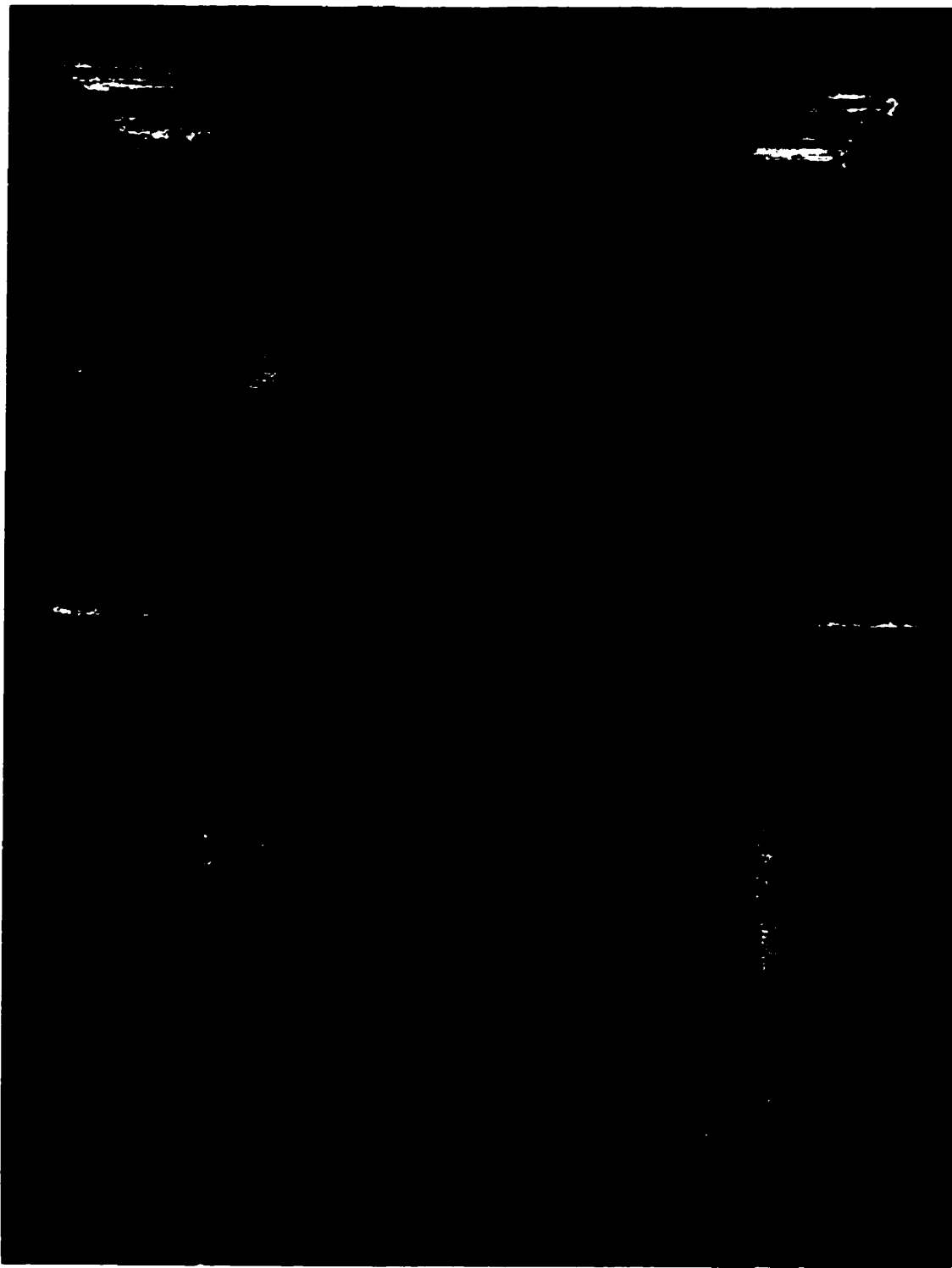
9. Jesus with Peter and two other apostles healing a hunchbacked leper (top panel); the cured leper bears two doves as offerings to a priest (bottom panel). Miniature. Gospel Book of Otto III, c. 1000. (Munich: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek MS. Latin 4453. fol. 97v.)

10. Francis dismounts from his horse and gives the leper a coin and a kiss. (From the 14th c. *Codice Latino Bonaventure*, Laurentianum, Rome.)





11. Above, original crucifix which moved its lips to speak to Francis. Below, an enlargement of the head of Christ showing T-shape on brow. At left, blood drips from the right wrist, down arm to elbow and from there onto a Roman soldier below. Paint on wood panel, late 12th c., full view and detail. Church of S. Chiara, Assisi. (From Luciano Canonici, *The Land of Saint Francis Umbria and Surroundings* (Narni: Ed. Plurigraf, 1987), fig. 21.



12. St. Francis kissing the bleeding wounds of the feet of a crucified Christ. Detail of a painting by Margarito d'Arezzo, 13th c. (Arezzo: Basilica di S. Francesco).

the reversal in his daily life.

Kneeling before the wooden crucifix, he began to pray, when suddenly the figure of Christ, parting its lips, called him by name and said, "Francis, go repair My house, which is falling completely to ruin (figs. 1, 11)."<sup>43</sup>

In what Augustine would describe as a *visio corporealis*, Francis was "smitten with unusual visitations," while compassion and tearfulness for the crucified Christ became "rooted in his soul" (fig. 12).<sup>44</sup> His interpretation of this *visio* led him to exchange his clothing and patrimony for a hut at the local lazaret, from which he set out each day to repair San Damiano.<sup>45</sup>

Through these experiences Francis began to see lepers as Christ, and Christ as a leper. The *Actus Beati Francisci* reports that Francis ". . . not only served the lepers willingly, but he had furthermore commanded the brothers of the order, passing through or sojourning in the world, to serve the lepers for the love of Christ who, for us, desired to pass for a leper."<sup>46</sup> When Francis began to attract his first followers in 1208, he would place each of them in a local lazaret, as a type of novitiate or testing ground before they took vows to join him, in

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<sup>43</sup>2 Cel 10.

<sup>44</sup>*De genesi ad litteram*, ch. 12; See Carolly Erickson, *The Medieval Vision: Essays in History and Perception* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 37; and Le Goff, *Imagination*, 216. Even though St. Augustine cautioned people never to expect a direct vision of God before death, by the twelfth century this view began to be challenged; *De doctrina christiana* II, 7, in *PL* 34, 40. For the first time in the medieval Christian West, the regular canon Richard of St. Victor offered a phenomenology of *personal* vision by those who aspired to the heights and frequencies of a type of seeing undreamed of by Augustine. Richard addressed his writings to contemplatives, "those to whom it is given to see face to face, who, contemplating the glory of God when his face is unveiled, see truth without a covering in its simplicity without a mirror or enigma." *Adnotationes mysticae in Psalmos* cxiii, in *PL* 196, 337; quoted in Barbara Nolan, *The Gothic Visionary Perspective* (Princeton: University Press, 1977), 31.

<sup>45</sup>2 Cel 10.

<sup>46</sup>*Actus Beati Francisci*, 25; trans. in Omnibus, 1357. The nursing of and companionship with lepers was, at this time, regarded as an act of utmost humility and personal sanctity; Cesarius of Heisterbach, *The Dialogue of Miracles* trans. H. von E. Scott and C. Bland (London, 1929), II, 30-34. A prophecy concerning Jesus in the Vulgate translation of Is 53.4 elevated the disease in the eleventh century to that of a sacred malady: "Surely he hath borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows: and we have thought him as it were a leper [*quasi leprosum*], and as one struck by God and afflicted." See Jerome, *Comm. in. Is. Proph.* 1.14, ch. 53 in *PL* 24, 525ff. See Schmucki, "Passion of Christ," 56. In ER 9, Francis quoted from the same section in Isaiah in such a way that Jesus, who should be seen by his followers in all the poor, looked like a leper, with his face set "like a very hard rock" (Is 50.7).

order to live with their "brothers in Christ," just as Francis himself did from time to time.<sup>87</sup> The lazarets were a combination of prison, almshouse and monastery, constructed from donated materials and located downwind from villages.<sup>88</sup> The leprosy epidemic peaked during Francis' youth. The chronicler Matthew of Paris states that there were some twenty thousand leper hospices in Europe at that time.<sup>89</sup> Thought to be caused by sexual sins, no misfortune was so feared as the diagnosis of leprosy, whose cure was often the harshest penances the Church could impose.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup>LP 22, 998; 1 Cel 104; 2 Cel 98; ER 9; MP 44, 58. St. Gregory of Nyssa (332-400), indicates the tightness of the leper community that Francis might have experienced: "They have no friends but each other, united as they are in misery; that which makes them despised of others unites them in a close bond among themselves." *De pauperibus amandis*, oratio II, in PG, 46, 477-478. Medical historian Keith Haines suspects that Francis may have suffered from a dormant form of leprosy; "The Death of St. Francis of Assisi" FS 58 (1976): 39. At least one of Francis' early companions, Giovanni della Capella, caught the disease; LP 57.

The *Legenda Antiqua of Perugia*, cited here and after as LP, is a collection of testimonies of Francis' original companions which ended up in 2 Cel and was most recently compiled by Rosalind Brooke in SL. Probably collected in 1311, the chronology is in disorder, but the individual stories retain a freshness of eyewitness accounts. "La 'Legenda Antiqua S. Francesco' Texte du MS. 1046 de Pérouse," ed. Ferdinand M. Delorme, *AFF* 15 (1922), 23-70; revised, *EF* 38 (1926), 555ff. See translation by Paul Oligny in *Omnibus*, 957-1101; and *Saint François d'Assise: Documents, Écrits et Premières Biographies*, eds. T. Desbonnets and D. Vorreux (Paris, 1968), 859-989.

<sup>88</sup>E. Jeanselme, "Comment l'Europe, au Moyen Age, se protégea contre la lèpre," *Bulletin de la Société Française d'Histoire de la Médecine* 24 (1930): 70-81. There were at least six leper hospices in the Assisi area, of which San Lazzaro d'Arce (whose small stone chapel remains today) is noted by local tradition as the one in which Francis visited most, and perhaps stayed. This tradition merges this lazaret with the leprosarium mentioned in LM 4.8 and designates Casa Gualdi, just outside of Assisi, as its location. Englebert, *Saint Francis*, 462, n. 25.

<sup>89</sup>Englebert, *Saint Francis*, 72. L.A. Muratori mentions that "In Italy, there was scarcely any *civitas* which had not appointed some place for lepers," *Antiquitates Italicae Medii Aevi* (Aretino, 1774), III, col. 51; cited in Haines "The Death of St. Francis of Assisi," 27-36, esp. 37; Fortini, 206, n. f.

<sup>90</sup>Saul Brody believes that no burden was heavier for the medieval leper as the reputation for immorality. And yet any number of skin diseases were enough to warrant a condemnation to this pariah status. Such a stigma owes its widest promotion to the extended discussion of the disease in the Book of Leviticus (Lev 13-14); see Brody, *Disease*, 107; Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 418-464. Here, leprosy was not so much the result of sin but the cause of sin itself, therefore making that person ritually impure. The other books of the Old Testament, however, explicitly depicted leprosy as the result of sin (Num 12.10-12; II Chron 26.16-23; II Kings 5.20-27; 15.1-6; Job 2.7). The early church fathers interpreted that the sin of leprosy was primarily that of heresy, but by the late Middle Ages leprosy was considered the result of almost any moral disorder, especially sexual depravity. A 1279 statute of Perugia condemned women who had sexual relations with lepers to be flogged throughout the city and suburbs, have their noses cut off, and be banished permanently; Fortini, 211. Sexual misconduct, leprosy and serfdom were generally equated to one another, each presenting original sin in its bodily manifestation. Moreover, sin itself was thought to be leprous: Justin Martyr wrote that leprosy was the "emblem of sin" and Maurice of Sully in 1170 said that "the leper signifies sinners, and the leprosy the sins." *The Writings of Justine Martyr and Athenagoras*, trans. Marcus Dodds, George Reith, and B. P. Pratten (Edinburgh, 1870), 357;

Through his early visions, Francis came to embrace the leprous marginality of a God whose imitation required rejection by the world, physical suffering, poverty and isolation interspersed with begging journeys into local villages. By reversing their interpretation through the birth and crucifixion narratives of his God, the downward spiral of terminal illness and moral agony now held the promise of the incarnation and the resurrection. The experiences and images of rejection, suffering, pain and mendicant itinerancy now provided mnemonic *loci* of biblical proportion; and isolation, the preferred architectural set-up for contemplation, memory-work, healing and miraculous visions. A solitude in poverty that could provide for mendicant itinerancy thus became the imaginative ideal and core program for Francis' subsequent architecture.

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*Maurice of Sully and the Medieval Vernacular Homily*, ed. C.A. Robson (Oxford, 1952), p. 91. On the symbolism of physiognomics as related to morality see Paolo Squatriti, "Personal Appearance and Physiognomics in Early Medieval Italy," *Journal of Medieval History* 14 (1988): 191-202.





## Building as Penance: San Damiano

### a. *Hermit Life and Devotions*

In his only autobiographical text, the Testament of 1226, Francis carefully builds the story of his life upon the foundation of his communion with lepers. He begins:

The Lord granted me, Brother Francis, to begin to do penance in this way: While I was in sin, it seemed very bitter to me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I had mercy upon them. And when I left them, that which seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of soul and body; and afterward I lingered a little and left the world. And the Lord gave me such faith in churches that I would simply pray and speak in this way: "We adore You, Lord Jesus Christ, in all Your churches throughout the world, and we bless You, for through Your holy cross You have redeemed the world."<sup>1</sup>

In this brief and somewhat oblique statement, Francis managed to condense his entire life up to the age of twenty-five. Of these years, the first twenty-three are summed up tersely as his period of sin, whose image was the scorn he felt for lepers. By finding mercy for lepers through a reversal of heart, Francis arrived at two decisions: the first, to leave the world, and the second, to receive a faith in, or devotion to, churches. By leaving the world Francis was directly referring to his early hermit vocation.<sup>2</sup> Celano provides the evidence for this by

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<sup>1</sup>Test 1-5.

<sup>2</sup>See Henrietta Leyser, *Hermits and the New Monasticism: A Study of Religious Communities in Western Europe 1000-1150* (London: Macmillan Press, 1984), 18-28. It would have been important, however, that Francis declare his status, since in medieval times, identity and a sense of self was coextensive with one's publicly defined status, no matter how destitute. See the introduction to Jacques Le Goff, ed., *Medieval Callings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). After his contact with lepers, 1 Cel 16 first reports that Francis spent several days as a scullion at a Benedictine monastery near Gubbio but had to leave on account of the monks' unwillingness to support him. The

noting that Francis, from 1206 to 1208, was wearing the leather belt, staff, sandals and haversack associated with hermits.<sup>3</sup> According to Celano, the time of this hermit vocation coincides with Francis' renovation of at least three churches, leading one to suspect that his Testament admission to a faith in churches had an active architectural dimension. Since the next sentence in the Testament begins with the word "Afterward," Francis seems to chronologically if not symbolically connect these two experiences as Celano does in his biography. On this basis we will consider Francis' hermit vocation and his devotional life as ritual and imaginative dispositions which continue to fill out the narrative content of Francis' memory. We will then examine how his early practices and symbolic palate come to bear upon his architecture beginning with his first intervention at the church of S. Damiano.

A flourishing hermit or eremitical movement appeared in Europe in the eleventh century—at the very time when the new urban society was taking shape and the Benedictine monastic orders were reaching their peak of power and prestige. The hermits constituted a rejection of both the new cities and the old monasteries; it avoided the problems of the one and the compromises of the other in favour of an ideal based on the penitential model of the fourth-century hermits of Egypt, Syria and the Holy Land. The two most influential hermits of the European revival were St. Romuald (d. 1027) near Ravenna and St. Peter Damian (d. 1072)

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rejection may have been a prompt, as it was for earlier hermits, to declare a more solitary and independent religious calling, outside of the established communities.

<sup>3</sup> Soc 21, 25. We know from three early chroniclers that Francis was wearing the habit of a hermit by the time he began repairing the Portiuncula in 1206. Bartholomew of Trent, *Legenda choralis Carnotensis*, in *AF* x, 538-40; 1 Cel 21; Jordan, 16. Cf. Esser, 97. Hermits refused to wear the black habit of the Benedictines, but wore white or whitish colours, with grey being considered holiest of all habits. Leyser, *Hermits*, 67. "The dress of hermits is always rough, but its make-up seems varied enough. One sees mention of rags and of sheepskins, but also of a tunic, a hood and a cloak. The white colour of the undyed wool is very generally mentioned, in such a way that it will become the distinctive mark of new religious foundations. Equally well attested are the wearing of a beard, with a large tonsure for clerics, and the use of a donkey as a means of transport." See J. Becquet "L'érémisme clérical et laïc dans l'Ouest de la France," in *L'Eremitismo in Occidente nei secoli XI e XII*, Atti della seconda Settimana internazionale di studio, Mendola, 30 August to 6 September, 1962 (Milano, 1965), 193-94. The geographical limits, however, of this description must be taken into account. Francis' habit may have been the "small tunic" mentioned in 1 Cel 16, given to him by a friend in Gubbio, which was a key centre for hermits in central Italy. The monastery and followers of Italy's most famous hermit, Peter Damian were located at Fonte Avellana in the mountains north of Gubbio. At least seven of its monks became bishops of Gubbio, including Blessed Villano (d. 1239), who may have been bishop when Francis arrived there.

in Umbria.<sup>4</sup> Romuald founded hermit communities of solitary huts all over central Italy, the most famous of which was Camaldoli, high in the Tuscan-Romagnese Apennines. Peter Damian, writing from his hermitage, became, with Romuald, the leading propagator of the eremitic movement and its particularly harsh penitential character.<sup>5</sup> From these leaders and their milieux began a renewed search for a primitive evangelical life, in contrast to the monasteries, through hard manual labour, a tendency toward solitude, constant contemplation and the daily practice of poverty.<sup>6</sup> A great many of the spiritual innovations in central Italy during the eleventh and twelfth century can be traced to the hermits who rose to prominence within the church.<sup>7</sup> For instance, Tuscany's hermit movement led to the foundation of numerous small houses grouped around a priory and eventually emerged in the thirteenth century to become the Servite and Friar Hermits of St. Augustine.<sup>8</sup>

The Assisi area, unlike the rest of Europe, had had an almost continuous eremitical presence since the first Christian hermits beginning with St. Isaac of Spoleto (d. 525), the Syrian founder of the early hermitages of Monte Luco above Spoleto.<sup>9</sup> The town of Foligno

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<sup>4</sup>O. Capitani, "San Pier Damiani e l'istituto eremitico," in *L'Eremitismo*, 122-63; Leyser, *Hermits*, 29.

<sup>5</sup>"O eremitic life," Damian once wrote, "you are the soul's bath, the death of evil-doing, the cleanser of filth; you make clean the hidden places of the soul, wash away the foulness of sin, and make souls shine with angelic purity." *Laus eremiticae vitae*, *PL*, 245, 247. On the rise of penitential spirituality see Little, *Religious Poverty*, 70-75.

<sup>6</sup>The hermit tradition has always been considered a *locus* for the support of orality and memory. For the orality fostered by the original Eastern desert fathers and mothers see Peter Brown, *Body and Society*, 229. For the Umbrian hermit, Peter Damian, the desire of learning grammar was synonymous with deserting God and turning to false gods: "God had no need of our grammar." *PL* 145, 695 B-697 B. Plato was one of the earliest authors to recognize the effects of literacy upon orality and ethics, when he noted how the invention of writing coincides with the loss of memory and the subsequent weakening of the mind—that in the heat of a debate, writing cannot answer for itself since it always remained mute before its detractors, *Phaedrus*, 274-77. Likewise, when anthropologists such as Albert Lord studied the introduction of reading and writing into oral cultures, they found that it directly interfered with the quality of the memory of their narrative poets. See, *The Singer of Tales*, Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature, 24 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960), 17.

<sup>7</sup>Lester K. Little, "Intellectual Training and Attitudes toward Reform, 1075-1150," in *Pierre Abélard, Pierre Le Vénérable*, Colloques Internationaux du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Cluny, 2-9, July 1972 (Paris, 1975): 235-49.

<sup>8</sup>F. Schneider, *Regestum Senense. I. Bis zum Frieden von Poggibonsi 13-30 Juni 1235*, *Regesta chartarum Italiae*, 8 (Roma, 1911), xlix, n.1; Giles Constable, "Eremitical Forms of Religious Life" in *Monks, Hermits and Crusaders in Medieval Europe* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1988), 254.

<sup>9</sup>A colony of hermit-monks from Syria were recorded in residence in Monteluco near Spoleto since the seventh century—creating what was called, probably with some exaggeration, "Thebaid of Umbria." See K. Elm, "Franziskus und Dominikus. Wirkungen und Antriebskräfte zweier Ordensstifter," in *Saeculum* 23 (1972): 127-47. Elm believes the roots of Francis' spirituality are not to be found in the wandering preacher groups like the Waldenses or the Humiliati, but in the desert monastic tradition as it arrived in the West (139ff). See also the history of debate on this subject in

near Assisi had one of the earliest Umbrian hermit-bishops, Bonfil of Foligno (d.1115). Along with the regular canons at S. Giorgio who endorsed a return to the mobility and poverty of Christ and the apostles, Assisi received visits and sermons from Peter Damian.<sup>10</sup> There were two types of hermit vocations according to Peter Damian: some lived alone in cells, and others were without fixed abodes, wandering in the desert like the earliest Christian hermits.<sup>11</sup> Twelfth and thirteenth-century hermit life covered a great diversity of practices including the scribal arts, scholarship, itinerant preaching tours, hearing confessions, healings, serving as ombudsmen for local disputes, as well as permanent enclosure for the sake of penance and contemplation.

From the beginning of his first experiments with contemplation two years before his conversion, Francis had been regularly seeking out poor and solitary places to pray and live in (figs. 13, 14).<sup>12</sup> He believed they who converted others through their preaching were actually being converted themselves through the prayers of their brothers and sisters "who hide in abandoned and secluded places."<sup>13</sup> It was in keeping with the aims of the hermit tradition that Francis considered these early years of solitude, wandering, begging, helping lepers and repairing ruined churches as his *poenitentia* or life of penance.<sup>14</sup> Francis' life, since his leper experiences, may then be described as an oscillation between contemplative-eremital and active-penitential ways of life.<sup>15</sup> Even after the Primitive Rule Francis wrote for his order in 1209, he and his first companions felt they still had to discern whether to live a hermit life in the strict sense or a mixed life of work and prayer.<sup>16</sup> Even though they finally chose the mixed life, all of Francis' earliest companions retained eremital practices to the

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Octavianus Schmucki, "Place of Solitude: An Essay on the External Circumstances of the Prayer Life of St. Francis of Assisi," *Greyfriars Review* 2, no. 1 (1988): 77-132, esp. 77.

<sup>10</sup>Constabile, "Eremital Forms," 248; Leyser, *Hermits*, 97.

<sup>11</sup>Peter Damian, *Op. XV de suae congregationis institutis*, ch. 3, *PL* 145, 338B. Constabile, "Eremital Forms," 243.

<sup>12</sup>Test 18; 1 Cel 3, 10; SL 6; see Lambert, 45.

<sup>13</sup>LP 71; 1 Cel 91.

<sup>14</sup>Test 1.

<sup>15</sup>Raffaele Pazzelli believes that Francis was a *conversus* or *donatus* (a type of hermit with vows of stability to a parish) during the time when he worked on S. Damiano. Although the work of restoring churches was typical *conversi* work, his argument, however, is based on the assumption that Francis stayed at S. Damiano during the restoration. All that can be verified from the sources, as I argue, was that, at this time, he was staying at the local leprosarium. See, Raffaele Pazzelli, *St. Francis and the Third Order: The Franciscan and pre-Franciscan Penitential Movement* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1982), 29-38.

<sup>16</sup>1 Cel 35.



13. Entrance to Francis' cave at Sant' Illuminata del Murrato, Alviano. (Photo by author.)

14. Cave of Francis. S. Urbino di Narni. Terni. (Photo by author.)



end of their lives: Brother Bernard often went off for months at a time wandering in the woods and the majority retreated permanently to hermitages after the death of Francis.

Thus, from the moment of his conversion experience, Francis' approach to the world was that of a hermit for whom penance carried out in a combination of solitude and itinerancy was an essential disposition. In his Testament, Francis connects this practice to his veneration of churches, represented by a prayer formula, as well as list of interconnected devotions to priests, Scripture, theologians and the eucharist, that followed from his veneration of churches.<sup>17</sup> These devotions specify the nature of Francis' hermit practices, which would eventually include architectural construction, in both conceptual and concrete terms. They demand therefore to be considered in detail.

The prayer for churches that Francis inserts in his Testament was a traditional one first recommended for recitation by St. Gregory the Great (d. 604) in his *Liber Responsalis* and later by the monk Arnuphe in his *Vitae Religiosae*.<sup>18</sup> It was associated with the liturgy of Holy Thursday, which commemorates the last supper and passion of Jesus. We can understand the meaning of Holy Thursday for Francis from the small Office of the Passion that he wrote for his followers. The office begins with psalms composed by Francis for each of the seven prayer hours of Holy Thursday. Their contents carefully weave the narrative of the passion through lines from the Gospels and the Psalms. Francis, however, skips the last supper and concentrates on a vivid and emotional rendition of the passion, wherein Christ declares his divine obedience in architectural terms: "Holy Father, zeal for Your house consumes me."<sup>19</sup>

Before the renunciation of his wealth and patrimony in 1206, Francis' interest in churches took the form of substantial donations of money and expensive ornaments.<sup>20</sup> Afterwards, Francis only deepened this concern by seeing that churches be prayed for and repaired, altars be properly furnished and the minute details of their upkeep become a priority. During his

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<sup>17</sup>Test 6-13.

<sup>18</sup>PL 78, 805; PL 184, 1177. A second prayer formula has been said to originate from Francis' vision before the crucifix and is attributed to Francis: "Most high/ glorious God/ enlighten the darkness of my heart/ and give me, Lord,/ a correct faith,/ a certain hope,/ a perfect charity, /sense and knowledge,/ so that I may carry out Your holy and true command." Here knowledge and obedience are stressed rather than church or crucifix adoration, thus throwing its authenticity into doubt. See *Prayer Before the Crucifix*, in Armstrong, 103; cf. Schmucki, "Passion of Christ," 11.

<sup>19</sup>*Office of the Passion*, V, 9, in Armstrong, 86.

<sup>20</sup>1 Cel 9, 18-22; 2 Cel 8, 14.

preaching tours, he often carried a broom in order to sweep out the churches he preached in:

For St. Francis was very grieved when he entered any church and found it was not clean, and therefore he always, after he had preached to the people and the sermon was ended, gathered together all the priests who were there into some remote spot so that the laity should not hear, and preached to them of the salvation of souls and especially that they should be careful and diligent in keeping clean their churches, altars, and everything connected with the celebration of the divine mysteries.<sup>21</sup>

Celano tells us that,

if a church were standing in any place whatsoever, even though the brothers were not present there but could only see it from a distance, they were to prostrate themselves upon the ground in its direction and, having bowed low with body and soul, they were to adore Almighty God, saying, "We adore thee Christ, here and in all thy churches," as the holy father [Francis] taught them. And, what is no less to be admired, wherever they saw a crucifix or the mark of a cross, whether upon the ground, or upon the wall, or in the trees, or in the hedges along the way, they were to do the same thing.<sup>22</sup>

What both passages testify to is how thinly the appearance of churches or crucifixes veiled the invisible presence of God. Both here and in the Testament, crucifixes seem to have an equivalency to the churches—in a way, they would serve equally well as traditional mnemonic containers for the church prayer formula Francis was promoting. And, if we were to key his devotion to churches to his vision before the crucifix at San Damiano (which would fit chronologically into the narration of the Testament concerning his faith in churches), we are confronted by a Jesus, as in a mnemonic composition, whose lips moved and commanded Francis to "Go repair my house."<sup>23</sup> Given that the image on the surviving crucifix suffers and

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<sup>21</sup>SL 18; see Francis of Assisi, *Letter to the Clergy*, 11 in Armstrong, 59.

<sup>22</sup>1 Cel 45. This seems to demonstrate how his prayer for churches was typically put into practice.

<sup>23</sup>2 Cel 10. This story only first appears in Celano's *Vita secunda* written in 1247-48. Celano, following the Testament, placed the event after Francis' contact with the lepers, but before the renunciation of his inheritance. I follow Richard Trexler in that this was most likely a retrojection due to the political complexities within the order of the mid-thirteenth century and should have been placed after the renunciation instead. See Trexler, *Naked Before the Father*, 32-34, 57.



drips bodily fluid as a leper would, the Testament story seems ingeniously to collapse Francis' entire conversion experience into the *res* for its remembrance (fig. 11).<sup>24</sup> That is, the image of a leper-Christ, the crucifix upon which he was painted, and the church of S. Damiano that the crucifix was in, provide the mnemonic images for the prayer formula including its association with the rites of the eucharist, Holy Thursday and their respective penitential dispositions. Indeed, the early biographers report that Francis was irreversibly changed by the talking crucifix. He was "stricken and wounded with melting love and compassion for the passion of Christ;"<sup>25</sup> "From then on he could never keep himself from weeping, even bewailing in a loud voice the passion of Christ which was always, as it were, before his mind."<sup>26</sup> Francis, in his life and Testament, wished to re-create this *compassio Crucifixi* for his followers: crucifixes and churches vibrated and overflowed with the sacred which, in turn, begged to be adored, cared for and listened to.

What the churches sheltered and the crucifix represented was the mystery of eucharist, which Francis considered his principal adoration, and through which all of his other devotions must be understood.<sup>27</sup> Of the relatively few texts composed by him, the number of words dedicated to the promotion, protection and praise of the eucharist and care of its liturgical paraphernalia seems almost obsessive. Rather than digressions from the serious legal or disciplinary topics which determined the need to compose his official *epistolae*, the eucharist often substituted for the central topic itself through which all other matters were to be discussed.<sup>28</sup> Francis justified this in two letters, stating, "I act in this way since I see nothing corporally of the Most High Son of God in this world except in His most holy Body and Blood."<sup>29</sup> Francis did not attempt to debate the fine distinctions of transubstantiation made by theologians of the day. For Francis, the Son of God corporeally humbled, indeed shrank

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<sup>24</sup>Celano's claim that Francis' *visio* was "a thing unheard of in our times," (2 Cel 10), may only refer to the specificity of its message. In fact St. Peter Damian, Rupert of Deutz, St. John Gualbert and St. Bernard all had visions before crucifixes which either spoke, bled, motioned or embraced them. *PL* 145, 432a; 168, 1590ff, 1601; 146, 767c; and 185, 419ff.

<sup>25</sup>3 Soc 14.

<sup>26</sup>2 Cel 11.

<sup>27</sup>Test 10-11.

<sup>28</sup>Francis of Assisi, Admonitions, in Armstrong, 25-36; idem, Letter to the Clergy, 3-11 in Armstrong, 49-50; idem, First Letter to the Custodians, 2-5 in Armstrong, 52-53; idem, Letter to the Entire Order, 2, in Armstrong, 55-61; idem, First Version of the Letter to the Faithful in Armstrong, 62-64; idem, Letter to the Rulers of People, 6 in Armstrong, 77-78; ER 20.5; Test 10; SL 79, 80.

<sup>29</sup>Test 10; Francis of Assisi, Letter to the Clergy, 3, in Armstrong, 49-52.

Himself, to appear in the communion bread (fig. 15)!<sup>30</sup> His Letter to the Entire Order breaks into ecstatic verse on this theme:

Let the whole of mankind tremble  
     the whole world shake  
     and the heavens exult  
 when Christ, the Son of the living God,  
     is on the altar  
     in the hands of the priest.  
 O admirable heights and sublime lowliness!  
 O sublime humility!  
 O humble sublimity!  
 That the Lord of the universe,  
     God and the Son of God,  
 so humbles Himself that for our salvation  
 He hides Himself under the little form of the bread!  
 Look brothers at the humility of God . . .<sup>31</sup>

Francis returns to this message continually throughout his writings, affirming over and over again that seeing is believing:

And as [the apostles] saw only His flesh by means of their bodily sight, yet believed Him to be God as they contemplated Him with the eyes of faith, so, as we see bread and wine with [our] bodily eyes, we too are to see and firmly believe them to be His most holy Body and Blood, living and true.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>See Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: University Press, 1991), 36; Chenu, *Nature, Man*, 117-18.

<sup>31</sup>Letter to the Entire Order, 26-28, in Armstrong, 58.

<sup>32</sup>Admonitions, 20-22, in Armstrong, 27. Peter Damian testifies to having seen the host during mass turn into real flesh, *PL* 145, 572-73. After the eleventh century the consecrated wafer was considered a type of a relic which, like relics, could be encased in altar stones and brought out to witness oaths and legal cases. Conversely, relics were often consumed in powder form to effect healings. In one bizarre case, St. Hugh of Lincoln was caught chewing on the bones of Mary Magdalene while on pilgrimage to France. He argued to his monk accuser that if he could consume the body of Christ in the mass, surely the same could be allowed here. Adam of Eynsham, *Magna Vita*



15. Miracle of the Child Jesus in the host, as revealed to Edward the Confessor. (Cambridge: CUL, Ec.3.59, p. 37. *Le estoire de sent Aedward le rei*, mid-13th. c.)

At a time when the laity were only required to receive communion once a year, Francis usually received the eucharist every day.<sup>33</sup> He implored, under the weight of a curse, that all the world's emperors should leave aside their cares and preoccupations and follow his practice.<sup>34</sup> He once desired to send his brothers throughout the world with "precious pyxes" or "metal boxes, finely wrought" within which to rescue and properly store misplaced hosts.<sup>35</sup>

No detail of the mass was to be performed without due reverence for Christ's flesh and blood manifest on the altar. In contrast, however, Francis warned that

we must hate our bodies with [their] vices and sins. . . . We must deny ourselves and place our bodies under the yoke of service and holy obedience. . . . We must not be wise and prudent according to the flesh (fig. 16).<sup>36</sup>

The opposition of divine and human flesh that Francis depicted for his followers was a rather extreme version typically endorsed in hermit circles.<sup>37</sup> An important distinction was made, however, concerning the hands of priests. For while the priest may be a known sinner himself, Francis believed that "the hands [that] touch the Word of Life have something about them that is more than human."<sup>38</sup> Francis would kiss priests' hands, and would say that he

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*Sancti Hugonis*, trans. ed. D.L. Douie and D. H. Farmer (London: Nelson, 1961-62), 169-70; and see, Ronald Finucane, *The Miracle Working Corpse: A Study of Medieval English Pilgrims and their Beliefs* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1972), 12. After the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 the elevation of the host gradually became an established practice in the mass and it was introduced into Italy ca. 1260 due primarily to the Franciscan devotion. See V.L. Kennedy, "The Franciscan *Ordo Missae* in the Thirteenth Century," *Medieval Studies* 2 (1940): 204-22, esp. 217. After the introduction of the elevation, eucharistic miracles and visions were widely reported; see Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 302-19.

<sup>33</sup>2 Cel 201. William Durandus of Mende (d. 1296) notes that since 1215 the laity received communion once a year and priests daily, on behalf of the laity. *Rationale divinatorum officiorum*, lib. 4, ch. 53, no. 3; cited in Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 64, n. 306. Francis also observed the three Lents (before Christmas, and before and just after Easter) following the custom which began ca. 700.

<sup>34</sup>Letter to the Rulers of Peoples, 6 in Armstrong, 77.

<sup>35</sup>2 Cel 201; SL 80; Letter to the Clergy, 1-7, in Armstrong, 50-51. Following the recommendations of the 1215 Lateran Council, pyxes used to carry the host were to be of precious metal often with an inner chamber of ivory or copper in which such holy substances as the oil of chrism and holy water were reserved. Cf. Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 45. See photos of these in *Age of Chivalry: Art in Plantagenet England, 1200-1400*, ed. J. Alexander and P. Binski (London, 1987), nos. 118, 119; and in F. Collins, *The Production of Medieval Church Music-Drama* (Chalottesville, Va.: 1972), 50, no. 7; 51, no. 8.

<sup>36</sup>Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful, 37, in Armstrong, 66.

<sup>37</sup>Ascetics ultimately claimed to follow St. Paul in dividing soul and flesh, such as in Rm 6.19, 8.3, 13.14, 1 Cor 15.50, Gal 5.17, and Eph 2.3.

<sup>38</sup>1 Cel 201.

preferred to venerate the fingers of a priest rather than greet a great but non-priestly saint such as St. Lawrence.<sup>39</sup> Francis distinguished between the corruption that priests might sink to, and the holiness they nevertheless bore due to their proximity to the eucharistic action.<sup>40</sup> Francis encouraged his brothers to help priests by, on the one hand, venerating them as cultic objects (as a means, perhaps, of calling the priests back to their sacramental commitment), while, on the other hand, striving to play down before the laity their lapses and human defects.<sup>41</sup>

The divine incoming of Jesus into the bread and wine required not only the fingers of the priest to raise the paten and cup, but the repetition of the words said by Jesus at the last supper. Every aspect of the ritual was to be venerated, and the words of Scripture, insofar as they were needed to manifest Christ's body and blood in the mass, had to be cared for with equal diligence:

I admonish all my brothers and encourage [them] in Christ that, wherever they come upon the written words of God, they venerate them so far as they are able. And if they are not well kept or if they lie about carelessly in some place, let them, inasmuch as it concerns them, collect them and preserve them, thus honouring the Lord in the words which He spoke. For many things are made holy by the words of God and in the power of the words of Christ the Sacrament of the altar is celebrated.<sup>42</sup>

Scripture was not, in Francis' mind, a document to be picked over and speculated upon by learned men, but a live oral tradition which spoke to everyone. Scripture was a dialogue, an invitation to participation, through which Christ spoke directly to Francis, and in which he would sometimes consult for major decisions, saying, "Let us go . . . and take the book of the Gospel, let us seek counsel with Christ."<sup>43</sup> By opening the Bible to whatever page that happened to fall open and reading aloud the first passage beneath his finger, Christ would

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<sup>39</sup>1 Cel 9; 2 Cel 201.

<sup>40</sup>Lemmens, *Testimonia minora*, 93-94.

<sup>41</sup>2 Cel 146.

<sup>42</sup>Letter to the Entire Order, 34-37 in Armstrong, 55. Cf. First Letter to the Custodians, 2-5; Letter to the Clergy, 3-5, 11, in Armstrong, 49, 52; 1 Cel 82. Francis admits the same in his Testament (12): "Whenever I find His most holy name or writings containing His words in an improper place, I make a point of picking them up, and I ask that they be picked up and put aside in a suitable place."

<sup>43</sup>1 Cel 92; 2 Cel 15.

reveal his will for Francis and his order (fig. 17).<sup>44</sup> Scripture was not simply a narrative to be read, but could be venerated page by page, as Francis demonstrated when he once tore a New Testament apart to share among a crowd of friars, giving each of them a page.<sup>45</sup> For Francis, truth resided not only in the words but in the actual letters of the alphabet, whether they appeared in Scripture or elsewhere:

Whenever he would find anything written, whether about God or man, along the way, or in a house, or on the floor, he would pick it up with the greatest reverence and put it in a sacred or decent place, so that the name of the Lord would not remain there or anything else pertaining to it. One day a brother asked him why he took such care in collecting even the writings of the pagans and other writings where the Lord's name was not found. He replied, "My son, it is because one finds there the letters which compose the glorious name of the Lord."<sup>46</sup>

"God created the world with twenty-two letters," says the Talmud, whose scholars since antiquity had developed a complex exegesis based on the letters.<sup>47</sup> William Durandus, in 1286, described the medieval ceremony of church consecration which required the bishop to mark out the Greek and Latin alphabets in sand and ashes in a cross shape across the entire cathedral floor.<sup>48</sup> The letters formed the symbolic foundation stones of the cathedral, which itself was considered built Scripture. Francis had a particularly strong devotion to one of these letters which in itself depicted a type of cross or crucifix, the *tau*.

The last letter of the archaic Greek and Hebrew alphabets, "the *tau* symbol, had, above all others, his preference," says Thomas of Celano. "He utilized it as a signature for his letters and he painted a drawing of it on the walls of all the cells."<sup>49</sup> Bonaventure notes that Francis

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<sup>44</sup>This type of divination, called *Sortes Biblicae* or *Sortes Sanctorum*, was an ancient Greco-Roman art which never ceased to be practiced in popular European Christian culture. Augustine practiced it, *Confessions* VIII, 12, 9. See Valerie Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton: University Press, 1991), 88ff, and 273.

<sup>45</sup>Bonaventure, 8: 334.

<sup>46</sup>1 Cel 82.

<sup>47</sup>Cited in Damien Vorreaux, *A Franciscan Symbol: The Tau* (Chicago: Franciscan Press, 1979), 21.

<sup>48</sup>William Durandus, *The Symbolism of Churches and Church Ornaments*, trans. of *Rationale divinatorum officialum*, by Neal and Webb (London: S.P.C.K., 1843), 111-36.

<sup>49</sup>3 Cel 3; 3 Cel 159.

"signed himself with it before beginning each of his actions."<sup>50</sup> Archaeologists have speculated that a red *tau* uncovered on the wall on the Gospel side of the S. Maddalena chapel at Fonte Columbo dates to the years during which Francis visited this chapel, and was probably painted by Francis himself (fig. 18).<sup>51</sup> In their communal hut at Rivo Torto, Francis marked the places for the friars to sleep on the wooden beams overhead, and just such a system, made of red crosses, also exists on the cave walls in the quarters of the early companions at Greccio (fig. 19).<sup>52</sup> At the same Greccio hermitage, in an early fresco depicting the site of Francis' nativity performance, Leo, the friar-priest who said the mass, is depicted wearing a large *tau* on his chasuble (fig. 20). On two letters written in the hand of Francis, one of which is the much venerated *chartula* or Blessing for Brother Leo, the signature of Francis is a large red *tau* (figs. 21, 22).<sup>53</sup>

The symbol of the *tau* has a lengthy and complex history. Both Greek and Semitic languages wrote the *tau* as a cross and in early Christian circles it became associated with the cross of Christ. The word *tau* appears once in the Vulgate, in Ezekiel 9.4 where a man with a writer's inkhorn in his belt and dressed in linen is bidden to mark out the penitent members of the Holy City so they may be saved from the Lord's fatal punishment (fig. 23). St. Jerome and other early Christian exegetes made a natural connection between the saving *signum* of the man in linen and two other signs which concern the Exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt. The first analogue evoked Aaron who was charged with marking the doorjambes of those to be spared by the angel of death with the blood of a slain lamb (fig. 24).<sup>54</sup> The second refers to the serpent of brass which Moses fixed to a pole in Numbers 21.8-9. By holding up the brass staff, the Israelites were spared from the fatal bites of God's fiery serpents (fig. 25). As prophylactic, curative or restorative signs, the author of the Gospel of John, as well as early Christian exegetes, were able to collapse the three narratives onto the symbolism of the crucifixion of Christ.<sup>55</sup> The mark of the man in linen, the graphic shape of Aaron's doorjamb signs and the configuration of Moses' pole were all considered to be in the form of the *tau*:

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<sup>50</sup>LM 2.9.

<sup>51</sup>A. Terzi, *Memorie francescane nella Valle Reatina* (Rome, 1955), 80, and 128ff, n. 59.

<sup>52</sup>3 Soc 55.

<sup>53</sup>The *chartula* is preserved in the Basilica of San Francesco, Assisi. As well, in the oldest copy of his Letter to the Clergy, a reasonable facsimile of another *tau* is drawn at the close of the text. See L. Oligier, "Textus antiquissimus epistolae S. Francisci 'de Reverentia Corporis Domini' in Missali Sublacensi," codex B 24 Vallicellanus, in *AFH* 6 (1913): 9, 3-12; illustration is between 12 and 13.

<sup>54</sup>Ex 12.23.

<sup>55</sup>John 3.14.

16. Francis asks to be led naked by his brothers, tied by a rope, through Assisi for the sin of eating some meat. (From the 14th c. Codice Latino Bonaventura at the Convent of the Laurentianum, Rome.)



17. Francis and Brother Bernard read whatever passage the bible falls open to in order to find the will of God for themselves. (From the 14th c. Codice Latino Bonaventura at the Convent of the Laurentianum, Rome.)

18. *Tau* attributed to Francis, painted in red on the inner sanctuary wall of the S. Maddalana Chapel, Fonte Columbo, Rieti. (Photo by author.)







19. The dormitory, as seen from the refectory/kitchen of the Greccio cave-hermitage, showing one of its red crosses marked on the right wall (at arrow) to designate a sleeping area. At the end are two private *cellae*. (Photo by author.)

20. The Nativity performance at Greccio with Saint Francis kneeling (centre) and Br. Leo (on the far right) saying mass with large green *tau* on his alb. (Fresco, 13th c., Nativity Sanctuary, Greccio. Photo by author.)





21. Blessing for Br. Leo showing a large red *tau* emerging from a head, with words arranged around it. (Autograph *chartula* of St. Francis of Assisi, Sacro Covento, Assisi.)

22. A fourteenth-century copy of the *signum tau cum capite* of the autograph *chartula* to Br. Leo. The *tau* appears to emerge from the mouth of Francis' head as it rests in a cave. (Assisi: Biblioteca comunale MS 344).





23. The man in linen (*homo similis Aaron*) marks the penitents on their foreheads. (Detail of the St. Bertin Cross. Saint-Omer. Hotel de Sandelin.)

24. Aaron marking the *tau* on a door lintel. (Plaque from a Mosan Cross. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.)



25. *The Brazen Serpent and Moses*. (Woodcut by Tobias Stimmer from *Neue künstliche Figurer biblischer Historien*. Basel, 1576.)



the same *crux* upon which Christ, the Lamb of God, was hung. "He who wants to follow me," Christ said, "must carry his cross."<sup>56</sup> Whether as a reference to the execution practices of the Romans, or a prophecy of his death, this call from Jesus would not have been lost on his fellow Jews, whose more pious members displayed a *tau* on their forehead as a sign of their commitment to the Torah (whose first letter is the *tau*, or *tav*, ט).

Francis would have first been exposed to the biblical significance of the *tau* through his association with the Hospital Brothers of St. Antony the Hermit. Founded in 1095, the Antonites were brothers who looked after the sick. They were principally associated with the care of lepers. In the early thirteenth century they had 369 foundations, including the hospital of St. Antony in Rome where Francis often stayed.<sup>57</sup> Francis' vow to leave the world, which was taken during his time among the lepers, may have been made in association with the Antonites. The habit of this order had a large *tau* sewn on its front, and each brother carried a walking stick with a *tau* attached to its top. The Antonite garb may have been the inspiration for the habit Francis designed for his followers in 1208, "that bore a likeness to the cross, that by means of it he might beat off all temptations of the devil."<sup>58</sup> Celano notes that Francis configured some rough material in the shape of a cross, but both the pictorial tradition and reliquary evidence assure us that this cross was a *tau*—even the neck hole follows the horizontal line when the sleeves are extended (figs. 26, 27).<sup>59</sup> The hood had a square cut such that when it was up the habit became a full crucifix to observers. Francis, however, typically prayed with hood down and arms outstretched to the side, i.e., in the *tau* position.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>Mk 8.34, Lk 9.23.

<sup>57</sup>Francis first lodged at the hospital of St. Antony in Rome in 1210. See Vorreaux, *Tau*, 14. The Brothers of St. Jacopo d'Altomaso were another hospitaler order, begun in 746, whose mission was to pilgrims and crusaders along the road between France and Rome, passing through Assisi. They were mendicant brothers with a grey or brown habit upon which the sign of a gimlet or hammer in the shape of a *tau* was displayed. See Fortini, *Nova Vita*, III, 70; Pazzelli, *St. Francis and the Third Order*, 35. Note, as well, a new group, the Italian Order of the Cross Bearers, was given constitutions under Pope Alexander II in 1196 and took care of the sick, but not specifically lepers, in two Assisi hospitals at the time of Francis.

<sup>58</sup>1 Cel 22.

<sup>59</sup>1 Cel 22. The *Legenda choralis Carnotensis* of the thirteenth century states that Francis wore a "tunic in the shape of a cross"; cited by Esser, 97.

<sup>60</sup>SL 95; 1 Cel 39. Peter Damian may have been one of the earliest in the West to promote this Eastern prayer position of extended arms, "so that while seeking to resemble the figure of the cross you may deservedly and with greater ease beg pardon of the Crucified." *Opuscula*, 15 in *PL* 145, 354 C. For the history of this custom see L. Gougaud, *Dévotions et pratiques ascétiques du moyen âge*. Collection "Pax," XX (Paris, 1909), 2-17. See also Octavian Schmucki, "Mentis Silentium:

Celano's understanding was that the Franciscan *tau*-shaped habit was designed to crucify the flesh and to depict the friars as crucified to the world.<sup>61</sup> The *tau* was associated with the penitential life of hermits. For example, the hermit Dadon is depicted in the twelfth-century tympanum of *Saint-Foy* in Conques leaning on his *tau*-shaped staff, and St. Antony the Hermit was typically illustrated carrying a *tau* (figs. 28, 29).<sup>62</sup> The *Liber de poenitentia* of an anonymous Benedictine of 1189, addressed to monks who supported the crusades, suggests that,

If you believe that you have gravely sinned, take upon yourself the sign of the *tau*, the sign of those who weep and lament their faults. The *tau* represents the figure of the Cross, a sign of the passion of Christ. Imitate therefore the passion of Christ and fulfill in your flesh whatever is lacking in the passion of Christ. If you do this, the judge will pass by without striking you; that is, he will pardon you.<sup>63</sup>

The *tau* is an exterior sign of an interior conversion.<sup>64</sup> The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 promised mercy upon those who bore the sign of the *tau* when on penitential journeys. For instance, crusaders, pilgrims and lepers were often marked with the *tau* in their departure ceremonies, and the *tau* was adopted as a sign by the Children's Crusade of 1212.<sup>65</sup>

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Contemplation in the Early Franciscan Order," *Greyfriars Review* 4, no. 2 (1990): 35-71.

<sup>61</sup>1 Cel 22, 39.

<sup>62</sup>A cross was typically sewn on the hood of cenobitic monks associated with Pachomius (d. 346), a follower of Antony. See Schmucki, "Passion of Christ," 61, n. 238.

<sup>63</sup>*Liber de Poenitentia et tentationibus religiosorum*, in *PL* 213, 865-904. The book is associated with the 1189 crusade of Fredrick Barbarossa. See also Rupert of Deutz, *De Trinitate et operibus ejus*, ch. 32, *PL* 167, 1458ff. Rupert explains Ezk 9.4 where he thinks the *tau*-writer is actually Christ who signs the foreheads of his penitential elect with the *tau* of his own blood. See also Hugo Rahner, "Antenna crucis: Das mystische Tau," in *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 75 (1953): 385-410, esp. 394.

Francis may have known the twelfth-century hymn which runs, "Marked with the sign of the *tau*, the sign of life, he thus proves that he wants to be the servant of the Crucified." J. Mone, *Latinische Hymnen des M.A.*, 1 (Fribourg, 1583), 313.

<sup>64</sup>Penance, as mentioned in the *Liber de poenitentia*, is, by definition, a *metanoia*: a conversion brought about by breaking with the world. See Francis' *First and Second Letters to the Faithful* in Armstrong, 62-73. These letters are actually addressed to the "Brothers and Sisters of Penance."

<sup>65</sup>G. Miccoli, "La Crociata dei fanciulli," in *Studi Medievali*, 3, no. 11 (1961): 407-33; In the case of the leper's ceremony, they were led to their hut where a cross and alms box were attached. Cf. Brody, *Disease of the Soul*, 74-75. Franciscan tradition in Corsica tells of the adoption of the *tau* seal from a journey Francis made to the island he called his *navette*, or little boat. In the medieval tradition of the *tau* is the figure of a ship's yard, harkening to the mast of the ark that Noah built for his difficult and salvific journey. *Actus B. S. Francisci*, 4 in *Omnibus*, 1309; Ernst-Marie de Beaulieu, "Le Voyage



26. Habit of St. Francis. Basilica di S. Francesco, Assisi. (Photo by author.)

27. Saint Francis designs his habit, detail of *S. Francesco ed episodi della sua vita* by Berlinghieri, early 13th c. (Cappella Bardi, Basilica di S. Croce, Firenze.)



28. St. Anthony Abbot with the *tau* on his robe and *tau* staff. (Woodcut from the *Feldtbuch der Wundartzney*, Strassburg, 1517.)



29. St. Anthony Abbot with the *tau* on his robe and St. Francis of Assisi. (Plaque from diptych. London: British Museum. From O.M. Dalton. *Cat. Ivory* (1909), fig. p. 135.)

Francis' brothers associated their founder with the holy sign. For instance, Br. Pacificus, the poet, had a vision of a large *tau* appearing on Francis' forehead in the dazzling colours of a peacock.<sup>66</sup> That Francis actually wore a *tau* on his forehead cannot be ruled out. It was a recorded practice among some of the early Christians and the S. Damiano cross which spoke to him depicts a Christ with a brow configuration in the form of an unmistakable *tau* (fig. 11).<sup>67</sup> What is certain, however, is that the *tau*/crucifix was emblematic of Francis' poetic mind-set.<sup>68</sup> In its metaphoric economy, the *tau* may be considered one of his principal mnemonic symbols or *rei*. As Thomas of Celano asks:

But what is there to wonder at if Francis appeared crucified, since all his concern was with the cross? With the cross thus wonderfully rooted in him interiorly, why should it be such a surprising thing if, coming from good ground, it should bring forth such conspicuous flowers, leaves and fruits?<sup>69</sup>

The cross as the *tau* was for Francis an *axis mundi*, a vertical pole through which heaven and earth, the invisible and the visible were mediated. Even though the blessed sacrament was not reserved in every church at this time, over every altar a crucifix was suspended.<sup>70</sup> Through the crucifix-eucharist axis radiated a meaning that extended to the liturgy, its furnishings, the fingers of the priests, the words of Scripture and the entire church edifice that enclosed it all.

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de saint François en Espagne, *EF* 15 (1906): 384-99. The poet Ausone (d. 395) declared, "As the mast bears its lateen yard, so do I, the *Tau*!" An entire nautical exegesis of the *tau* eventually developed such as in Paulinus of Nola, *Carmen*, XIX, 612-16, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, 30, 139; see also Vorreaux, *Tau*, 24.

<sup>66</sup>2 Cel 106; LM 4.

<sup>67</sup>Note that like the Hebrews before them, red forehead *taus* were known among early Christians, and were noted by Augustine in his day. K-H. Schelkle, *Disciple et apôtre* (Le Puy-Lyon: Mappus ed., 1964), 21; Vorreaux, *Tau*, 22.

<sup>68</sup>1 Cel 94.

<sup>69</sup>2 Cel 109. These words appear in a context which refers to a dream Br. Sylvester had of an immense golden cross which reached to the sky and whose foot was planted in the mouth of Francis. See my discussion of this vision in chapter 6 (a), and note 51.

<sup>70</sup>See J. Braum, *Das christliche*, 469ff; cited in Octavianus Schmucki, "The Passion of Christ," 59.



b. *Labouring at San Damiano*

Francis' directive to build came from a vision before the crucifix in the church of S. Damiano. In the Middle Ages it was expected that religious building projects would be initiated by a vision.<sup>71</sup> St. Bernard of Clairvaux's *Life of St. Malachy* records the vision of Malachy which initiated a Cistercian-style stone oratory for his Irish homeland:

Returning from a journey one day as he approached the place he looked at it from some distance away. And behold! A great oratory appeared built of stone and extremely beautiful. He considered it carefully, its position, its shape and its arrangement . . . [and, in the end,] the completed oratory was so like the one he had seen that anyone would believe that he, with Moses, had heard it said: "See that you make all things according to the pattern which was shown to you in the mount."<sup>72</sup>

Similarly, the temple of Jerusalem which was measured out by God for the prophet Ezekiel is referred to in the famous vision of Gunzo in 1120 for the reconstruction of the monastery at Cluny.<sup>73</sup> Saints Peter, Paul and Stephen appeared to Gunzo after he, like Ezekiel, was struck down with paralysis. St. Peter "was seen by Gunzo to draw out measuring-ropes [*funiculos*] and measure off the length and breadth [of the church]. He also showed him in what manner the church was to be built, instructing him to commit both its dimensions and design securely to memory" (fig. 30).<sup>74</sup> Ezekiel recovered after committing his vision to memory, and Gunzo's miraculous healing was proof enough that Hugh, abbot of Cluny, reconstructed his monastery according to Gunzo's divinely bestowed measurements.

Francis' vision, according to Celano, became "imprinted upon his heart," that is, the seat of his memory.<sup>75</sup> No dimensions were given in this message probably since his work was to

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<sup>71</sup>Mary Carruthers, "The Poet As Master Builder: Composition and Locational Memory in the Middle Ages," *New Literary History* 24 (Autumn 1993): 881-904.

<sup>72</sup>Bernard of Clairvaux, *The Life and Death of St. Malachy the Irishman*, trans. Robert Meyer (Kalamazoo, Mich., 1978): 80, para. 63. The biblical passage is Heb 8.5 citing Ex 25.40.

<sup>73</sup>Ezk 40-48.

<sup>74</sup>*Bibliotheca Cluniacensis*, ed. Martin Marrier and Andre Duchesne (Paris, 1614; reprint, Brussels, 1915), cols. 457 ff; translated in Wolfgang Braunfels, *Monasteries of Western Europe* (London, 1972), 240-41.

<sup>75</sup>2 Cel 10; cf. 3 Soc 13.

be a *reparatio*, a repair or renovation, initiated within a given building fabric.<sup>76</sup> Francis interpreted the direction literally; he was to envision, *cernere*, the destruction and begin to repair the actual church he was in.<sup>77</sup> Both San Damiano, and the chapel of San Feliciano just up the road, were dedicated to healer-saints whose cures dated back to the third century.<sup>78</sup> Both of these saints were depicted at the base of the crucifix which spoke to Francis in S. Damiano, so it seems probable that Francis understood the call to *repara* as a call to heal and cure locally, in this case in stone, as his two saintly Assisian forefathers had.

Architectural and archaeological investigation of the site has verified that a significant repair of the church took place at this time.<sup>79</sup> In the earliest version of his biography, Celano reports that Francis

. . . did not try to build one anew, but he repaired an old one, restored an ancient one. He did not tear out the foundation, but he built upon it. . . . When he had returned to the place where, as has been said, the church of S. Damiano had been built in ancient times, he repaired it zealously within a short time.<sup>80</sup>

The church seems to have been built upon a foundation of Subasio and travertine stone dating to the seventh or eighth century.<sup>81</sup> The first written document to mention the church, dating from 1030, involved the liberation of a serf. A later document testifies that a consortium of

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<sup>76</sup>"'Francisce', inquit, 'vade, repara domum meam, quae, ut cernis, tota destruitur.'" 2 Cel 10; 3 Soc 13; LM 2.1. We can assume that the words of the message Francis received stem from the original event since all his later biographers preserve their order.

<sup>77</sup>2 Cel 11; LM 2.1. Many of his early biographers judged that the building activity of Francis was a misreading of a message that referred to the universal church rather than S. Damiano. Even though both Francis and Pope Innocent III believed that individual clerics were being corrupted in their day, nowhere is there an indication from them or others of the time that the Roman Catholic church was in peril let alone "completely in ruin," so a misreading seems unlikely. Robert Brentano makes a compelling case for why the church of Innocent III (1198-1216) was one of the strongest and best organized of the Middle Ages. See Brentano, "The Early Franciscans and Italian Towns," 29-49. Note that 3 Soc 13, from which Celano's story probably derives, has no such interpretation attached.

<sup>78</sup>According to the *Vita Sancti Feliciani*, Feliciano himself, the first evangelizer of Umbria, planted a cross on the site of this church and implored his listeners to fall on their knees, speak with the cross and fall in love with it. "Vita S. Feliciani martyris episcopi fulginatis," *Analecta Bollandiana* 9 (1890): 379-92.

<sup>79</sup>L. Bracaloni, *Storia di S. Damiano in Assisi*, 2nd ed. (Todi, 1926), 36; Marino Bigaroni, "San Damiano Assisi: The First Church of Saint Francis," *FSt* 47, no. 25 (1987): 45-96, esp. 82.

<sup>80</sup>1 Cel 18.

<sup>81</sup>Bigaroni, "San Damiano," 54, 56.

noble families who owned the church gave it to the canons of San Rufino in 1103.<sup>82</sup> By the end of the twelfth century the bishop and the local Benedictine abbots became the main feudal landholders of the commune of Assisi. Donations of land, with or without serfs, to the church hierarchy were often made for the expiation of serious sins or for protection against the forceful appropriation of the land by a rival feudal lord. Often these donations specified the building of a church and the financial support for a number of monks to pray for the donor's salvation.<sup>83</sup> S. Damiano may owe its erection and neglect to this type of donation to a local monastery, whose promised penitential substitution ran its course.

Celano reports that S. Damiano, had "nearly fallen to ruin and was abandoned by everyone."<sup>84</sup> However, at the time of Francis' vision, the church still had a resident priest and an altar, as well as a crucifix before which one could pray, therefore there must have been some sort of secure enclosure and a roof. S. Damiano's ruinous state was probably not unlike its depiction by Giotto (or the school of Giotto) showing a church with a timber roof badly in need of repair (fig. 1). Giotto was an architect and a careful researcher of his subjects and their architectural backgrounds, so the late thirteenth-century painting may have some accuracy.<sup>85</sup>

The precise extent of Francis' intervention on the site has been a source of ongoing debate among twentieth-century historians.<sup>86</sup> An archaeological investigation of the site began in

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<sup>82</sup>Fortini, 115, 215. The site of the church was just outside the Assisi gate closest to Francis' home, only 400 meters from the Stadette farm owned by Francis' family.

<sup>83</sup>In 1088, for instance, Abbot Bernard of the Abbey of Farfa in Latium came to Assisi to accept from Ubertino son of Guittone a lot on the western spur of nearby Mount Subasio. The document openly states that Ubertino had killed his godfather, the latter's son "and several others," for which crime he received from the Bishop of Gubbio a penance of 300 years. The abbot then took over this penance on behalf of his congregation and promised that his priests would pray, chant, fast, offer sacrifices, and distribute alms for the soul of the donor in a new church and property donated by Ubertino. Fortini, *Nova Vita*, III, 243, 262, 548; Brown, *Roots of St. Francis*, 149-51.

<sup>84</sup>2 Cel 10, 18; 3 Soc 13.

<sup>85</sup>Giotto was appointed by the Florentine government in 1334 the *capomaestro*, chief master, of the building of the cathedral and chief of the public works. David Wilkins, "The Meaning of Space in Fourteenth-Century Tuscan Painting," in David Jeffrey, ed. *By Things Seen: Reference and Recognition in Medieval Thought* (Ottawa: University Press, 1979), 109-21; Samuel Edgerton, *The Heritage of Giotto's Geometry: Art and Science in the Eve of the Scientific Revolution* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1991), ch. 1.

<sup>86</sup>J. Bettella and P. Colussi, "Il Santuario di S. Damiano in Assisi," in *Architettura XIII* (1968), 685-689. Angiola Maria Romanini, "Il francescanesimo nell'arte: l'architettura delle origini," in eds. M. Baldelli and Angiola Maria Romanini, *Francesco, il francescanesimo e la cultura della nuova Europa* (Firenze: Paoletti, 1986), 181-95; Bigaroni, "San Damiano," 77-84; and Caroline A. Bruzelius, "Hearing is Believing: Clarissan Architecture, ca. 1213-1340," *Gesta* 31, no. 2 (1992): 83-91. For this section I am indebted to Fr. Conrad Harkins, OFM, of the Franciscan Institute, St.

1996, but, since an earthquake occurred in the area in 1997, it is unlikely that the results will be published in the near future.<sup>87</sup> At this point it seems certain from both the site and the written sources that Francis worked on S. Damiano on two major campaigns: the first in 1206-07, and the second in 1211-12.<sup>88</sup> The second campaign was prompted by the need to provide a secure convent for Clare of Assisi and her followers just after she took her vows before Francis and his young order of two dozen or so brothers. This early group of friars, under the leadership of Francis, constructed a new dormitory for Clare's order directly above the chapel. The walls of the bare, rectangular-planned dormitory are stone, although the roof itself has timber trussing (figs. 31, 32). The extent of the renovation of the chapel below is still under dispute.<sup>89</sup> Concerning the earlier of the two campaigns, however, scholarship and dating are more consistent.

Celano reports that the first campaign was short, under a year, and probably done alone.<sup>90</sup> The archaeological evidence points to the construction at this time of a new stone vault upon the existing stone walls that formerly held up a timber roof.<sup>91</sup> The vault could not be simpler. Built of rough, unhewn stone in an quasi-elliptical barrel form, it is possible that the entire ceiling was built off the end walls without scaffolding (figs. 31-34).<sup>92</sup> Its construction required the minimum of expertise or skill but the maximum in strength to haul the stones to the site and lift them to the roof. Its pointed-arch form would have put less stress on the bearing walls than a barrel arch.<sup>93</sup> The bearing walls would then require little if any strengthening—hence the frequency of this type of construction for small rural chapels

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Bonaventure, NY, for his expertise and guidance through this complex building and its literature.

<sup>87</sup>The earthquakes, throughout the region of Umbria, occurred between September 27 and October 14, 1997. For the most recent reports on damages and repairs, including photos, for the hundreds of historical sites which were affected consult <<http://www.assind.perugia.it/terremoto/welcing2.htm>>.

<sup>88</sup>Bigaroni, "San Damiano," 77; Bruzelius, "Hearing is Believing," 84; and Romanini, "Il francescanesimo nell'arte," 191-92.

<sup>89</sup>This second renovation was conceived and constructed with a program very different in its goals and patronage from Francis' architectural vision for his own Friars Minor. The most recent investigation and interpretation of this construction, however inexact, is Bigaroni, "San Damiano Assisi."

<sup>90</sup>1 Cel 18.

<sup>91</sup>Evidence for this includes three narrow slots for timber which were blocked up at this time; see Bigaroni, "San Damiano," 59, 79; Bracaloni, *Storia*, 39; Romanini, "Il francescanesimo nell'arte," 192.

<sup>92</sup>This type of traditional peasant construction is illustrated in Hassan Fathy, *Architecture for the Poor* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1969), figs. 7-18.

<sup>93</sup>Bigaroni, "San Damiano," 59, 60.

throughout central Italy.<sup>94</sup>

During the first campaign, the only material with which Francis built was stone:

He started back to the city where he began to praise God loudly in the streets and public places; and when he had finished his song of praise, he set to begging stones with which to restore the church. He called to passers-by: "Whoever gives me one stone will have one reward; two stones, two rewards; three stones, a treble reward." . . . It would be difficult to specify all the hard work that had been done to restore the church. At home he had been coddled, whereas now he carried a load of stones on his own shoulders and endured many hardships for love of God.<sup>95</sup>

Not only does this coincide with the archeological data—revealing a very crude Subasio stone construction above the ancient and carefully formed Subasio and travertine walls—but it also falls within a tradition of church rebuilding begun circa 1000 throughout the countryside of central Italy. Donors and monastery missions strove to replace whatever was wood in the churches with the more durable material of stone.<sup>96</sup>

One can imagine Francis begging for stones in exchange for heavenly rewards by means of a troubadour performance. The attention of townsfolk in the market square would be caught by the humorous reversal of trading practices. Francis was sending out the clear message that barter and labour rather than cash donations were the preferred means of contributing to his project. It was an era of the rise of a market economy in central Italy, and preachers had begun to speak of usury and the mobility of monetary exchange as the equivalent to prostitution and troubadour poetry—all being considered sterile, infertile and a threat to social interchange, family lineage and a common language.<sup>97</sup> In Francis' Earlier Rule of 1221, which replaced the 1209 Primitive Rule, his personal practice of avoiding money

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<sup>94</sup>The present apse seems to have been added at a later date, along with the large rose window on the facade. See Bigaroni, "San Damiano," 81-84.

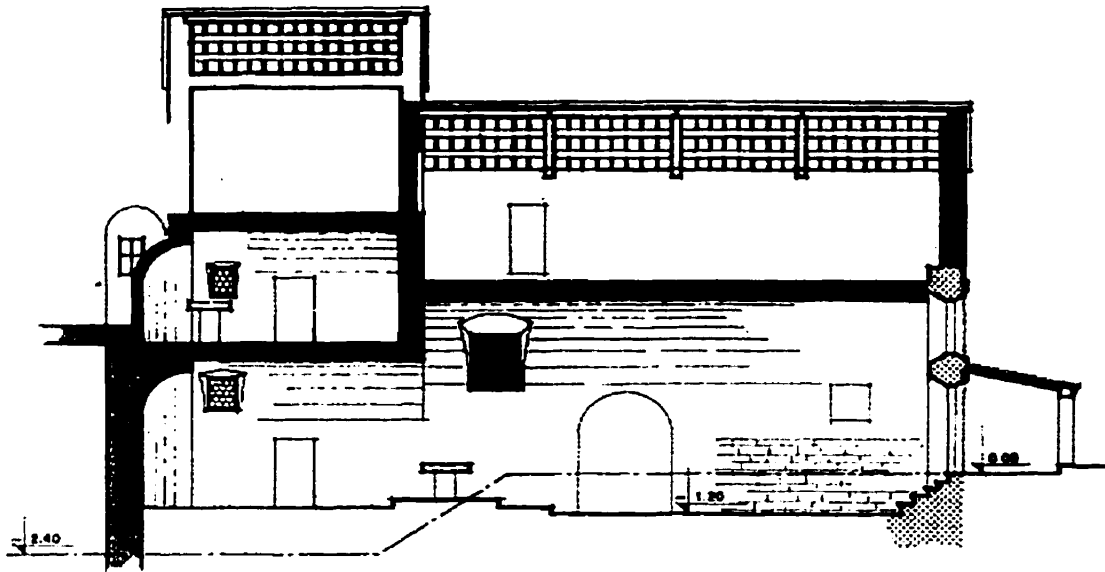
<sup>95</sup>3 Soc 21.

<sup>96</sup>Giles Constabile, "Monasteries, Rural Churches and the *Cura Animarum* in the Early Middle Ages," in idem, *Monks, Hermits and Crusaders in Medieval Europe* (London: Varium Reprints, 1988): 350-89; Marvin Becker, *Medieval Italy: Constraints and Creativity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 102.

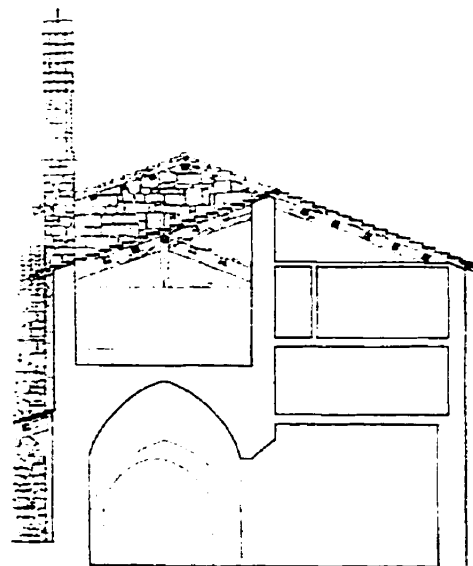
<sup>97</sup>Howard R. Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies* (Chicago: University Press, 1983), 174. On usury and poetry see B. Fitz, "The Prologue to the *Lais* of Marie de France and the *Parable of the Talents*: Gloss and Monetary Metaphor," *Modern Language Notes* 90 (1975): 588-596.



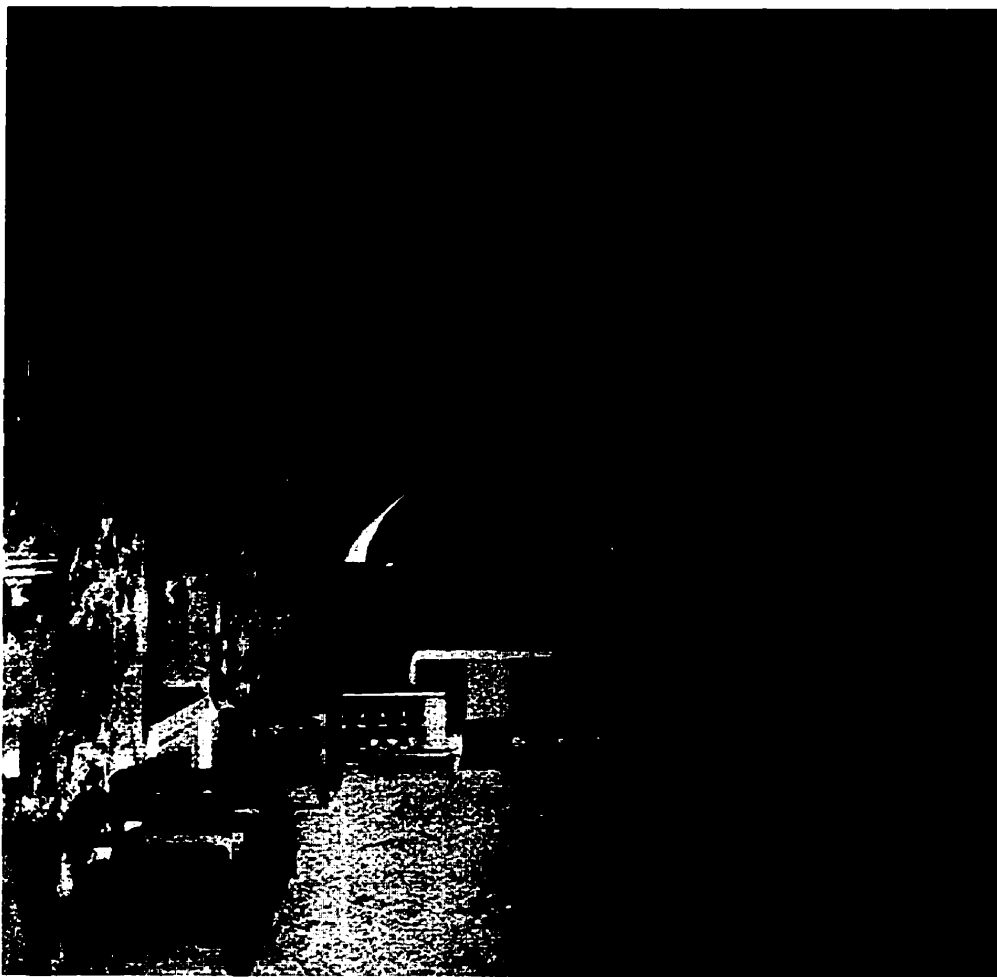
30. The dream of Gunzo where SS. Peter and Paul appeared and marked out the plan of Cluny III with ropes. (Miniature from a manuscript of c. 1180. From Braunfels. *Monasteries of Western Europe*. 59.)



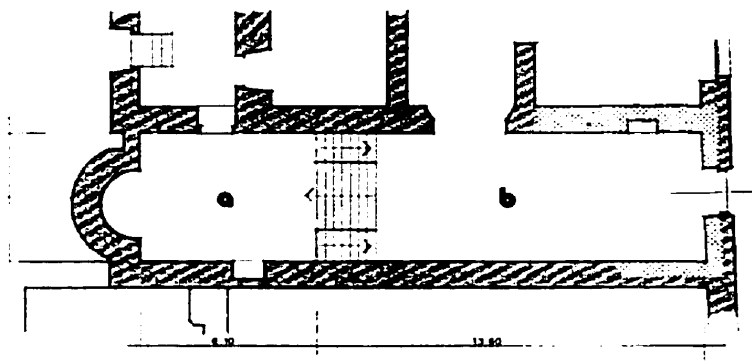
31. The present church of S. Damiano, section. Above, to the right, is the dormitory of St. Clare with timber roof. (From Bigaroni. "San Damiano Assisi," fig. 2. Drawing by M. Brozzetti.)



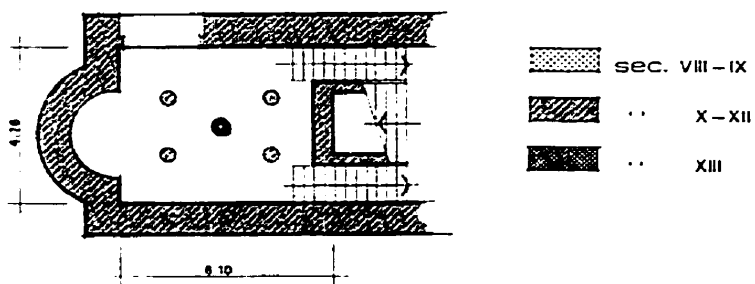
32. The present church of S. Damiano, section. The original chapel is below, left, with pointed arches; the dormitory of St. Clare, with timber roof, is above, left. (From Bigaroni. "San Damiano Assisi," fig. 3. Drawing by M. Brozzetti.)



33. S. Damiano, interior view towards sanctuary. (Photo by author.)



34. S. Damiano plan before the intervention of Francis, according to Bigaroni. Above, centre stairs from nave (b) lead up to the sanctuary (a) and side stairs down to a crypt below. Below: the crypt plan. (After Bigaroni, "San Damiano, Assisi," fig. 4.)



became legislation strictly forbidding his brothers to touch it: "And if we should find coins anywhere, let us pay no more attention to them than the dust we tread under our feet."<sup>98</sup> Here the term used was *denarius*, a money token, but everywhere else in the Rule he linked it to *pecunia*, that is, all media of exchange. This implies total withdrawal from buying and selling, which forced his itinerant followers to save nothing for the morrow in imitation of Christ.<sup>99</sup> Such repugnance for money was enthusiastically endorsed by Italian hermits and ascetics. For instance, Peter Damian tells us that he chose to become a hermit because he witnessed two hermits refusing the gift of a silver vase. When the companion of hermit Bernard of Tiron was given some coins, Bernard demanded that, "either you cease to be my companion, or you cease carrying those coins."<sup>100</sup> No group, however, surpassed the organized, widespread and radical practice of these restrictions that was upheld by the early Franciscan order; even the Cathar *perfecti*, whose voluntary destitution distinguished them across Europe, were permitted to receive financial support from second-class Cathar associates.<sup>101</sup>

Francis would not have been a stranger to the relationship of monumental architecture to unjustly held wealth; it is generally supposed that he participated in the destruction of the castle of La Rocca and perhaps other castles of the Assisians' German feudal occupiers in the 1198-1200 uprisings.<sup>102</sup> He probably also participated in the communal construction of the new town walls to mark the victory of the democratic merchant-led commune.<sup>103</sup>

The simplicity of stone was a symbol to Francis and his community of taking an ethical stand. The use of rough, unhewn rocks to form the most straightforward of vaults, would be in observance of the warning given to Moses by God in Ex 20.25 that craftsmen and their use of tools profane altar stones. Peter Damian was one of the earliest voices in medieval times to criticize "the unnecessary sounding of bells, the protracted chanting of hymns and the conspicuous use of ornament," in churches.<sup>104</sup> Damian told of a certain abbot who was seen in a well known vision story burning in hell and sentenced to setting up scaffolding for

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<sup>98</sup>ER 8. Francis also referred to coins as "flies," SL 59.

<sup>99</sup>Mt 6.34.

<sup>100</sup>*Vita Bernardi*, PL 172, 1384; cited in Leyser, *Hermits*, 55.

<sup>101</sup>Lambert, 41.

<sup>102</sup>1174-1210 is the period of the definitive collapse of the feudal structure in the city of Assisi.

<sup>103</sup>Fortini insists that Francis was a part of these events due to his age and class and the expectations of the merchant leaders in the uprisings; Fortini, 129.

<sup>104</sup>A. Cantin, *Les sciences séculières et la foi* (Spoleto, 1975), 315-38; Becker, *Medieval Italy*, 107.



eternity because of his immoderate architectural projects.<sup>105</sup> It is probably due to Francis' association with the hermit tradition that S. Damiano, compared to other rural Romanesque churches, shows a conspicuous absence of any ornamentation whatsoever.

Francis never considered himself to be a skilled builder, let alone an architect. He uses the word *laboritium* in his Testament. Like *lavoreccio* of the Assisi dialect, it means a day-labourer without the promise of work into the next day.<sup>106</sup> Becoming a labourer was a tremendous act of humility after the life of wealth and political power he had as a young Assisi merchant. Building labourers in particular are often depicted in medieval illustrations as taking the brunt of humour, with frayed or poor clothing, trousers often drooping to display their aft side while carrying a hod, or as the victim of some humorous accident or another (fig. 35).<sup>107</sup> Being a day labourer removed all pretention to class, wealth or skill. *Aedificatio*, literally, was to be the work of all Christians, paid for by God Himself. In his Testament, Francis records:

I used to work with my hands, and I still desire to work. . . . Let those who do not know how [to work] learn not from desire of receiving wages for their work, but as an example and in order to avoid idleness. And when we are not paid for our work, let us have recourse to the table of the Lord, seeking alms from door to door.<sup>108</sup>

Manual labour for hermits such as Francis was not only a matter of avoiding idleness, but also a chief means of support besides alms. The hermit Ailbert of Rolduc, quoting 2 Thess 3.8-10, claimed his father in manual labour was the tentmaker St. Paul who undertook his trade to avoid being an expense on his hosts, "not that we were obliged to do this, but as a model for [their] own behaviour."<sup>109</sup> St. Augustine and St. Benedict promoted manual labour: it became, for instance, one of the chief matters of debate between the monks at Cluny and the reform Cistercians. Where the monastic tradition of the twelfth and thirteenth century seems

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<sup>105</sup>A. Cantin, *Les sciences séculières et la foi* (Spoleto, 1975), 315-38; Becker, *Medieval Italy*, 107.

<sup>106</sup>Manselli, *Saint Francis*, 199.

<sup>107</sup>Andrea Louise Matthies, *Perceptions of Technological Change: Medieval Artists View Building Construction* (Ph.D. Dissertation, State University of New York at Binghamton, 1984), 76-77.

<sup>108</sup>Test 20-22.

<sup>109</sup>*Annales Rodenses*, 692; as cited in Lesyer, *Hermits*, 56-57.

to have had little time or use for manual labour, hermits of the same period had little time for contemplation and liturgy. At Obazine, for example, the hermits worked night and day: during the day on buildings, collecting stones and wood, and at night making by candlelight whatever the community might need. Even though hired workers sometimes joined them, hermits preferred to learn the various trades themselves.<sup>110</sup> Francis would himself encourage among his followers the learning of crafts, such as basket-weaving, as an alternative to alms-begging.<sup>111</sup>

Manual labour in hermit circles was primarily undertaken as a public and ongoing penitential sacrifice.<sup>112</sup> Francis was worn down by constant labour to such a degree that the priest at S. Damiano offered him special food for his health. Francis rejected preferential treatment and began to beg door to door for scraps to eat. Even though the scraps "filled him with horror," he was provided with a further opportunity to "conquer himself."<sup>113</sup> The repair of the church was linked directly to the rejection of bodily desires.

According to Elaine Scarry the only conceivable intentional object for accepting the pain of penance or sacrifice, which are otherwise objectless, is the imagination.<sup>114</sup> As memory

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<sup>110</sup>Leyser, *Hermits*, 58.

<sup>111</sup>1 Cel 39, 2 Cel 97, 161; MP 75. The menial work which Francis promoted was insecure day-labour such as grave-digging and water-carrying; cf. ER 7; and Lambert, 41. Francis' own attempt at fashioning a clay vase, however, ended with him destroying it since "these worthless imaginings," distracted him from meditation. 2 Cel 97. The admission reveals that Francis indeed saw his creative works as a manifestation of his imagination which was connected to his meditation. If he discarded a clay pot, but continued to build, preach and write for the bulk of his life, these occupations were probably considered the type of imaginings which were worthwhile and a support for meditation.

<sup>112</sup>The hermit life became a magnet for laity such as Francis who took up penance as a lifelong disposition. These were called lay-hermits or *conversi*, whose numbers have been reckoned to exceed hermit priests two to one. Indeed, many hermitages were founded exclusively by laity. For instance, Romualdo, founder of the hermit Camaldoli order (although later ordained) was originally a lay-hermit. Six noblemen founded the Affligem hermitage, and three laymen were reported to have founded Flône. Leyser, *Hermits*, 47. When priests joined the lay-hermit groups they often had laymen as their superiors, as was the case in the early Friars Minor. Leyser, *Hermits*, 47. Both Francis and his successor as Minister General, Brother Elias, were both laymen with authority over priests.

<sup>113</sup>2 Cel 14.

<sup>114</sup>Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 164. Concerning the body, suffering, perception and, by extension, architecture as embodiment, see also Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962); idem, *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History, and Politics*. ed. James M. Edie (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1964); Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964); and David Michael Levin, *The Body's Recollection of Being: Phenomenological Psychology and the Deconstruction of Nihilism* (London, Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985).

requires the discipline of contemplation, solitude and other practices, so does discipline itself require the imagination for its inspiration and object. The apparent absurdity of freely chosen suffering may be rationalized by how it focuses the attention of the imagination on conceiving an ideal such as a just world without oppression. As that ideal becomes more nuanced, the imagination requires the order that memory-work provides. Objectless discipline or penance needs memory as much as memory needs it: the two must be understood as a pair.

By choosing work as a more moderate form of suffering, the immobility that often accompanies acute pain is lessened and the labourer benefits from seeing the imagined utopia come about as the object of his or her labour.<sup>115</sup> This is the movement, as at the nativity at Greccio, from memory as imagination to memory as manifestation. In a similar way, *laboritium* in the monastic Christian tradition was considered the primary means of recreating the primitive simplicity and equality of the Garden of Eden.<sup>116</sup> The chief promoters of this ideal in the twelfth century were Francis' teachers, the regular canons. For instance, an unnamed canon of Liège praised the humility and magnanimity of the life of his brothers who chose the more solitary path, although he was nevertheless alarmed that "priests and even an abbot in this order of canons are milking their own ewes and cleaning stables. . . . I can hardly believe it!"<sup>117</sup> His surprise was not uncommon, because to value labour was ultimately to reject the fast-evolving market economy, its preference for trade and monetary transactions over production and barter, and the distinctions of class through wealth.<sup>118</sup> Freely chosen labour was a source of community, creativity and hope for the otherwise marginalized and, when embraced by someone from the upper classes such as Francis, it was a direct challenge to inequities in church, state and commercial institutions.

Until the mid-twelfth century, penance was understood as beginning in this life and

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<sup>115</sup>Scarry, *The Body*, 171; Paul Ricoeur, "L'idéologie et l'utopie: deux expressions de l'imaginaire social," in *Du texte à l'action* (Paris, 1986), 379-92.

<sup>116</sup>See George William, *Wilderness and Paradise in Christian Thought* (New York, 1962). On the history of the terms labour and work, see Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1958), 79-174.

<sup>117</sup>*Libellus de Diversis Ordinibus et Professionibus qui sunt in Ecclesia*, eds. Giles Constable and B. Smith, (Oxford, 1972), 66-72; Leyser, *Hermits*, 59.

<sup>118</sup>Any officially sanctioned penitent, for instance, was prohibited automatically from offices which medievals believed could not be held without sin such as magistrate, judge, lawyer, merchant and soldier. Jean Morin, *Commentarius Historicus de disciplina in administratione Sacramenti Poenitentiae tredecim primis saeculis in Ecclesia* (Antwerp: ed. Metelen, 1682), 315-16; cited in Pazzelli, *St. Francis and the Third Order*, 160, nn. 5-7.

continuing into purgatory.<sup>119</sup> The penitent undertook a spiritual death. Henceforth he or she, quite literally, became a pilgrim, who, according to medieval practice, left everything behind with no hope of finding anything upon return. Francis, according to Raffaele Pazzelli understand penance as a journey, "a dynamic road of ascent" through the action of love.<sup>120</sup> It was a pilgrimage, however, that had no end in this life; the journey was continually beginning again. Francis would often say, "Let us begin, brothers, to serve the Lord God, because so far we have made little or no progress in anything."<sup>121</sup>

If purgatory was a time of continuous penance which began in this life and continued into the next, then the hard labour, the use of rough stone and the absence of ornament at S. Damiano may be understood as the elements of what we may call a "purgatorial" architecture.<sup>122</sup> More than a century before Dante constructed his Purgatorio in the poetic afterlife, Francis manifested grief for his sins stone by stone in this life. To Francis, penance had to become habitual, "so that the body may not have an aversion to prayer and vigils."<sup>123</sup> Thus, as a purgatorial architecture, S. Damiano served Francis as a house for contemplation and memory work that he may keep his sins ever present to his mind: at S. Damiano, repentance inheres in the stones. But if this freely chosen suffering permitted Francis to both imagine and build a better world, a vehicle for salvation, what would its architecture look like? Francis believed that the Portiuncula chapel was its prototype.

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<sup>119</sup>Test 24; Armstrong, 141, n. 15.

<sup>120</sup>Pazzelli, *St. Francis and the Third Order*, 120. Perhaps one indication of this dynamic approach to penance was Francis' continual recitation of the admission of the publican in Lk 18.13b: "O God, be merciful to me, a sinner," as a vigorous ejaculatory prayer. See Schmucki, "Place of Solitude," 82.

<sup>121</sup>1 Cel 103. See also Esser, 207.

<sup>122</sup>Purgatory was first proposed by St. Augustine, however, the birth of the first definitive concept of purgatory in the West, according to Jacques Le Goff, occurred between 1170 and 1220. During this period, purgatory was considered "a time of continuous penance," which begun in this life and continued through to the next. Only much later in the thirteenth century was it clearly separated out from terrestrial space and time as a place of "punishment". Le Goff, *Medieval Imagination*, 67-77, 86-94; Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984), ch. 8.

<sup>123</sup>2 Cel 129. Schmucki, "Mentis Silentium," 60. On the benefits of fasting according to the desert fathers and mothers see Margaret R. Miles, *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 42; Brown, *Body and Society*, 78, 217-36, 419.



## Building as Metaphor: The Portiuncula

### *a. A Tabernacle in the Wilderness*

Within a short time Francis completed the first phase of S. Damiano and, in about 1206, moved on to repair another "certain dilapidated and almost destroyed church."<sup>1</sup> According to local tradition, this was the church of San Pietro della Spina, whose site still remains to be determined.<sup>2</sup> Documents within the Assisi archives, however, have led Arnaldo Fortini to propose its location at the Strice di Fontanelle, a land-holding about three kilometres from S. Damiano, midway to the Portiuncula—property once owned by Francis' family (fig. 36).<sup>3</sup> If this is so, the act of repairing a chapel owned by the family who had just disowned him for renouncing his inheritance would either indicate Francis' desire to heal the rift or to continue the confrontation by bringing public attention to his father's disregard for their family chapel. Either way, S. Pietro della Spina's dedication to the apostle Peter, whose simplicity, devotion and martyrdom hermits such as Francis sought to imitate, and its dedication to the *spina* relic (a thorn from Christ's crown of passion), may, at the very least, indicate Francis' continued concentration at this time on the narratives and symbols of sacrifice and purgation.

Francis turned to another ruined rural church later that same year:

Then he went to another place, which is called the Portiuncula, where there stood a church of the Blessed Virgin Mother of God that had been built in ancient times, but was now deserted and cared for by no one.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>1 Cel 18.

<sup>2</sup>Bonaventure was the first to record this chapel as the "church of St. Peter," LM 2.7.

<sup>3</sup>Fortini, 115.

<sup>4</sup>1 Cel 21.

The earliest documentary evidence for the existence of this site is a 1045 bill of sale for a piece of property named "Porticula" at the location of the present Portiuncula. Although no mention is made of a chapel, the transaction was between clerics and has generally been taken to refer to Sancta Maria de Angelis proper.<sup>5</sup> In Francis' time, the chapel was owned by the nearby Benedictine monastery of Monte Subasio. The building had probably been a mission post served by monks during the previous century.<sup>6</sup>

Francis' earliest companions recount how the chapel of Sancta Maria de Angelis was also called Sancta Maria de Portiuncula or simply the Portiuncula, in reference to the district in which it was found. The word "Portiuncula" is a diminutive of "portio," meaning "a portion of a whole," such as a piece of an estate, a serving of food, or an ecclesiastical revenue, stipend or tribute. This seems to be an appropriate name for a small piece of donated property.

Francis, it was said, took great pleasure in the fact that the church was called after Christ's mother, was very tiny, and had a nickname that he found significant.<sup>7</sup> The significance arose, in part, out of Psalm 141.6 "I cried to Thee, O Lord. I said, Thou art my portion, my hope in the land of the living." Not only would Francis choose this Psalm to be the last he said on earth as he lay dying twenty years later in front of the chapel, but he also chose this line to adorn his 1223 Later Rule (which revised the 1221 Earlier Rule) with what historians such as Regis Armstrong consider to be his most concise and influential statement on poverty:

The brothers shall not acquire anything of their own, neither a house nor a place nor anything at all. Instead, as pilgrims and strangers in this world who serve the Lord in poverty and humility, let them go begging for alms with full trust. Nor should they feel ashamed since the Lord made himself poor for us in this world. This is that summit of highest poverty which has established you, my most beloved brothers, as heirs and kings of the kingdom of heaven; it has made you poor in the things [of this world] but exalted

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<sup>5</sup>*Atto di vendita del 1045* (Assisi: Archivio di San Rufino), fasc. VII, n. 6. The document, with a translation in Italian, appears in Ugolino Nicolini, "La Porziuncula: una 'particella di mondo' per san Francesco," in Francesco Federico Mancini and Aurora Scotti, eds. *La Basilica di Santa Maria degli Angeli* (Perugia: Electa, 1989), 49-50.

<sup>6</sup> Cel 44; SL 8-10. Luciano Canonici and Giamaria Polidoro, *Basilica Patriarcale di S. Maria degli Angeli* (Assisi: Editione Porziuncula, 1970), xxix-xxx.

<sup>7</sup>SL 8.



35. Building the Tower of Babel. Note that the labourer carrying the hod up the ladder has his leggings slipping down. (London BL Egerton MS. 856. From Matthies, *Perceptions of Technological Change*, fig. 95.)



36. The city of Assisi at the time of Saint Francis. On the far right, outside the city walls is the church of S. Damiano. The Portiuncula is just off the image at the end of Via di Portiuncula, bottom left. The church of S. Pietro della Spina is depicted just below the city walls in the centre. To the immediate left of the city walls is the Colle d'Inferno where the Basilica of S. Francesco now stands. (Illustration by Pompeo Bini, 1727. From Silvestro Nessi, *La Basilica*, fig. 1.)



you in virtue. Let this be your *portion*, which leads into "the land of the living."<sup>8</sup>

Unlike the psalmist, Francis does not consider this world to be the true land of the living, but only the next. A portion of the world to come, however, is experienced in this world in the form of grace through alms. Mendicancy therefore becomes a play on a further medieval definition of *portio* which refers to a fortune or great riches. The Portiuncula, for Francis, participated in the reversal of the bitter and sweet in his life and spirituality: it was not merely a small section of land but a small section of heaven, the home of celestial riches, on earth.

In the original Italian, *porziuncula* was also used as a nickname for someone very small.<sup>9</sup> Thomas of Celano makes a direct connection between the Portiuncula and Francis' height:

The servant of God Francis, a person small in stature, humble in mind, a minor by profession, while yet in the world chose out of the world for himself and his followers a little portion [*particula*], inasmuch as he could not serve Christ without having something of the world. For it was not without the foreknowledge of a divine disposition that from ancient times that place was called the Portiuncula which was to fall to the lot of those who wished to have nothing whatsoever of the world.<sup>10</sup>

The depiction of the body in medieval art and popular culture was understood to reflect a person's social station, character, holiness and/or humour. The nobleman was tall, handsome and well-built, the peasant short, ugly and deformed. Voluntary deformity, however, resulting from fasting, flagellation or other ascetic practices, was the proper physiognomy of the saintly.<sup>11</sup> Celano notes that Francis was

of medium height, closer to shortness . . . his neck was slender, his shoulders straight, his arms short, hands slender, his fingers long, his nails extended, his legs were thin, his feet were small, his skin was delicate, his flesh very spare.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>LR 6.1-5, the italics are mine; Armstrong, 141, n. 15.

<sup>9</sup>Carlo Battista Giovani Alessio, *Dizionario Etimologico* (Firenze, 1954), 3032.

<sup>10</sup>2 Cel 18.

<sup>11</sup>See Squatriti, "Personal Appearance and Physiognomics," 191-202; Jacques Le Goff, "Head or Heart? The Political Use of a Body Metaphor in the Middle Ages," in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, Part 3 (New York: Urzone, 1989): 13-26.

<sup>12</sup>1 Cel 83.

Being shorter than average connotes someone before adulthood, with teenage idealism or possibly childlikeness; or, conversely, someone slighter, much older and therefore wiser. Francis' thin neck, hands, legs and flesh signify an emaciated body from lack of nourishment, but his fine shoulders, skin and nails indicate that he was not from the labouring class. His overall gaunt physique, therefore, could only be the result of voluntary asceticism (figs. 37, 38).

Francis seized his smallness as an apt symbol for his life's project: throughout his writings and quoted words there is play on the diminutive. He called himself "little man" and insisted on having a small, more humble tonsure rather than a large one; the friars were to be like children and "little poor ones" in their mendicancy, never seeking to be rulers on high but servants bowed low: *Fratres minores* rather than *maiores*.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, even Christ, as mentioned earlier, seemed to contract physically before Francis' eyes when he "hides Himself under the little form of the bread" (fig. 15).<sup>14</sup>

The Portiuncula chapel was smaller than S. Damiano and most rural chapels. The original plan was much as it is today: a simple rectangle, approximately 9.5 by 4 meters, with an apse at one end and a door at the other (the present side door was added after Francis' death to ease the flow of pilgrims) (figs. 39-44). The sanctuary was divided from the nave by a rise of three steps and a pulpitum or rood screen. This screen has long been lost, but a suggestion of its form may be seen in the Giotto fresco of Francis in prayer behind the pulpitum at S. Damiano (fig. 1). Archaeologists and historians date the Portiuncula's foundation, walls and some moulding fragments found buried near the site to the tenth or eleventh century (fig. 45).<sup>15</sup>

While its size and the fact that it needed repair may have made the Portiuncula interesting

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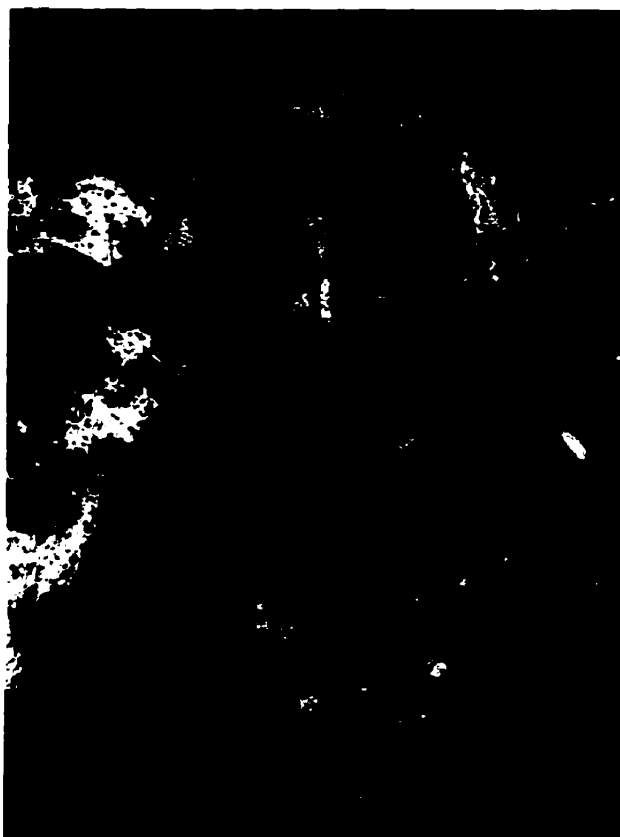
<sup>13</sup>1 Cel 38. In 1234, the poet Henri d'Avranches notes how the gate to heaven is too narrow for the *maiores*, but not for the Friars Minor, because of their fasting and humility; *Legenda Versificata*, Bk VI, II, 157-65 in *AF*, 447. Cf. 2 Cel 158; Armstrong, 146-48; Fortini, 312-315. The Provost of Ursberg came to know the members of Francis' group as the "pauperes Minores" as early as 1210. *Chronicle of the Premonstratensian provost Buchard of Ursperg*, found in Lemmons, *Testimonia minora*, 17-18. Esser believes that Francis made the name of Friars Minor official in the Primitive Rule of 1209/10; Esser, 29-30.

<sup>14</sup>Letter to the Entire Order, 26-28, in Armstrong, 58.

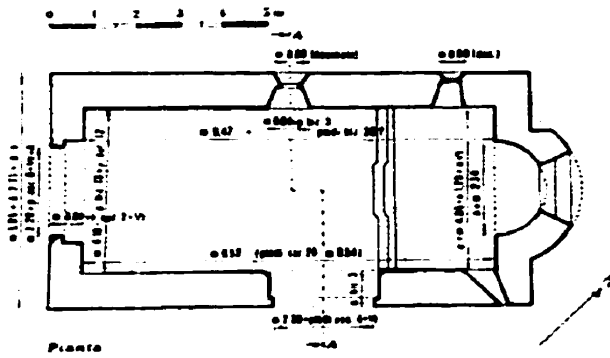
<sup>15</sup>Angiola Maria Romanini, "Reliquiae e documenti: i luoghi del culto francesco nella basilica di Santa Maria degli Angeli presso Assisi," in Mancini and Scotti, *La Basilica*, 61-62. The decorative mouldings of palm-woven crosses, plants and birds in patterns common to simple buildings of the tenth century were not found on the chapel but in fragments buried around the site. This raises the question whether they were broken off previously or if Francis stripped them off himself during his renovation in the name, perhaps, of simplicity.



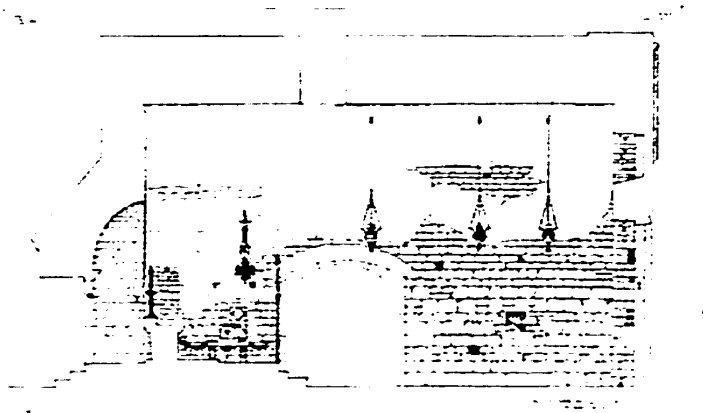
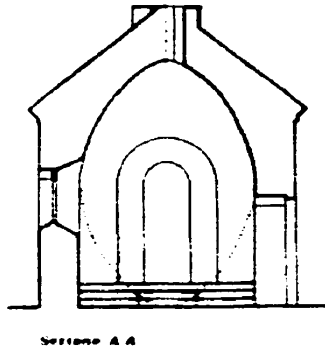
37. Earliest known portrait of Francis of Assisi, c. 1224, depicted without the stigmata. (Benedictine Monastery of Subiaco, Lazio.)



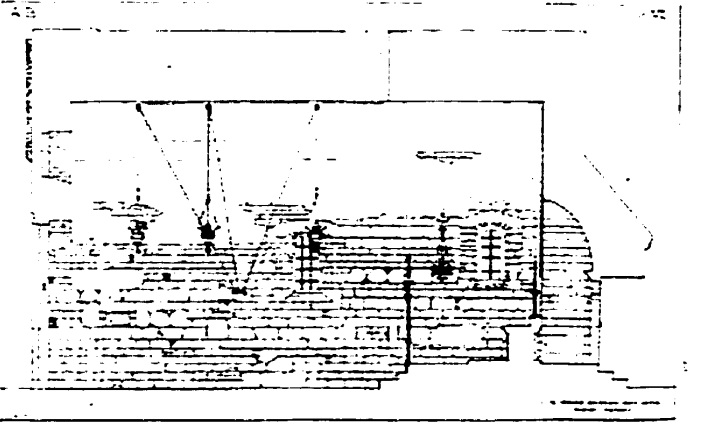
38. Portrait of St. Francis with stigmata. (Detail of an early 13th c. fresco by Cimabue in the Basilica di S. Francesco, Assisi.)

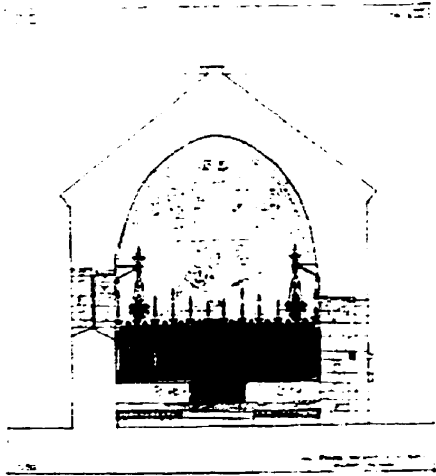


39. Plan and section of the present Portiuncula chapel, Assisi. (From Salvatori, "Le prime sedi francescane," fig. p. 90.)

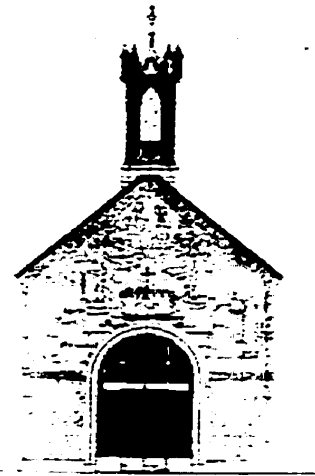


40. Longitudinal sections of the present Portiuncula chapel, Assisi. The large side door is a late 13th c. addition. (Drawing by Cesare Bazzani, from Mancini and Scotti, *La Basilica*, figs. 46, 47.)

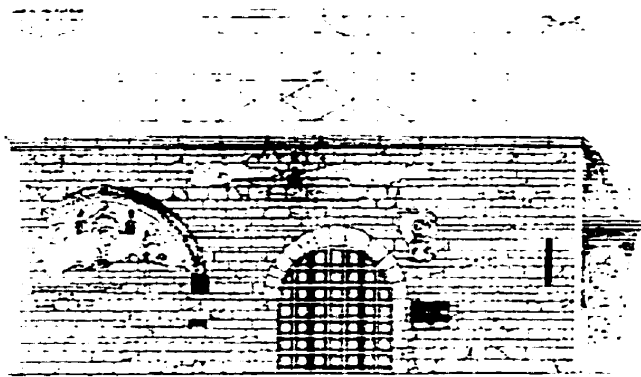




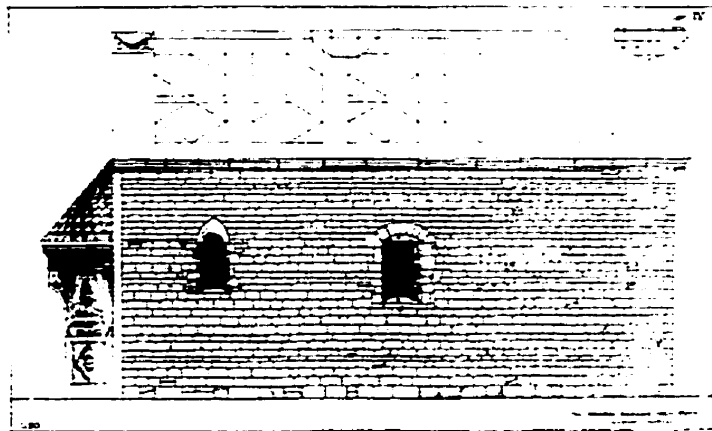
41. Cross-section of the present Portiuncula chapel, Assisi, with a view towards the sanctuary. (Drawing by Cesare Bazzani, from Mancini and Scotti. *La Basilica*, fig. 48.)

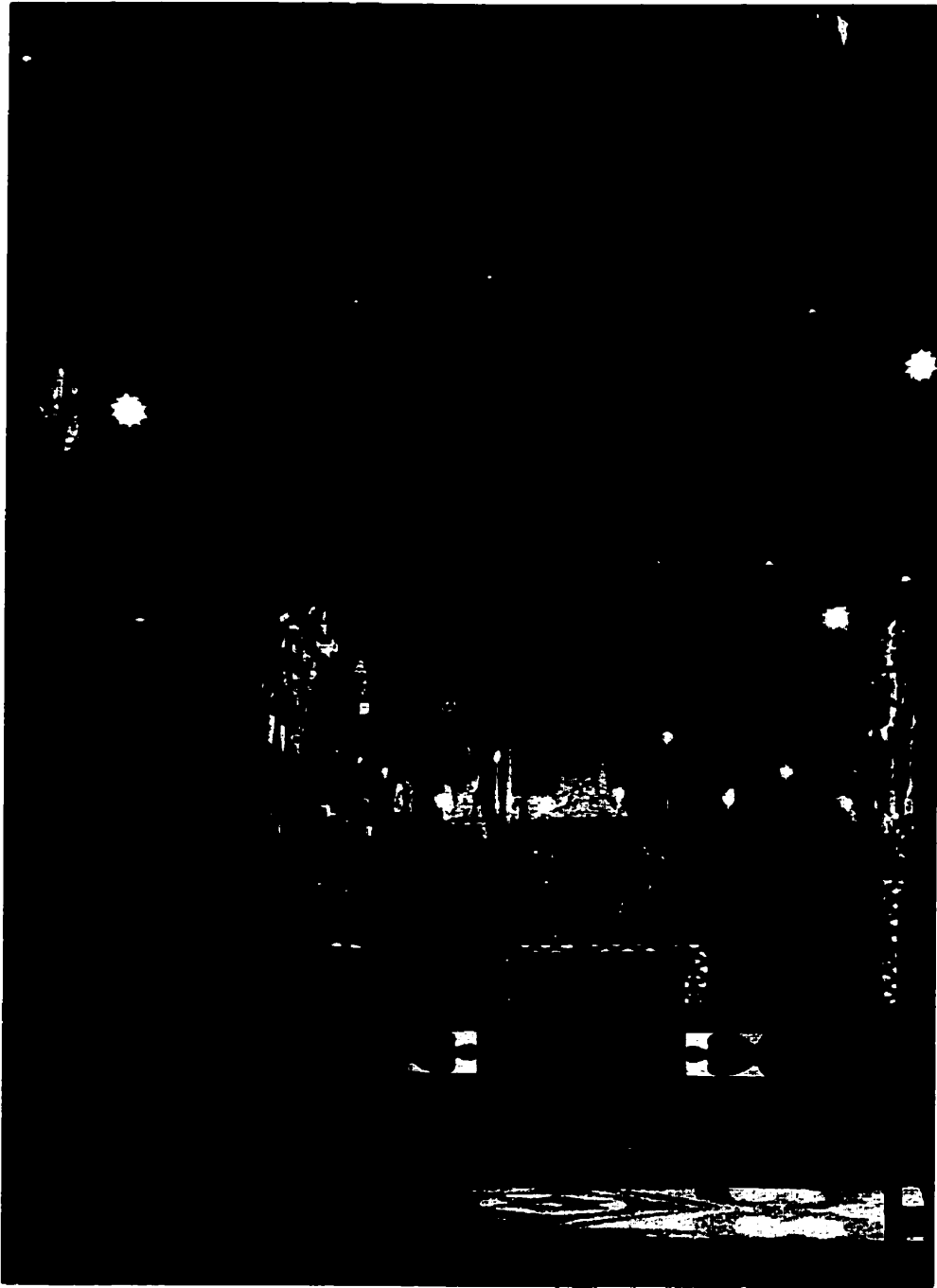


42. Entrance facade of the present Portiuncula chapel, Assisi, with later cupola. (Drawing by Cesare Bazzani, from Mancini and Scotti. *La Basilica*, fig. 42.)



43. Side elevations of the present Portiuncula chapel, Assisi. (Drawing by Cesare Bazzani, from Mancini and Scotti. *La Basilica*, figs. 43, 44.)





44. Interior photo of the Portiuncula chapel, Assisi. (From Von Matt and Hauser. *Saint Francis of Assisi*, fig. 59.)

45. Decorative carving of the 10th or 11th c. excavated at the Portiuncula site showing birds and foliage around crucifixes. (From Canonici, *La Portiuncula*, 96.)



to Francis, perhaps the most attractive element was its reputation throughout the Assisi commune as a holy site. "For although the place [*locus*] itself was already holy [*sanctus*], they nurtured its holiness with continuous prayer day and night, and continuous silence."<sup>16</sup> The late antique definition of *locus sanctus* as "catacomb niche; grave; a church adjacent to a saint's tomb; a church where relics of saints are preserved," held until the eleventh century when it began to refer as well to monasteries and monastery churches in particular.<sup>17</sup> The Portiuncula was the site of a relic (in its altar stone) and served as the chapel of a Benedictine monastery-mission. The *Scripta Leonis* underlines its cult status: "Although it was so tiny and had been for a long time almost in ruins, the people of the city of Assisi and the surrounding district had always held this little church in great devotion and hold it even greater to this day."<sup>18</sup>

No altar could be consecrated without a saint's remains or relic being located there.<sup>19</sup> Relics were usually placed beneath the altar to ensure the vertical connection of the church, its liturgy and its martyrs to the heavenly mysteries above. A church or shrine containing the grave of a martyr or his or her relics was often referred to as "the place" or "the holy place": *loca sanctorum*, δ τόπος.<sup>20</sup> It was a *locus* where the normal laws surrounding the dead were held to be suspended. It was a place of which Gregory of Nyssa could say,

Those who behold [the relics] embrace, as it were, the living body in full flower: they bring eye, mouth, ear, all the senses into play, and then, shedding tears of reverence and passion, they address to the martyr their prayers of intercession as though he or she were present.<sup>21</sup>

The Portiuncula in Francis' time lay deep within a dense wooded area called the *cerreto*

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<sup>16</sup>SL 9; LP 9.

<sup>17</sup>*Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*, ed. B.G. Teuleer (Leipzig, 1980).

<sup>18</sup>SL 8.

<sup>19</sup>According to a fifth-century Carthage decree, all Christian altars were to contain relics. In the sixth century Gelasian sacramentary, these altars were referred to as places where God cured the sick. See J.D. Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* (Paris and Leipzig, 1759-1927), III, col. 971. Given the Portiuncula's dedication to Mary, it is possible that its altar stone contained a Marian relic although this cannot be verified.

<sup>20</sup>H. Delehaye, "Loca sanctorum," *Analecta Bollandiana* 48 (1930): 5-64.

<sup>21</sup>Gregory of Nyssa, *Encomium on Saint Theodore*, in Migne, *Patrologie cursus completus. Series graeca* 46, 740B.

*della porziuncula*, the oak wood of the Portiuncula, or the *selva grossa*, the large and/or great oak forest.<sup>22</sup> This wood lay untouched by the agricultural expansion of the previous century; it was perhaps an Umbrii sacred precinct within the Assisi commune. Not far away, on the hill above nearby Spoleto, the venerated forest of Monte Luco ranks to this day as "the most important spiritual centre in Umbria, after Assisi."<sup>23</sup> Originally a nature shrine of the ancient Umbrii, it eventually became the site of the oldest recorded law to protect the environment, the third-century BCE Roman decree, *Lex Spoletana*.<sup>24</sup> Thus, the Portiuncula's forest could very well have been the earliest object of devotion. In this area many Christian shrines were built upon pre-Christian sacred sites.<sup>25</sup>

Francis, according to Celano, brought to the Portiuncula the appropriate emotional disposition. Unlike the descriptions of Francis' involvement with S. Damiano and S. Pietro della Spina, Celano emphasizes how the Portiuncula first moved Francis emotionally.

When the holy man of God saw how it was destroyed, he was moved to pity [*pietate*],

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<sup>22</sup>SL 21, LP 21, 2 Cel 115, 3 Soc 36; Omnibus, 565, n. 66.

<sup>23</sup>Brown, *Roots*, 28.

<sup>24</sup>The law absolutely forbade, under severe penalties, cutting down a single tree or even a branch; this is mentioned with respect by Cato, Seneca and Pliny. Pilgrims could approach the mountain only after a purification rite and an offering of sacrificial incense vases to be placed in the branches. St. Isaac of Spoleto in the sixth century, Francis and Michelangelo (a Franciscan tertiary), among others, had hermitages or retreats within this famous forest.

<sup>25</sup>The Umbrians have often been described as a people mystical by nature with a humble and vigorous piety conditioned, in part, by the rigours of their rugged, mountainous region. Few tombs and artifacts remain of the ancient Umbrii, but Gubbio's *Igvine Tablets* of 200 BCE indicate a deeply religious people with sacred gates and temples in their square-planned cities, and a people practicing complex religious rites, sacrifices and dances. The tablets indicate that the name Assisi derives from the Umbrian word *asa* (Latin, *ara*, or altar) meaning "city of the altar" or "holy city" (Fortini, 90, n. r.). Many of their customs paralleled their sophisticated and more urban Etruscan neighbours, whose key city, Perugia, could be easily seen across the Tiber valley from Assisi. The enormous cemeteries of the Etruscans, such as those found near the Portiuncula, were lined with streets of chamber mausoleums, honouring the dead who were thought to hover around their tombs (Brown, *Roots*, 20). In 295 BCE both peoples had submitted to Roman rule for the next seven centuries. Etruscan, Umbrian and Roman gods eventually consolidated into what became the Roman pantheon of gods. Assisi, as a typical Roman *municipium*, had a temple of Janus on the lower slope (over which Assisi's first cathedral of *Santa Maria* would eventually be built), a temple of Mars below that, a temple of the *Bona Mater* on the upper hill (over which Assisi's second cathedral of San Rufino rose) and a temple of Hercules still farther up. In the centre of the city still stands the temple of Minerva, owned and occupied by the Benedictines from the eleventh century until 1212 when it became the town hall of the *podestà* and its crypt the town jail. Also noteworthy is that between Assisi and Spoleto, the Roman religious cult of the river-god Clitumnus at the temple of the Clituno Springs evolved from an ancient Umbrii devotion to the site's sacred waters, mountains and forests. In the seventh century, this temple became one of Umbria's first and most important Christian churches.



because he burned with devotion toward the mother of all good; and he began to stay there continuously. It was the third year of conversion when he began to repair this church.<sup>26</sup>

The decision to reside there may have had the same motive that he had for living in the leprosarium, the desire to heal his own soul by healing those he pitied, in this case, a church in need of repair. Unlike S. Damiano, the Portiuncula was abandoned, so he would not infect a resident monk or cleric with his leprous uncleanness. More important, however, was that the election to reside at the Portiuncula moved him from a communal life among lepers to the solitude more properly associated with being a hermit. Many hermits chose to dwell in abandoned churches or military buildings, in imitation of St. Antony Abbot. Robert of Chaise-Dieu, for instance, prayed for and found "some little church in a hermitage, ruined and deserted."<sup>27</sup> Aybert of Crespín, during his spell in Vallombrosa, took up the hermit life in a cell which was said to resemble a ruined town or castle.<sup>28</sup> And the hermit Peter of Blunt was said to have rejoiced when he heard that the deserted church where he wanted to settle was neither subject to another church nor used for services.<sup>29</sup>

The Portiuncula offered Francis not only ecclesial and political neutrality but a physical, and therefore spiritual, exile. Whereas S. Damiano was located just outside the gate from the Assisi quarter where his family dwelt, the road to the Portiuncula was reached from the far gate near the bishop's quarter, passing by the Casa Gualdi leprosarium. The church of S. Damiano hugs Assisi's slope, a stone's throw from the walls, but the Portiuncula rests on the valley floor between Assisi and Perugia and within walking distance of both (fig. 36).

Celano's description of the Portiuncula as a deserted place not only holds physically and politically but scripturally as well. To the ancient Hebrews, the wilderness, or *eremia*, described a place either sandy, rocky, stepped, or, like the site of the Portiuncula, forested.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>1 Cel 21.

<sup>27</sup>Marbod of Rennes, *Vita sancti Roberti abbatis Casae Dei*, ch. 7, in *PL*, 171, 1509.

<sup>28</sup>Robert of Ostrevand, *Vita S. Ayberti*, in *Acta Sanctorum* (3rd ed.) 7 April, I, 671-77.

<sup>29</sup>*Gallia christiana*, II, 1380 as noted in Constabile, "Eremitical," 247.

<sup>30</sup>The Hebrews had many names for the wilderness: *midbar*, *arabah*, *triyyah*, *tohu*, *chorbah*, *yeshimon*. See Williams, *Wilderness and Paradise*, 12; see also Chenu, *Nature, Man*, 1-48. Authors who have considered the specific importance of nature to Francis and his order have had little to say concerning Francis' architectural response to the wilderness. Cf. Edward A. Armstrong, *Saint Francis: Nature Mystic* (Berkeley, 1973); and Roger Darrell Sorrell, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature: Tradition and Innovation in Western Christian Attitudes Toward the Environment* (New York: Oxford

Uninhabited wilderness was useful only as a place of burial; it was considered the haunt of evil spirits, wild beasts, impure grave diggers, and, like the gloomy Sheol of the Old Testament, the dry crust under which the immense ocean of primordial chaos swirls—the watery depths of serpents and dragons. The *desertus* was the forty year Israelite battleground for temptation, testing and punishment—foreshadowing, for Christians, the forty days of Christ's wilderness temptation. Like Elijah's cave in Mount Horeb, and Elisha's desert refuge, the wilderness was the only place of refuge from the secular and corrupting city, and for Jeremiah, Hosea, Amos and Ezekiel, the wilderness was the crucible wherein the weakened Hebraic cult could be spiritually purified.<sup>31</sup>

The western Christian interpretation of the wilderness—the primordial chaos, the abandoned *vastum*, or wasteland of the Egyptian hermits—also included forested areas. Authors such as Athanasius (d. 373), Sulpicius Severus (d. 497) and Gregory the Great (d. 590), echoed through subsequent authors, reflected a general fear of the wild as under the control of a demonic presence which the early hermits had to overcome through perseverance and faith (fig. 46). Athanasius' extremely popular biography of St. Antony paints the figure of a wilderness thaumaturge able to tame demon-possessed weather phenomena and wild animals.<sup>32</sup> Severus' widely disseminated fourth-century *Postumianus* depicts his hero Martin of Tours (d. 397) as vanquishing "the fury of beasts and the venom of snakes" and winning back the peace of Adam's terrestrial paradise (fig. 47).<sup>33</sup> And Gregory of Tours speaks of Umbria's St. Benedict (d. 543) who, among other wilderness adventures, was tempted by and had to overcome a possessed blackbird.<sup>34</sup>

The medieval forest was considered a frontier, the abode of those on the fringes of society—woodsmen, fugitive serfs, murderers, soldiers of fortune, brigands, pagan cults, if not the haunt of the mythical wildman or *uomo selvatico*. The wildmen and wildwomen slept in caves, were covered in fur, crawled on all fours, had no rational ability and had control

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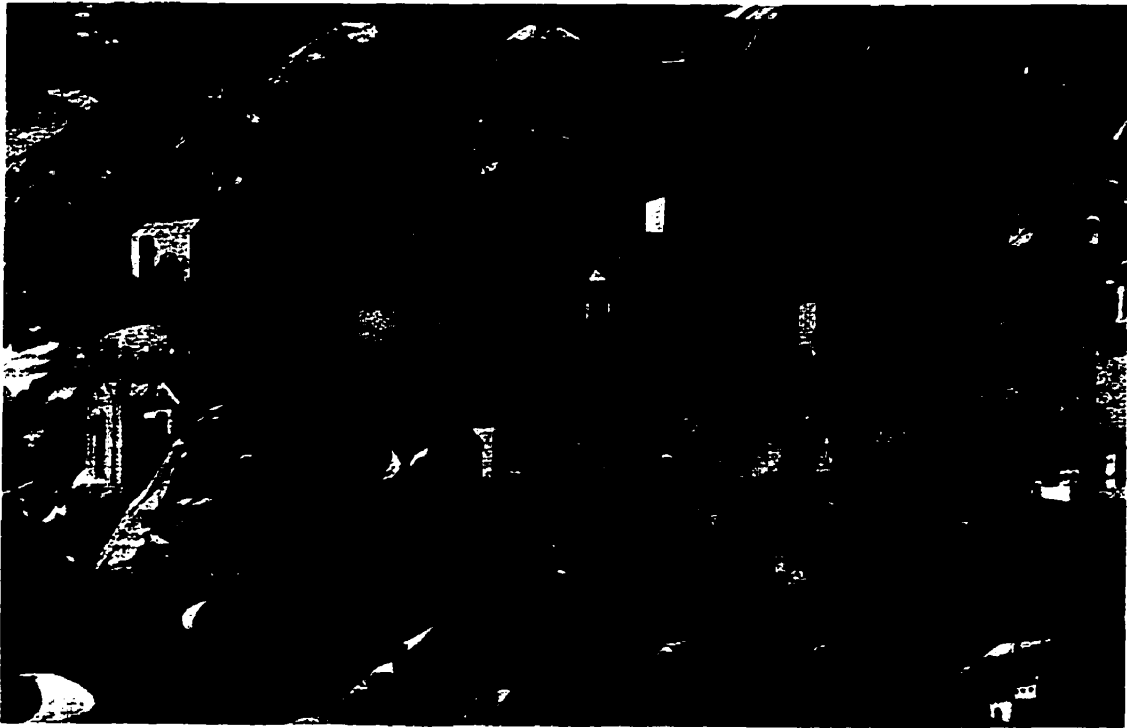
University Press, 1988).

<sup>31</sup>2 Kgs 4.38ff; 1 Kgs 19.4-8.

<sup>32</sup>Athanasius, *Life of St. Antony and Letter to Marcellinus*, trans. Robert Gregg (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 29-100.

<sup>33</sup>Sulpicius Severus, *Works in The Western Fathers*, ed. and trans., H.R. Hoare (New York, Paulist Press, 1969), 97.

<sup>34</sup>*Dialogues*, Bk. 2, ch. 2, trans. O. Zimmerman in *Fathers of the Church*, vol. 39 (New York, 1959).



46. *The Thebaid*, detail (1354), showing hermit huts, caves and chapels probably closer in form to the hermit tradition in Italy than the Holy Land. (Gherardo Starnina, Galleri Uffizi, Firenze.)

47. Adam and Eve in paradise. (Mosaic detail of the Creation Cupola, San Marco, Venice. Photo archive of the National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.. As reproduced in Jolly, *Man in God's Image?*, fig. 56.)



over the wild through their violence and physical strength (fig. 48).<sup>35</sup> As Francis and his companions adapted to their woodland hermitages, they were soon taken to be wildmen themselves. People fled at their sight and locals spoke of them as *quasi silvestres homines*.<sup>36</sup> While on the one hand the wilderness dwellers represented the animal side of human nature—the violence, lust and raw struggle for survival, on the other hand they brought to mind the Edenic way of life away from the distractions and corruptions of the city—they were considered in legends to be bearers of grace and mediators of redemption.<sup>37</sup> Saints in this tradition include John the Baptist, Mary Magdalene, John Chrysostom, Christopher and Mary the Egyptian.<sup>38</sup> They were depicted as voluntarily undergoing their redemption in the wild, sprouting hair over their entire bodies and making peace with animals and beasts (fig. 49). By deciding to live at the Portiuncula, by adding a gaunt, mendicant, labouring, wilderness-man to its destroyed chapel, Francis made his first intervention. A hermit may have found his temporary home, but the Portiuncula, by association, gained the distinction of becoming the *locus* of a spiritual warrior.

Archeological investigation has shown that the rubble-walled Portiuncula chapel seems to have originally supported a timber pitched roof (fig. 50).<sup>39</sup> What Francis came upon in 1206 was probably a small one-storey chapel with gabled ends whose wooden members had

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<sup>35</sup>Richard Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages: A Study in Art, Sentiment, and Demonology* (New York: Octagon Books, 1970), 9.

<sup>36</sup>Soc 34, 37.

<sup>37</sup>David A. Sprunger, "Wild Folk and Lunatics in Medieval Romance," in Joyce E. Salisbury, ed. *The Medieval World of Nature* (New York: Garland, 1993), 145-63. On the connection of *monstri sacri* to architecture from the early Renaissance on, see Marco Frascari, *Monsters of Architecture: Anthropomorphism in Architectural Theory* (Savage, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1991), 51ff.

<sup>38</sup>The allusion to Francis as a John the Baptist, for instance, is in Br. Elias' letter which announced Francis' death; LE, 1957.

<sup>39</sup>Romanini, "*Reliquiae e documenti*," 53-87, esp. 67; idem, "Il francescanesimo nell'arte," 181-95; and idem, "Nuovi documenti sulla Cappella del Transito in Santa Maria degli Angeli di Assisi: introduzione," in Baldelli and Romanini, *Francesco, il francescanesimo*, 231-34. Romanini is the latest in a series of art historians to attempt to understand the chronology and diffusion of types related to the Portiuncula; the meaning and symbolism of the chapel, however, remained outside of her considerations. Cf. Canonici, *La Porziuncola*; idem, "Documenti e ricordi dei secoli prealesiani," in Francesco Federico Mancini and Aurora Scotti, *La Basilica di Santa Maria degli Angeli* (Perugia: Electa, 1989), 89-96; Édouard d'Alençon, "Des Origines de l'Église de la Portiuncule et de ses diverses dénominations," in *EF*, 11 (1904): 585-606; Nicolini, "La Porziuncula," 35-51 and Luigi Pelligrini, "La prima fraternità minoritica ed i problemi dell'insediamento," in *Lo Spazio dell'umiltà* (Atti del Convegno di Studi Sull'edilizia dell'ordine dei Minori: Fara Sabina, 1984), 17-57. These scholars generally declined to consider the meaning of the Portiuncula either in its context, through the primary source material, or with respect to future architectural decisions within the order.

probably fallen in. The simple form of this church in its forest setting echoes the traditional architectural configurations associated with the wilderness: tabernacles, arks, tents and the framed or woven lean-tos' of the crusaders (figs. 51, 52).

The term *tabernaculum* appears in the Vulgate with an array of meanings established within the iconography of hermit or nomadic existence.<sup>40</sup> The Feast of Tabernacles, one of the three principal Hebraic festivals to this day, commemorates the dwellings of the Israelite children of the Exodus, for whom Jacob, a tent-dweller, was their exemplar-builder.<sup>41</sup> Deriving from the Hebrew word *sukkāh*, the Exodus tabernacle denotes a booth, lean-to or hut made of tree branches gathered from the mountains and associated with the harvest feasts of the ancient Near East (fig. 53).<sup>42</sup> The tabernacle, Moses' tent of meeting, was the collapsible frame and skin tent whose construction was mapped out by God in Exodus 25 (fig. 54). Within this sacred tent was the ark of the covenant, the footstool of God, over which the pillars of cloud and fire hovered, and before which the Lord spoke to Moses face to face.<sup>43</sup> The sole mention of the feast in the New Testament refers to Jesus' clandestine participation in the feast in Jerusalem, a prelude to his Passion.<sup>44</sup> Medieval interpreters, following Jerome, turned the feast into a fast to link the season with the forty-day fasts of Moses, Elijah and Christ as the scriptural echoes of the Christian season of Lent.<sup>45</sup>

As a tent, the tabernacle was the dwelling of St. Paul, a mystical visionary and tent-maker by trade.<sup>46</sup> To John Chrysostom, the making of tents was the most appropriate work for the pilgrim, exemplifying the virtue of manual labour and evangelical poverty. The basket-weaving and plaited rushwork of the desert fathers and mothers were materially and spiritually associated with tabernacling as essentially contemplative works (figs. 52, 55).

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<sup>40</sup>For the tabernacle in relation to Franciscan iconography see Fleming, *From Bonaventure to Bellini*, 25-98. For a more general discussion of the role of the primitive hut in architectural theory, but not necessarily in the Middle Ages see Joseph Rykwert, *On Adam's House in Paradise: The Idea of the Primitive Hut in Architectural History* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981).

<sup>41</sup>Gen 25.27.

<sup>42</sup>A comprehensive study of the liturgical origins of the feast is given in Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Gottesdienst in Israel: Studien zur Geschichte des Laubhüttenfestes* (Munich, 1954). For the ancient Near Eastern roots of the feast see E.O. James, *Seasonal Feasts and Festivals* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1961), 20-91.

<sup>43</sup>For a full discussion of the history and relationship between the tabernacle and the ark see de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 289-311.

<sup>44</sup>Mt. 26.2-5.

<sup>45</sup>In *Zachariam*, III, xiv, 16 (*Corpus Christianorum*, LXXVI, ii, 894-95). Cf. Ex. 24.18; 3 Kgs 19.8; Mt 4.2.

<sup>46</sup>Acts 18.3.

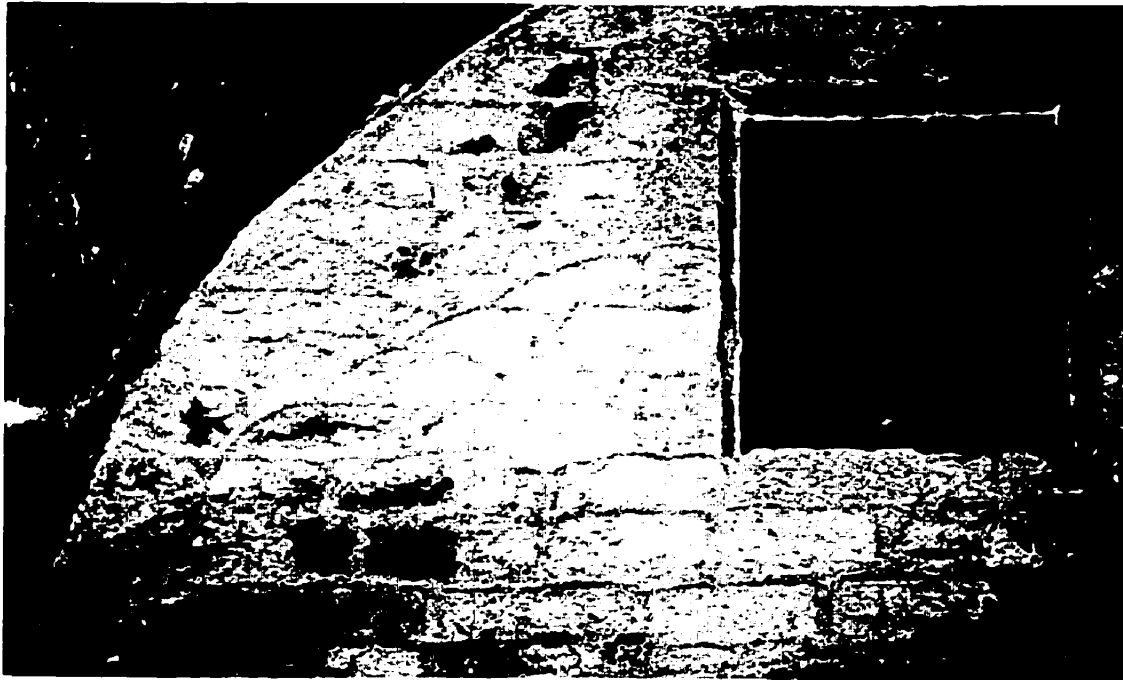


48. Wildman and wildwoman. A page from Walter de Milemente's *De Nobilitatibus et Sapientiis Regum*. (English. 14th c. Christ Church, Oxford. From Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages*, 9.)

49. Mary Magdelene, the penitent, with her hair as her clothing. Master of the Magdelena. *Mary Magdelene and Stories of her Life*, 1250-70. (Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence. From Margaret Miles, *Carnal Knowing*, fig. 7.)



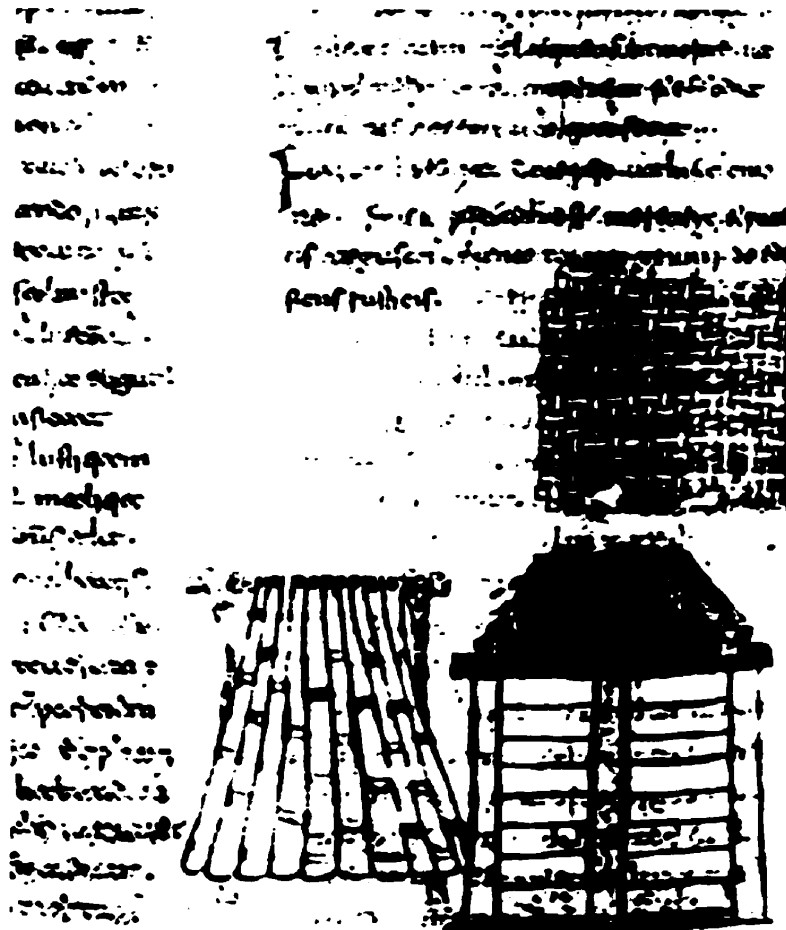
50. Interior of Portiuncula chapel, Assisi, showing the line of a previous timber shed roof, above the entrance door, beneath the present vault. (Photo by author.)





51. Tabernacle with monstrance.  
 (Guyart Desmoulins. *Bible Historiale*. Oxford: Bodleian Library, Douce 211).

52. Woven hut or tabernacle. Rabanus Maurus, *de universo*, 1023. Montecassino Monastery, 132. p. 368.).





53. Moses Refreshes the Twelve Tribes. Dura-Europos Synagogue. (From Goodenough, *Jewish Symbolism*, 56.)



54. God communicating with Moses in his tabernacle. (Roda Bible. I. fol., 56ro. Paris: Lib., Bib. Nat., lat. 6. From *Institute of Est. Catalans*, Anuari IV [1911-12], fig. 19, p. 500.)



Chrysostom, as adapted by William of St. Thierry in the eleventh century, metaphorically extends basket-weaving to become a military art:

I beg you therefore, while we are pilgrims in this world and soldiers on earth, let us not build for ourselves houses to settle down in but make tents we can leave in a moment's notice, we who are liable to be called away from them in the near future to our fatherland and our own city, to the home where we shall spend our eternity. We are in camp. We are campaigning in a foreign country. Whatever is natural is easy, but in a strange land hard work is the rule. Is it not easy for a solitary, enough for nature and in keeping with conscience to weave for himself a cell out of pliant boughs, plaster it with mud, cover it with anything that comes to hand and so come by a dwelling-place eminently suited to him? What could be more desired?<sup>47</sup>

In Book XV of *De Civitate Dei*, Augustine traces the roots of the pilgrim church to Abel, the simple pastoral nomad murdered by Cain, the first city builder. The apology of Stephen, the proto-martyr, before the Jewish council in Acts 7 dwells at length on the Exodus, only to draw a sharp division between a religion of tents—the religion of Moses, the prophets and Jesus—and a religion of temples extending from Cain through Solomon to the wealth and political hegemony represented by the temple of his day.<sup>48</sup> He announced that, "Our fathers had the tent of witness in the wilderness . . . but it was Solomon who built a house for Him. Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made with hands."<sup>49</sup> Stephen harkens back to

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<sup>47</sup>William of St. Thierry, *Epistola aurea*, I, xxxvii, 151, in William of St-Thierry, *The Golden Epistle: A Letter to the Brethern at Mont-Dieu* (Spenser, Mass: Cistercian Publications, 1971), 60-61. William's source is Chrysostom's homily on Matthew, 12 (PG 58, 651).

<sup>48</sup>Moses' tent/tabernacle was a powerful medieval metaphor; it was depicted as the site of a theophany, as the original *ecclesia spiritualis*. In Isaiah 32.18, tabernacles are a metaphor for a sanctified Israel where "my people shall sit in the beauty of peace, and in the tabernacles of confidence [*tabernaculis fiduciae*], and in wealthy rest." The post-exilic liturgy of the Feast of the Tabernacles included the recitation of the messianic Vulgate Psalm 117.22-27 which associated tabernacling with the coming of the messiah, as God appeared to Moses. Such references took on great mystical significance for Christians when they became associated with Jesus' transfiguration. When Peter saw Jesus gloriously illuminated and in conversation with the desert prophets Moses and Elijah, he proposed, in delirium, to "make three tabernacles, one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah," to mark the awesome event (Mt 17.4; Mk 9.5 and Lk 9.33). The tabernacle became not only the eschatological location for the hoped-for second coming, but also the sacred boundary within which theophanies, holy visions and God's will were secretly gathered.

<sup>49</sup>Acts 7.48.

Isaiah who ordered the destruction of city temples for the sake of the desert huts preferred by God—an act that Francis seemed to reenact himself when, a dozen years later, he ordered the destruction of a large stone dormitory built by the commune of Assisi next to the Portiuncula chapel (fig. 56).<sup>50</sup>

A mud and stick hut was recorded on the Portiuncula site before 1209 and was probably built and lived in by Francis while he worked on the chapel.<sup>51</sup> It became a rule during Francis' lifetime that all friars living at or visiting the site, for instance during their Chapter meetings, would dwell there in similar fashion. The practice may suggest the meaning of Francis' original hut. A temporary shelter erected for a Chapter meeting was called a *storium* (according to the *Speculum Perfectionis*) or *umbraculum* (according to Jordan of Giano).<sup>52</sup> The rare term *storium* has, according to Du Cange, a thirteenth-century usage indicating a kind of awning set up in market stalls; in the Crusca dictionary it is etymologically tied to the early Italian words for doormat or weaving associated with wicker-work.<sup>53</sup> *Umbraculum*, of the Vulgate, directly refers to shady bower dwellings prescribed for the feast of the tabernacles in Leviticus 23.42. Coupled with the fact that Francis often addressed his followers as the "Children of the Exodus," both his hut and the chapel on the Portiuncula site may have departed very little in his mind from that of a Mosaic tabernacle of theophany, the eschatological pilgrim's tent and the woven-branch *sukkah* (figs. 52, 55, 57 and frontispiece).<sup>54</sup>

Before repairing the Portiuncula, both the *Vita prima* and the Testament seem to indicate that he may have dwelt within the perimeter of the Portiuncula chapel itself.<sup>55</sup> Was this in the medieval tradition of *incubatio*? The practice stretched back to Greek and Roman rites at the shrines of the healing gods Apollo and Asclepius and involved sleeping within the confines of the temple or shrine in order to effect a cure for a disease or to receive a propitious dream.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>SL 11, 2 Cel 57. Is 66.1-2. See the discussion of the commune house in the next chapter.

<sup>51</sup>3 Soc 55.

<sup>52</sup>MP 7, 21, 62; Jordan, 16; cf. Fleming, *Bonaventure*, 77-78.

<sup>53</sup>Du Cange, *Glossarium ad scriptores mediae et infimae latinitatis* (Paris, 1840-1850).

<sup>54</sup>Note that Francis once spoke of his death in terms of 1 Pet 1.14: as a "folding of a tent"; LM 14.2. The most primitive of habitations known to humankind, according to Vitruvius, whose *Ten Books on Architecture* was still in circulation at this time, were mud and stick shelters; II, 1.3. See Rykwert, *On Adam's House*, 105-20.

<sup>55</sup>1 Cel 21. In Test 18, Francis admits that he and his earliest companions, "quite willingly stayed in abandoned churches," as proof of their itineracy. Here, he may have been referring directly to the Portiuncula since this admission was dictated there.

<sup>56</sup>See Walter Addison Jayne, *The Healing Gods of Ancient Civilizations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1925; reprint, New Hyde Park, N.Y.: University Books, 1962), 224-25, 306-10.



55. Work and prayer at the Portiuncula with Francis flagellating himself in his mud and stick cell. lower right; on the left the "Marthas" in the *domus* or communal quarters. (Anonymous of Umbria, second half of the 16th c. Miniature from *Francheschina di Santa Maria degli Angeli* (Santa Maria degli Angeli, Archivio della Porziuncula), fol. 319v.)



56. Francis orders the destruction of the community house built beside the Portiuncula without his permission. (Bresciano miniature, 15th c., St. Bonaventure, *Legenda Maggiore* (Roma: Museo Franceseano.) From Pavone, *Iconologia Franceseana*, fig. 89.)

In the Christian West, many ancient healing shrines came to be replaced by the sanctuaries of saints, such as that of Martin at Tours, complete with the practice of incubation (fig. 58).<sup>57</sup> A number of healing miracles connected to incubation at a saint's tomb are recorded by Gregory of Tours in the sixth century.<sup>58</sup> The eighth-century Anglo-Saxon poem *Dream of the Rood* describes a healing message that comes in a dream experienced during sleep before a rood screen. The eighth-century Ruthwell cross bears lines from this poem which describe such a wooden cross appearing "drenched in gold," soaked in blood, jewelled and hung with garments.<sup>59</sup> Before arriving at the Portiuncula, Francis spent an entire month fasting, meditating and sleeping in a secret pit located within the confines of S. Damiano. If the incubation at S. Damiano led to his vision of a talking crucifix which gave him his current mission, perhaps his stay within the confines of the Portiuncula was a similar mnemonic preparation to receive his next divinely-bestowed mission at this site in 1208.<sup>60</sup>

In the desire to undertake penance for his sins, Francis sought out not only an Edenic or wilderness location, but also an eloquent example of architecture associated with this primal state. Francis received a little portion, a tiny tabernacle to live as the one on the lowest rung of the social ladder, such as animals deserve. The Portiuncula, in turn, was reinforced in its sacredness through the presence of a hermit or holy wildman, becoming a healing shrine, a tent of prophetic vision, a mimesis of Adam's hut in paradise. Architectural invention began for Francis in a narrative reconstruction of the given place through a type of montage: an abandoned and ruined church is set beside a wilderness holy man. The tableau, however, only becomes interactive when, as we consider in the next section, Francis refines his architectural palate.

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<sup>57</sup>Alcuin makes the connection; esp. 245 in *Momumenta Germaniae Historica, Epistolae Karolini Aevi*, ed. E. Dümmler, ii (Berlin, 1895), 397. *Incubatio* was practiced enough in Tertullian's day that he wrote about it in his *De anima*, 48.3. On medieval incubation Le Goff, *Medieval Imagination*, 209; Finucane, *The Miracle Working Corpse*, 29ff; Meier, *Ancient Incubation*, 1-15; and Flint, *The Rise of Magic*, 270.

<sup>58</sup>Gregory of Tours, *Vitae Patrum VI*, 7; trans. E. James, *Gregory of Tours, The Life of the Fathers* (Liverpool, 1985), 59.

<sup>59</sup>See M. Swanton, *The Dream of the Rood*, rev. ed. (Exeter, 1987).

<sup>60</sup>l Cel 22.

b. *The Chapel of the Annunciation*

The only repair to the Portiuncula which can be dated to the time of Francis' arrival is the construction of a stone vault where the gabled timber roof once was (fig. 50).<sup>61</sup> On top of this new stone vault a new gabled roof of stone and tile was then constructed. On the exterior, therefore, the Portiuncula retained its unmistakable tabernacle form and all that that would imply (figs. 42, 43, 56, 59; cf. 46, 51, 53, 59). On the interior, a simple elliptical vault, made of rough unhewn stones, was constructed higher up the walls than the earlier roof in a way similar to the work dated to the time of Francis at S. Damiano (fig. 44). Even though the choice of stone has the air of functional expediency about it—replacing a roof structure more vulnerable to age and weather with a more permanent one—there may well have been an additional meaning to the act. Francis' building work was the penitential act of a hermit now residing in the wilderness. Stone vault-making—its elliptical verticality and its dark, cave-like quality—may be considered to contribute to this exile.

The key to understanding the renovation of the Portiuncula may be found in Francis' delight that the church was dedicated to *Sancta Maria de Angelis*. Francis, his companions said, "took great pleasure in the fact that the church was called after Christ's mother."<sup>62</sup> And Celano tells us that the Francis took pity and repaired the chapel because "he burned with devotion toward the mother of all good."<sup>63</sup> The chapel evoked Francis' compassion because it exemplified the poor and obedient life, the little portion which Mary humbly received from God. In his *secunda vita*, Celano describes the depth of Francis' devotion:

Toward the mother of Jesus he was filled with an inexpressible love, because it was she who made the Lord of majesty our brother. He sang special praises to her, poured out prayers to her, offered her his affections—so many and so great that the tongue of man cannot recite them.<sup>64</sup>

While Francis lived at the Portiuncula, his friend Bernard reported that "Francis would pray

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<sup>61</sup>Romanini, "*Reliquiae e documenti*," 53-87, esp. 67. See note 39, above.

<sup>62</sup>SL 8.

<sup>63</sup>1 Cel 21; cf. 3 Soc 14.

<sup>64</sup>2 Cel 198.

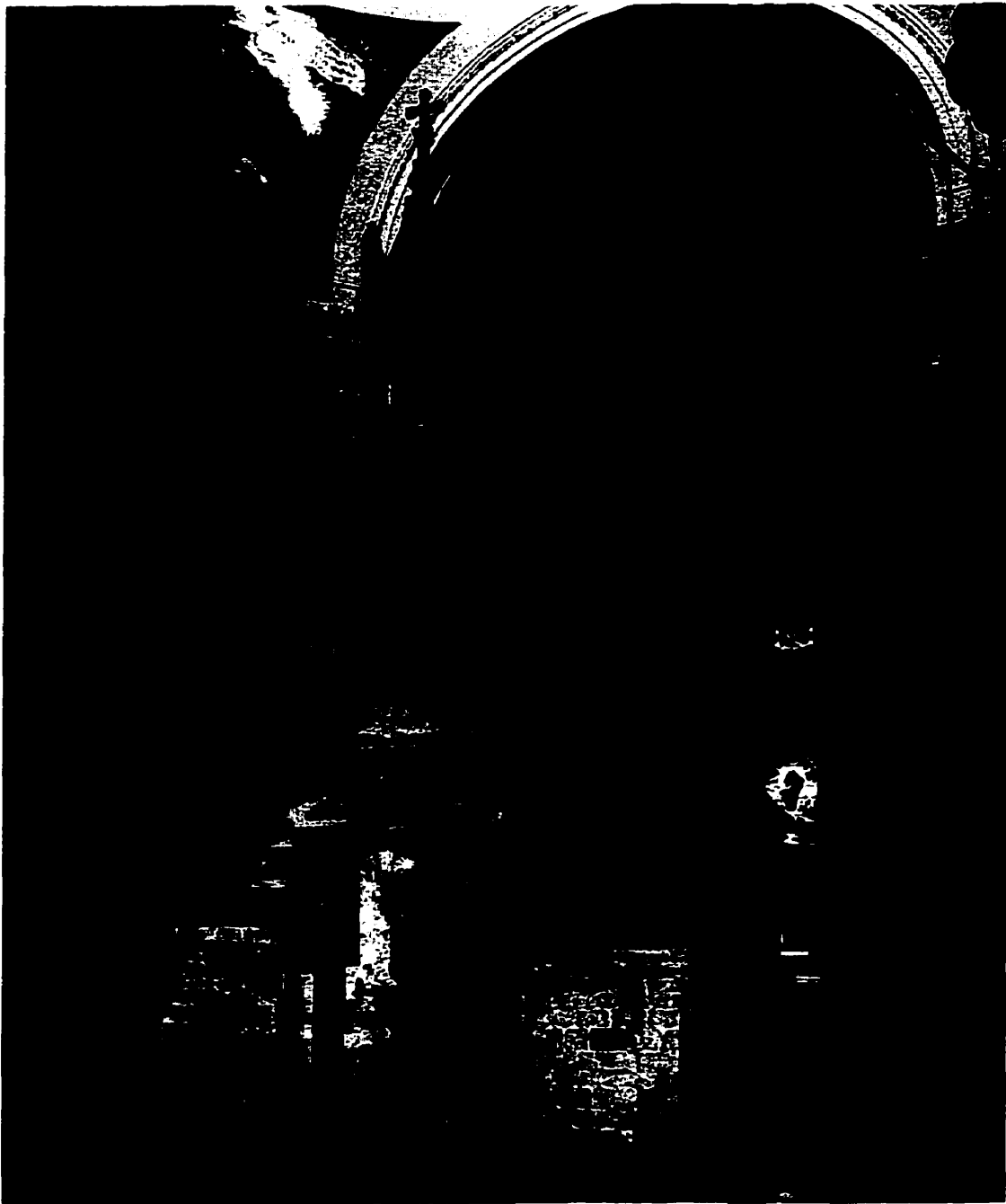
57. Francis, while on retreat in a makeshift cell on Mt. La Verna, receives the vision of the crucified Seraph and the stigmata. (Moroni, *Descrizione del Sacro Monte della Vernia*, 56, engravings by Iacopo Ligozzi.)



58. Pilgrims entering holes which were often placed under the tombs of the saintly in order to venerate the relics or incubate for cures. The coils of wax string in front are called "trindles" or *rotula* in which the measurements of a pilgrim's height are left to incubate at the tomb in place of the pilgrim. (From Cambridge University Library, as reproduced in Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims*, fig. 4.)



En un lieu: un lieu caré / Un lieu poie par sen par / Un lieu hardy: en fin d'œuvre  
 e: reit au sein e grace e gloire / e la embe: sen: toi: adu: / e cueillant: sure en fin:



59. The chapel of Sancta Maria de Portiuncula, view towards main entrance. The chapel now sits within its sixteenth-century basilica. The fresco on the facade and the cupolae are later additions. (Photo by author.)

all night, sleeping but rarely, praising God and the Glorious Virgin mother of God.<sup>65</sup> Further testimony to Francis' early devotion to Mary includes his regular, perhaps daily, recitation of the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary.<sup>66</sup> Francis' devotion, however, tended to go beyond standardized prayers.

The happy father used to say that it had been revealed to him by God that the Blessed Mother loved [the church of *Sancta Maria de Angelis*], among all the other churches built in her honour throughout the world, with a special love; for this reason the holy man loved it above all others.<sup>67</sup>

For Francis the chapel had a profound mediating role, perhaps surprising when one considers that many more important opulent churches and cathedrals were, by the early thirteenth century, dedicated to Mary. The revelation eventually prompted Francis to approach the new pope, Honorious III, in 1216 and request a plenary indulgence, so that anyone who visited the chapel on a certain day each year could receive total remission of temporal penalties for forgiven sins. This unusual privilege was immediately granted, thus demonstrating to believers the determination of Mary, through Francis, to bring favour on this chapel. The only similar indulgence for pilgrims at this time was granted to those who either joined the crusades or made penitential pilgrimages to the Holy Land, Rome or Santiago di Compostella in Spain. But even in those cases, the indulgence was at most only a few years compared to the Portiuncula's promise of an eternity of forgiveness.<sup>68</sup>

According to eyewitnesses, the indulgence was promulgated at an event held on 2 August 1216 at the Portiuncula. Seven local bishops gathered on a makeshift platform in front of the chapel to hear Francis quote Solomon concerning the temple of Jerusalem:

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<sup>65</sup>1 Cel 24.

<sup>66</sup>Weekly recitation of the Little Office was first imposed upon all lay faithful by Pope Urban II in 1095. Oktavian Schmucki, "St. Francis' Devotion toward the Blessed Virgin Mary," *Greyfriars Review* 5, no. 2 (1991): 218.

<sup>67</sup>2 Cel 19; LP 9. In Bartholi's indispensable collection of documents on the indulgence, evidence is brought forth at length to verify that "Christ and His Mother, surrounded by heavenly spirits, had appeared to [Francis] in the chapel of St. Mary of the Angels." See *Fratriscis Bartholi de Assisi, Tractatus de Indulgentia S. Mariae de Portiuncula*, ed. Paul Sabatier (Paris, 1900), xl; translated in *Omnibus*, 1868-70.

<sup>68</sup>Bartholi de Assisi, *Tractatus de Indulgentia*, xlv-liv; translated in *Omnibus*, 1868-71.



Lord God, is it to be thought that You should indeed dwell on earth? Behold, the heavens themselves cannot contain You, and how much less this house which I have built! Let Your eyes, however, be open day and night upon this house.<sup>69</sup>

Francis concluded by proclaiming to the crowd: "I want to send you all to Paradise, by announcing to you this indulgence!"<sup>70</sup> This exclamation confirms that Francis believed the Portiuncula to be a portion of heaven and shows his conviction of its vertical link to paradise, in the manner of the temple of Jerusalem.

The interventions of Francis at both S. Damiano and the Portiuncula build upwards upon given foundations rather than extending outwards in plan. At S. Damiano, Celano tells us that Francis did not uproot the foundation but, perhaps inspired by Paul's letter to the Christian community at Corinth, built upon it, "for no other foundation can anyone lay, than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."<sup>71</sup> The act of building, then, was not only a model of the heavenly temple of Jerusalem whose stones are the saints and holy ones, but also served as an analogue for the construction of the entire cosmos (fig. 60).<sup>72</sup> The unarticulated walls of the early Franciscan churches which were patterned on the Portiuncula typically rose upwards and curved gently inwards to form vaults. These vaults often carry their original frescos depicting stars, simply, if not crudely, rendered upon a deep blue background (figs.

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<sup>69</sup>3 Kgs 8.27-29, 41-44.

<sup>70</sup>Bartholi de Assisi, *Tractatus de Indulgentia*, xliiv-liv; translated in Omnibus, 1868-71. The Portiuncula indulgence has had questions raised concerning its authenticity since the thirteenth century. The controversy among scholars concerns the fact that it was first mentioned in print only in 1277, when it was finally promulgated by the papacy as an annual event. Was it kept a secret until this time? If so, was it because the indulgence would not only put the Portiuncula on par with the three greatest Christian shrines, but also damage enlistment in the crusades? Englebert believes Francis would have been reluctant to challenge the resentment among the clergy of the time who supported the crusades or served more important Marian churches than the Portiuncula. Francis may have requested his secretary, Br. Leo, to keep the promise of an annual indulgence a secret until the papacy was ready to proclaim it. Given the specificity of the testimony concerning the promulgation, and the popularity of the Portiuncula among laity such that the friars had to abandon the chapel in 1221, it seems that Francis and the local prelates promoted the devotion, but only with oral papal approval. See Englebert, *Saint Francis*, 209-11, 475-76; Virgilio Crispolti, *Le Crescenti glorie della Porziuncula* (S. Maria degli Angeli: Tip. Porz., 1930); Fortini, 381-85; Raphael M. Huber, *The Portiuncula Indulgence: From Honorius III to Pius XI* (New York: J. W. Wagner, 1938); and Joseph Nacua, "Simple Reflections on the Portiuncula," *Contact*, 12, n. 1 (1991): 5-13.

<sup>71</sup>1 Cel 18. 1 Cor 3.11.

<sup>72</sup>The same may be said a century earlier for the French Gothic cathedrals, albeit with a very different interpretation. See Otto von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral: Origins of Gothic Architecture & the Medieval Concept of Order* (Princeton: University Press, 1988), 35-37.

61-63). The interior of the chapel therefore repeats the arch of the cosmos and casts the visitor out under a vast night sky, beneath the constellations of the heavens, the abode of the angels and the saints (fig. 64).

At the Portiuncula, the meaning of the vault becomes specific when we consider the wilderness isolation of the chapel and its dedication to Mary and the angels. Not only does Mary carry the scriptural appellation as "Morning Star" and the "Star of the Sea," but also few Gospel narratives allow the starry sky to figure as strongly as the nativity where a bright star guides the magi, and angels appear out of the night sky before the shepherds to announce and glorify the birth of Jesus.<sup>73</sup> Francis' experience of the Portiuncula parallels these narratives:

For though he knew that the kingdom of heaven was set up in all the habitations of the land and believed that the grace of God was given to the elect of God in every place, he had however experienced that the place of the church of St. Mary of the Porziuncula was endowed with more fruitful graces and visited by heavenly spirits.<sup>74</sup>

According to the name of the church, which since ancient times was called St. Mary of the Angels, he felt that angels often visited there. So he took up residence there out of his reverence for the angels and his special love for the mother of Christ. The holy man loved this spot more than any other in the world. For here he began humbly, here he progressed steadily, here he ended happily. At his death he commended it to the friars as a place cherished by the Virgin.<sup>75</sup>

Francis also had a strong devotion to the angels. He

venerated with a very great affection the angels. . . . Such companions were everywhere with us, he used to say, and were to be venerated and invoked as our guardians . . . in choir [he said] we sing in the sight of the angels.<sup>76</sup>

Angels were present to Francis as intimate friends and guides throughout his life, and

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<sup>73</sup>Job 11.17, Amos 5.26; Mt 2.2-10; Rev 2.28, 22.16; Lk 2.1-40.

<sup>74</sup>1 Cel 106.

<sup>75</sup>LM 2.8.

<sup>76</sup>2 Cel 197, quoting, in part, Ps. 137.1. See ER 23.6 for Francis' invocation of the angel's names.

especially close when he was caught up in praises to God—appearing to him, for example, during his Mt. La Verna stigmatic rapture in 1224 (fig. 57). Angels took on special importance for Francis in connection to Mary. In the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, the key texts involving Mary also involve angels. The angel Gabriel appears to Mary face to face at the annunciation, Joseph has three angelic apparitions in dreams which change the course of his relationship with Mary, and the angels appear to the shepherds to announce the birth.<sup>77</sup> In his writings, Francis directly quotes the *angelus* prayer twice and he refers to the annunciation once.<sup>78</sup> His biographers paint a picture of a holy man delirious over anything to do with the nativity of Jesus. His mimed performance of the manger scene at Greccio has already been mentioned, and Celano notes that Francis defied Catholic tradition by holding Christmas to be a greater feast than Easter:

The birthday of the Child Jesus Francis observed with inexpressible eagerness over all other feasts, saying it was the feast of feasts, on which God, having become a tiny infant, clung to human breasts. . . . His compassion for the Child flooded his heart and made him stammer words of sweetness after the manner of infants.<sup>79</sup>

The Portiuncula gave first place to the annunciation, the original Gospel act of humility. Above the Portiuncula's altar still resides an early thirteenth-century fresco of the annunciation, designating this Gospel narrative as the one most associated with the chapel's dedication (fig. 65). As well, the altar antependium that Francis seems to have made around this time for the chapel at Cesi (a possible fourth church, now destroyed, that Francis repaired himself in the exact manner of the Portiuncula) was also inscribed with Gabriel's annunciation address: "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you."<sup>80</sup> A church dedicated to the annunciation—a tiny, poor, humble and abandoned church—could therefore be read not only as the room of Mary's annunciation, but also as her womb where, through the action of the Holy Spirit, Christ had his first residence outside of heaven. Moreover, when the Portiuncula

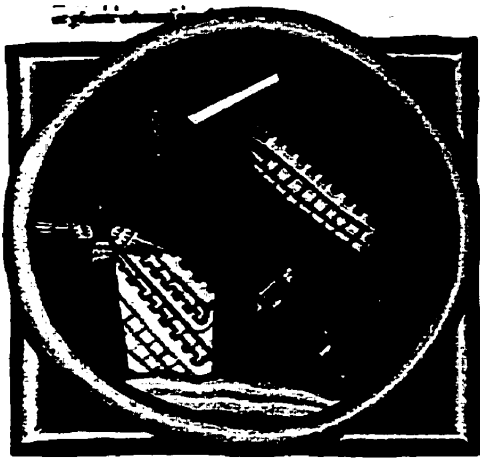
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<sup>77</sup>Mt 1.20, 2.13 and 2.19; Lk 1.26-38.

<sup>78</sup>Francis of Assisi, Office of the Passion, 15.8, in Armstrong, 80; *idem*, Exhortation to the Praise of God, 4, in Armstrong, 42; and *idem*, Letter to the Entire Order, 4, Armstrong, 55.

<sup>79</sup>2 Cel 199.

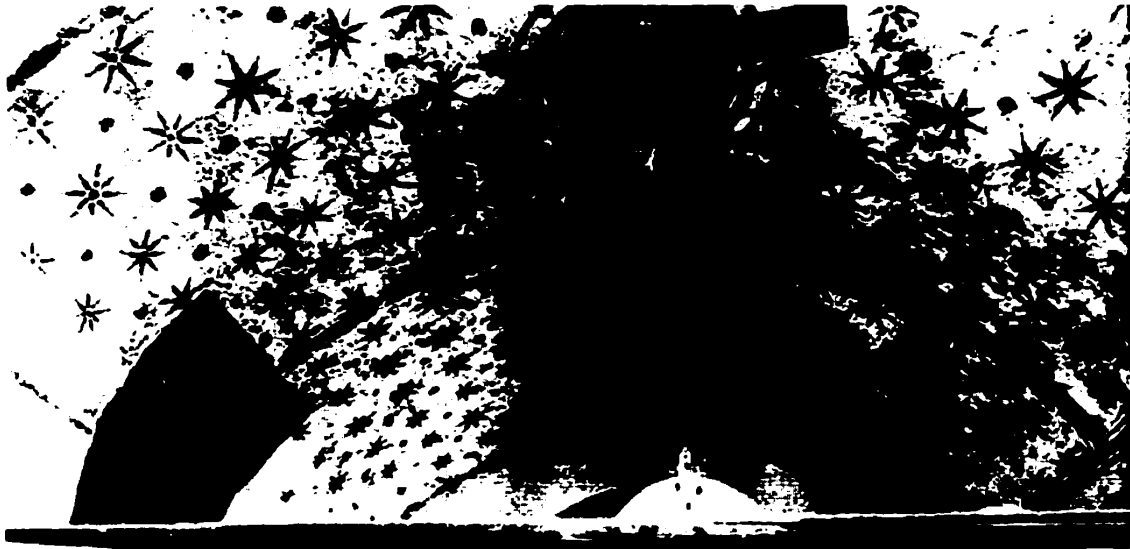
<sup>80</sup>Francis of Assisi, Exhortation to the Praise of God, in Armstrong, 42. The Gospel passage is Lk 1.28. The Cesi church was completely destroyed in the 1996 earthquake, and before I was able to document it. See chapter 5, note 109.



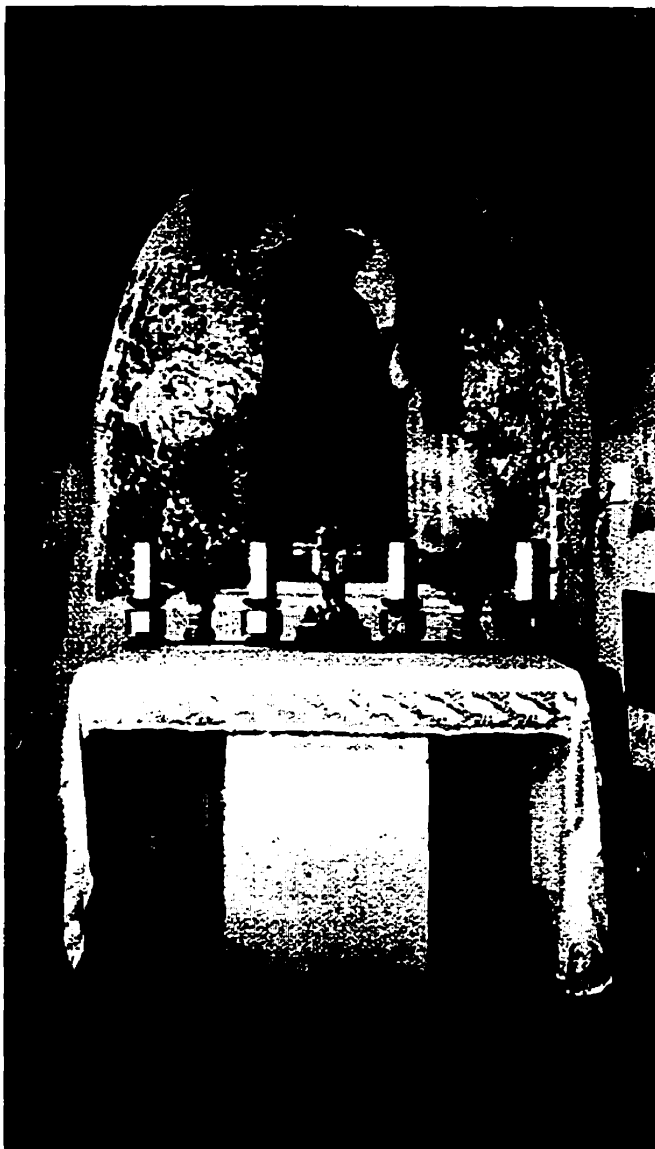
60. Vision of the edifice of salvation with Jesus as the *lapis angularis*. (Hildegard of Bingen. *Liber Scivias*. 12th c. *Hildegardis Scivias*. C.C.C. Cambridge Med. 43A.)

61. Interior of the Portiuncula showing sanctuary ceiling with stars in fresco. (Photo by author.)

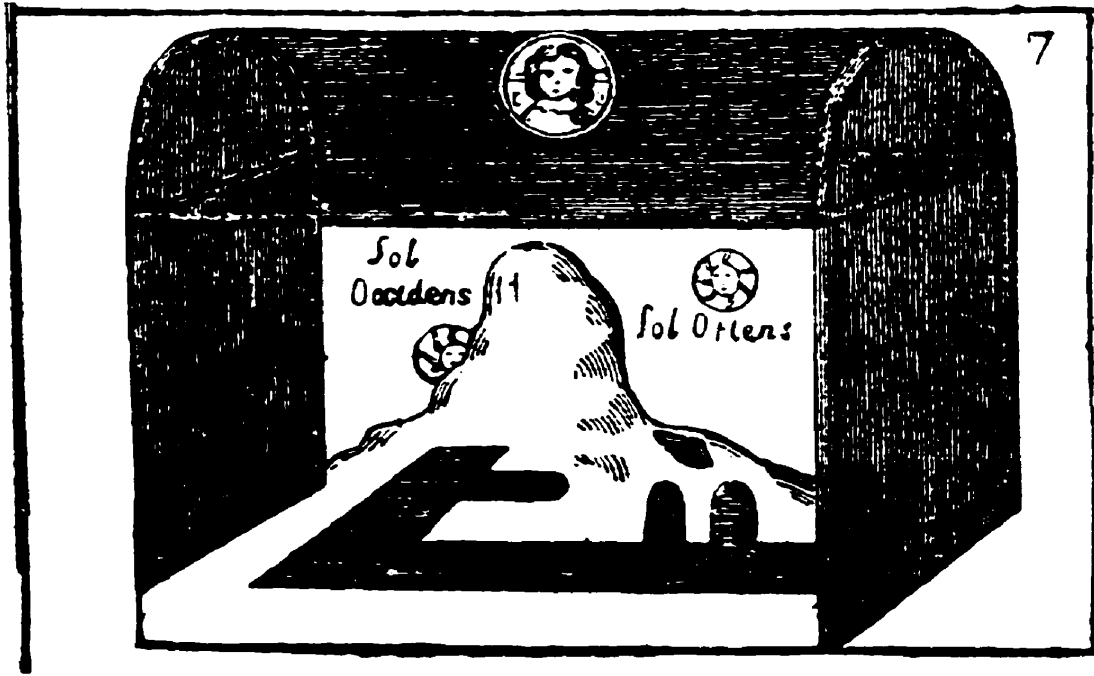




62. Chapel of S. Francesco, Greccio, Rieti (b. 1226). Interior showing fresco ceiling with stars. (From Salvatori, "Le prime sedi francescane," fig. 25.)

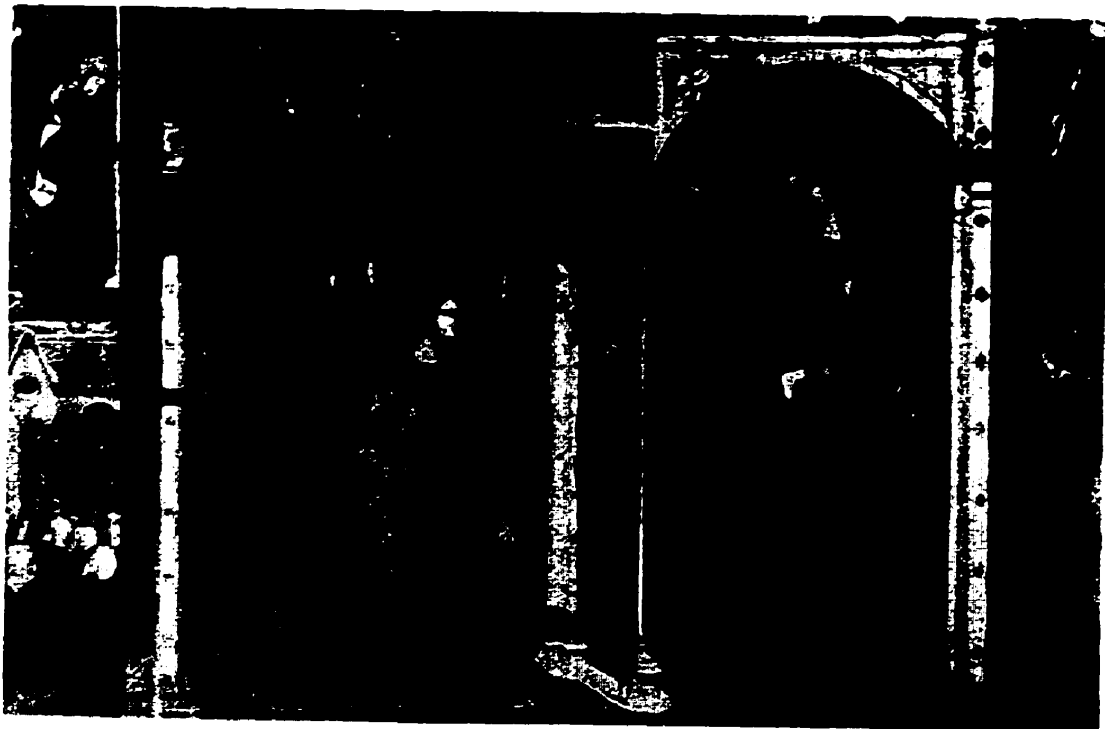


63. Oratory of St. Mary, Carceri, Mt. Subasio, Assisi (b. 1215-16). Interior with Umbrian school frescos showing starry sky on blue ceiling. (Photo by author.)



64. The universe-dwelling as seen by Comos Indicopleustes, 6th c. (MS. Plut. 9.28 fol. 95v [10th c.] Bib. Medicea Laurenziana, Florence, Italy. As reproduced in McDannel and Lang, *Heaven: A History*, 56.)

65. Fresco of the Annunciation (13th c.), above altar in the Portiuncula Chapel, Assisi. (Photo by author.)



received its new vault, it could once again house the daily liturgy of the eucharist, which, in Francis' view, was a re-enactment of the incarnation: "See, daily He humbles Himself," Francis said referring to Christ in the eucharist, "as when He came from the royal throne into the womb of the Virgin."<sup>81</sup>

The annunciation underlined Mary's mystical union with God such that, for Francis, she could be called the "Spouse of the Holy Spirit"—an almost unheard of term before Francis' time.<sup>82</sup> The Portiuncula may therefore be simultaneously read as the betrothal chamber of Mary and the Holy Spirit, a marriage rapturously reenacted in the reception of holy communion by the communicant. In a letter to his order, Francis emphasized how the "angels desire to gaze upon" communion recipients who hold in their hands him whom the Virgin carried in her womb (fig. 66).<sup>83</sup> When a believer consumes the host he or she thus becomes a Mary. "We are spouses when the faithful soul is joined to Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit," Francis declared. "We are mothers when we carry Him in our heart and body through love and a pure and sincere conscience; we give birth to Him through His holy manner of working, which should shine before others as an example."<sup>84</sup>

The indwelling action of the Spirit, according to the theology of the day, resulted in an outflowing grace, which Mary exemplified in her ancient role as mediatrix, the womb and church *in via*. Bernard of Clairvaux was one of the earliest writers to clarify this title by speaking of Mary as the "one through whom we ascend to Him who descended through her to us . . . so that through [her] He who through [her] was given to us might take us up to Himself."<sup>85</sup> Likewise, for Peter Damian, she was, "the Gate of Paradise, which restored God to the world and opened heaven for us."<sup>86</sup> And a verse recited at the Saturday Marian masses, and during the nativity mass, emphasized the construction of such a gate out of the material

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<sup>81</sup>Admonitions, 14, in Armstrong, 25.

<sup>82</sup>Office of the Passion, compline, in Armstrong, 80. The first known use of the term "Spouse of the Holy spirit" comes from Cosmas Vestitor in the tenth century; only three other references have been found between the time of Cosmas and that of Francis, all of which come from German and French monasteries. Cf. Schmucki, "Blessed Virgin Mary," 254-55 and notes.

<sup>83</sup>A Letter to the Entire Order, 21-22, in Armstrong, 57.

<sup>84</sup>Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful, 48-53, Armstrong, 66; Schmucki, "Blessed Virgin Mary," 224.

<sup>85</sup>St. Bernard, Homily no. 2, *In Missus Est*, cited in Mabillon, ed. *Life and Works of Saint Bernard* (London, 1976), 3:315-16.

<sup>86</sup>*Sermo*, 46 in *PL* 144, 752 B-D.

of humility, saying, "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!"<sup>87</sup> Francis understood that Mary's role as mediatrix was predicated on her humility, just as Jesus, for Francis, "was a poor man and a transient and lived on alms—He and the Blessed Virgin, and His disciples."<sup>88</sup> Mother and child with Joseph were the refugee family on flight to Egypt, and Jesus later claimed to have "no place to lay his head."<sup>89</sup> Mary's humble physical transience brought about the interior effectiveness of the holy exchange, the divine downward and upward movement through her womb. This action, in Francis' words, inspired her embrace of poverty:

Through His angel St. Gabriel the most high Father announced this Word of the Father—so worthy, so holy and glorious, in the womb of the holy and glorious Virgin Mary, from which He received the flesh of humanity and our frailty. Though He was rich beyond all other things in this world, He, together with the most blessed Virgin, His mother, willed to choose poverty.<sup>90</sup>

A fervent interest in Mary's poverty was engendered among twelfth-century hermits. Peter Damian commemorated the place of the nativity and wrote that Mary "abounded in a lack of temporal things."<sup>91</sup> One of Francis' contributions to Marian devotion was the popularization of this belief. It seemed natural to Francis to associate poverty with both the annunciation and the nativity. Mary's *fiat* implied for Francis choosing the poverty of the nativity with a free will such that he "would recall, not without tears, what great want surrounded the poor Virgin on that day."<sup>92</sup> For Francis the poverty of the holy family was ever present: "When you see a poor man, brother, an image is placed before you of the Lord and His poor mother."<sup>93</sup> "In all the poor he saw the Son of the poor lady, he bore naked in his heart Him who she bore naked in her hands."<sup>94</sup> Likewise, Francis considered the Portiuncula

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<sup>87</sup>Cited in Elspeth Latimer, "Jerusalem Above, Our Mother" (unpublished dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1987), 31.

<sup>88</sup>ER 9.35, Armstrong, 107.

<sup>89</sup>Mt 2.14; 8.20; Lk 9.58.

<sup>90</sup>Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful, 4, in Armstrong, 67.

<sup>91</sup>Sermo 12 in *Nativitate Beatae Mariae Virginis*, PL 144, 747d; Schmucki, "Blessed Virgin Mary," 220-24.

<sup>92</sup> Cel 200.

<sup>93</sup> Cel 85.

<sup>94</sup> Cel 83.



to be the exemplary *locus* of Mary's poverty, more than once stripping "Mary's altar" and "Mary's ornaments" to give them to the poor.<sup>95</sup> As the Franciscan order grew so did the devotion to Mary's poverty in sermons, prayers and a diverse pictorial tradition fostered by the Franciscans depicting the Madonna of Humility, among other Marian titles (fig. 67).

If, on the exterior, the Portiuncula may have alluded to a tabernacle, the little house of Mary's annunciation or the tiny nativity stable, the interior of Francis' unornamented stone vault, rising continuously from the almost windowless stone walls, plunges the visitor into a cave. Moreover, if we were to read the gentle pointing of its vault as a reference to Holy Land architecture, as this form was understood in Francis' time, then the Portiuncula's interior would be adhering to the historical details of the annunciation and the nativity.<sup>96</sup>

There had been a wave of Byzantine influence upon the Roman church two centuries earlier. It brought with it interpretations, which, while departing from the canonical Gospels, held true with respect to the biblical landscape, sacred sites and oral tradition of the East. For example, the stories that Christ was born in a cavern rather than in a stable of an inn, that he was buried in a cave rather than a stone tomb and that he ascended from a stone recess on top of the Mount of Olives, are interpretations based on Eastern Christian speculation on the Septuagintal text of Isaiah 33.16ff: "He shall dwell in the lofty cave of a strong rock. Bread shall be given him, and his water [shall be] sure. You shall see the king with glory."<sup>97</sup> The early Christian writers planted this lofty cave in the wilderness, fed it with redemptive waters and saw it blossom into the flower of Christian sacramental salvation.<sup>98</sup> Once the cave of Isaiah was linked to the waters of salvation, an entire theology of caves, associated exclusively with Eastern Christianity, eventually collated and interpreted various biblical passages to support a cave location for the key narratives of Christ's life. Constantine (d. 337) was the first to express this architecturally. Christ's victory over the cave *cultus* of the pagan

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<sup>95</sup>2 Cel 18, 67; 1 Cel 22-23, 106; LM 2.8; SL 10, 56.

<sup>96</sup>Local Umbrian forerunners of this shape of vault are very few. See Romanini, "Il francescanesimo nell'arte," 181-95. The use of the pointed arch in Moorish architecture in Spain and southern France seems to have been adopted by the French Cistercian monasteries, not in the least due to their historical interest in Jesus and all things Oriental. See J. Bony, "French Influences on the Origin of English Architecture." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XII (1949).

<sup>97</sup>The reading "in a lofty cave" is found neither in the Hebrew Bible nor the Vulgate. This prophecy was referred to in Pseudo-Barnabus (11.9), in Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Typho* (lxx) and in the *Proto-evangelium* (21.3) ascribed to James, the brother of the Lord.

<sup>98</sup>Justin Martyr, *Dialogue*, lxix.

world was marked by new basilicas built over the Grotto of Nativity in Bethlehem, the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and over the "very cave [on the Mount of Olives] where the Saviour imparted his secret revelations to his disciples."<sup>99</sup> By the end of Constantine's reign, the key pilgrimage shrines within the Holy Land included Lazarus' cave of resurrection in Bethany, the caves of Elijah on Mount Carmel and Abraham in the valley of Mamre, as well as the cave of Mary's birth and another of her annunciation.

The Eastern cave tradition in architecture, theology and liturgy seemed to completely displace the biblical account of Christ's birth in a stable—especially after the Isaianic prophecy became aligned with a reference from Daniel concerning a stone section cut out from the mountain.<sup>100</sup> Mary's womb then became both the lofty cave and a provisional paradise:

Today the Virgin gives birth to the Creator of all;  
The Grotto brings forth Paradise.<sup>101</sup>

So runs the eighth-century Christmas hymn. The same hymnal exclaims: "Bethlehem has opened Eden. . . . Come, let us receive in the Cave that which is of Paradise."<sup>102</sup>

An explicit architectural identity continued to be applied to Mary in the Christian West. Hippolytus of Rome (d. 235) understood her as the "Refuge of the Afflicted," the "Home of the King," and the "Gate of Heaven, and Ark." Alexander of Alexandria (d. 328), compares Mary's virginity to the closed eastern gate of Ezekiel's temple, and described her as

the stainless jewel of virginity, the rational paradise of the second Adam, the workshop of the unity of the natures [of Christ], the scene of the saving contract, the bridal chamber, in which the Word espoused the flesh, the living bush, which was not burnt by the fire

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<sup>99</sup>*Little Apocalypse in Life of Constantine*, iii, 41 and 43; in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (New York, 1890), I, 530ff. Neither Mt 24.3 nor the accounts in Mk 16.19, Lk 24.50 or Acts 1.1 mention any cave on the Mount. The cave over which the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre rose, designated the place of vertical descent of Christ's three days into hell, and was previously occupied by a shrine of a dying and rising god, Tammuz-Adonis. Williams, *Wilderness and Paradise*, 37.

<sup>100</sup>Mt 2.11; Dan 2.45.

<sup>101</sup>Hymn of Germanos for the Vespers of the Feast of Christmas; *Menologion* (Athens), XII (December, 1904), 307. That the cave with its cradle was thought of theologically as being located in the wilderness, though it was located in Bethlehem, is borne out by a sticheron in the liturgy for December 26; *Men.*, XII, 319.

<sup>102</sup>*Men.*, XII, 312.



66. Angels holding a monstrance with the host: initial of the Corpus Christi mass. (Cambridge, Trinity College B. II. II, fol. 197rb. Sacrum missal of c. 1430.)



67. Madonna of Humility. Attributed to Masaccio, c. 1425. (National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., Andrew Mellon Collection. From Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, fig. 23.)

of the divine birth, the truly light cloud that bore him who is above the cherubim together with his body, the fleece cleansed by the dew from heaven . . . servant and mother, virgin and heaven, the only bridge between God and men, the awesome loom . . . on which the garment of union was woven (fig. 68).<sup>103</sup>

After the council of Ephesus in 431 proclaimed Mary *Theotokos*, many pagan shrines to feminine deities became rededicated to the "Mother of God," one of the earliest being the Pantheon in Rome, attributed to Mary and the martyrs. It became the house of all of the holy imitators of Mary's son beneath the cosmic womb of the temple's dome, whose oculus, or *omphalos* (navel), opened to the heavens.<sup>104</sup>

With the full adoption of the Christian religion by the Roman empire, the building of

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<sup>103</sup>PG 23, 231. Ezk 44.2. As cited in Latimer, 8.

<sup>104</sup>See Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, 109-10. A full exploration of the significance of Mary, gates, caves and architecture has to begin with the great feminine deities of the West. For instance, the third-millennium BCE myth and hymn cycles of the Sumerian fertility goddess Inanna depict her as bearer of all plant, animal and human fertility; architecturally she is typically associated with the elements of passage: gates, ladders, windows, bridges and caverns to the netherworld. She is both the bride and the bridal chamber for her lover Dumuzi, whose embrace causes food to pour forth from her. As "lady of the date clusters," her earliest emblem is a gatepost with a rolled up mat to serve as the door of the date storehouse. See Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1976), 34-36; H. and H.A. Frankfort, John A. Wilson and Thorkild Jacobsen, *Before Philosophy: The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man* (1946; reprint ed., Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1963), 180-82, 207, 214-15, 224; and David Kinsley, *The Goddess Mirror* (New York: University Press, 1989), 114. In the Akkadian myth, "Ishtar's Descent to the Underworld," Inanna (as Ishtar) is compelled to go among the dead, but must pass through seven gates, each of which strips her of an article of her royal jewellery and raiment, until she is finally left naked, humiliated and hung on a peg to rot. After three days of mourning, the gods rescue her with the waters of life and she passes back through the gates, retrieving her clothing at each one and thereby initiating the next growing season. Her reliance on the waters of life accrued to Inanna a great deal of watery symbolism including responsibility for the flood waters in a section of the Epic of Gilgamesh, the Mesopotamian precursor to the story of Noah's flood in Genesis 6-8. William W. Hallo and J.J.A. van Dijk, *The Exaltation of Inanna* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 15-19; Pritchard, 581. James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. (Princeton: University Press, 1969), 108, 383, 644. See also the updated translation in, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh and Others*, trans. and intro. by Stephanie Dalley (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 155-162. Her adornment, an important part of her cult and worship, is subordinated to her sacrificial death and passage among the dead in order to bring about fertility, so longed for after the darkness of winter. Inanna was considered queen of heaven and earth whose authority was specifically over the ranks of the gods and the natural world below. In her royal position she was sometimes associated with the evening star and other celestial bodies including the moon. Nevertheless, her role among the heavenly court was less the distribution of political order and justice as was the case for male deities, and more as a personal advocate who was compassionate and merciful and often petitioned by those in dire need. Jacobsen, *Treasures*, 237; Kinsley, *Goddess Mirror*, 135-37.

churches dedicated to Mary shifted the emphasis from her desert humility to her identity as *Regina*, queen of heaven. For example, four hymns from the twelfth century explicitly evoke Mary's royalty: "Regina Caeli," "Ave Regina Caelorum," "Alma Redemptoris Mater," and "Salve Regina." In the early twelfth century, the Neoplatonic speculation of the Chartres Platonists depicted Mary as Wisdom incarnate, the *Sedes Sapientiae*—just as she was later carved on their cathedral's tympanum enthroned and enclosing her son, the Divine Logos, in her lap.<sup>105</sup> In the cathedrals rising across Europe bearing Mary's new feudal title of Our Lady, *Notre Dame*, she finally became the royal enclosure of illumination itself.

Francis' devotion to Mary resonates with an architectural imagery that bridges both Eastern and Western Christian traditions. For instance, in his *Salutations to the Blessed Virgin Mary* he trumpeted,

Hail, O Lady,  
     holy Queen,  
     Mary, holy Mother of God:  
     you are the virgin made church . . .  
     in whom there was and is  
         all the fullness of grace and every good,  
 Hail, His Palace!  
 Hail, His Tabernacle!  
 Hail, His Home!  
 Hail, His Robe!  
 Hail, His Servant!  
 Hail, His Mother!<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup>e.g., Fulbert of Chartres, in his *Sermo VI* (PL 141, 328) speaks of the "queen of all wise virgins." The second and third archivolts of the Incarnation tympanum on the north facade of Chartres Cathedral depicts the Wise and Foolish Virgin, indicating Mary as the supreme example of wisdom. In the Incarnation tympanum at Laon cathedral the Virgin is represented as Theotokos, the *Sedes Sapientiae*, underneath a canopy. See Adolf Katzenellenbogen, *The Sculptural Programs of Chartres Cathedral* (New York: Norton, 1959), 15, 66-67.

Mary's wisdom, in her role as *Advocata*, inspired a theological merger of Mary and Sophia, beginning with her liturgical association in the ninth century with the Wisdom texts, Proverbs and Ecclesiasticus 24.9: "From eternity, in the beginning, He created me."

<sup>106</sup>Francis of Assisi, *Salutations to the Blessed Virgin Mary*, in Armstrong, 149-50.

Few authors of Francis' time have so concisely covered the range of architectural symbolism that could be associated with Mary.<sup>107</sup> From palace, to tabernacle, to home, to robe, to servant to mother: Francis poetically shrinks the grandest architectural gesture into the space of her womb. As the spatial references of the metaphors decrease in size, so do all the possible readings of a Marian church such as the Portiuncula become contained in the image of the humblest womb-like cave. For Francis, however, the multiple readings were meant to reinforce, not negate, one another: the palace is still contained in the mother, just as the contents of the memory harmonize and compact into the simplest symbolic *res*.

Few Gospel scenes outside of the eucharistic "Do this in memory of me" were as strong an incitement to mnemonic practice as the annunciation. Mary heard Gabriel's annunciation and pondered it, just as she considered "in her heart" the angels' announcement to the shepherds at the nativity.<sup>108</sup> Mary's pondering became the primary exemplar and *locus* of mnemonic practice for contemplatives from the desert anchorites of the fourth century to the Italian hermits of the twelfth.<sup>109</sup> Peter Damian wrote that "Mary conceived Christ in her bodily womb, likewise, we bear Him about in the womb of our mind."<sup>110</sup> With Mary in her annunciation and nativity cave as she is in her heart, penitent Christians were offered a series of mnemonic *loci* wherein to place the sacred mysteries in their own hearts (fig. 69). "Behold these innumerable fields and dens and caves of my memory . . ." says Augustine.<sup>111</sup> For the hermit Francis, building a cave to contemplate with Mary doubled as that in which Jesus himself would pray, because, as Francis believed, "The Lord, when he was in the hermit's cave [*carcere*], when he prayed and fasted forty days and forty nights, did not have a cell or any building made there but stayed on the mountain under a stone."<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>107</sup>In another Marian prayer, Francis relies on Peter Damian for his architectural imagery; cf. Francis' Office of the Passion, Armstrong, 81-82 and Damian's *Sermo*, 46, *PL* 144, 753c and 761ab.; as cited in Schmucki, "Blessed Virgin Mary," 207, n. 30.

<sup>108</sup>Lk 1.29, 2.14-19. The incitement is based on the heart, typically considered the seat of the memory, upon which Mary would contemplate.

<sup>109</sup>For instance, the hermit Carthusian order, founded in the Chartreuse mountains of the French Alps near Grenoble the eleventh century, dedicated itself to the Virgin and prescribed that each member have a Marian oratory for contemplation situated in the first room of their cells.

<sup>110</sup>*Sermo*, 45 *PL* 144, 747 B.

<sup>111</sup>St. Augustine, *Confessions*, X, ix. This harkens to Mt 13.44 concerning the parable of finding a treasure (the memory contents) buried in a field. Both St. Augustine's and Hugh of St. Victor's references to the *cavus* or *antrum* of the memory are part a tradition goes back at least to Quintillian's *Institutio oratoria*, x, 3, 25 and 30.

<sup>112</sup>SL, 13; 2 Cel 59; *carcere*, in this case, probably derives from the *carcer* mentioned in Mt 4.1-2. Cf. 1 Cel 71, 122; LM 10.3.

We are now within the realm of Francis' architectural poetics. Francis demonstrates through the Portiuncula renovation that metaphor, the basis of poetics, is essential to the ethical aim of memory.<sup>113</sup> According to Paul Ricoeur, metaphor brings a verbal motion to a noun by substituting for an absent but available ordinary word.<sup>114</sup> At the outset, then, ethics and metaphor share the same substituting function: neither impose a new order except by creating rifts in the old.<sup>115</sup> By raising a vault where a timber gabled roof would have more easily done the job, Francis substituted the ideal for the real without creating an entirely new building. The combination of a relatively lofty vault on such a small plan, and in an otherwise abandoned forest, heightens our awareness through their tension. If medieval ethics required a well constructed memory, where the good deeds of the ancients were not simply verbalized but embodied, practiced and ultimately demonstrated in the world, metaphor similarly requires the work of an inventive mind that can permit the ideal and the real to coexist in one place. This coexistence extends the possible meanings of a noun, as ethics extends the possible responses to a given situation. When different things or concepts are brought together, the metaphor, like ethics, sets the situation in motion; an unforgettable image is painted, a memorable action is done. A creation that preserves this tension permits revelation.

If the crucifixion was keyed for Francis, as I believe, to the *tau* as a mnemonic *res*, then the nativity may have been similarly conveyed by the Portiuncula. As his words and example became the rule for those who joined him, the challenge facing Francis was to sustain the poetic tension of the *tau* and the Portiuncula as a shared vision within the fragility of community life and its architectural needs.

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<sup>113</sup>Metaphor, argues Paul Ricoeur, is at the basis of poetics: the poem in miniature. *The Rule of Metaphor: Multidisciplinary Studies of the Creation and Meaning of Language*, trans. Robert Czerny (Toronto: University Press, 1977), 222.

<sup>114</sup>Ricoeur, *Rule of Metaphor*, 16-20. His definition springs from metaphor as defined by Aristotle in his *Poetics* 1457 b 6-9.

<sup>115</sup>Ricoeur, *Rule of Metaphor*, 22.



68. The Virgin. Queen of Hell. 14th c. (From Warner. *Alone of All Her Sex*. fig. 48. Copyright British Public Library.)

69. John Climacus and fellow hermits praying in *orans* prayer position within a cave. John Climacus. Chapter V. 11th c. (Rome: Lib., Bibl. Vatican. gr. 394. fol. 12ro.)







## The Forms of Itinerancy

### *a. The Habit of Penance*

After beginning the work on the Portiuncula in 1206, Francis heard a passage on poverty from the Gospel of Matthew and decided to renovate his eremitic practice under its inspiration.

But when, on a certain day the Gospel was read in that church, how the Lord sent his disciples out to preach, the holy man of God, assisting there, understood somewhat the words of the Gospel; after mass he humbly asked the priest to explain the Gospel to him more fully. When he had set forth for him in order all these things, the holy Francis, hearing that the disciples of Christ should not possess gold or silver or money nor carry along the way scrip, or wallet, or bread, or a staff, that they should not have shoes or two tunics but that they should preach the kingdom of God and penance, immediately cried out exultantly, "This is what I wish, this is what I seek, this is what I long to do with all my heart."<sup>1</sup>

While Celano places the site of this decision at the Portiuncula, his early companions place it at San Damiano.<sup>2</sup> Since the Portiuncula was abandoned until Francis arrived, the latter seems a more probable site.<sup>3</sup>

Celano writes that Francis committed all that he heard in the Gospel that day "to praiseworthy memory" and tried to carry it out "to the letter."<sup>4</sup> Given Francis' image-based

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<sup>1</sup>1 Cel 22. The Gospel passage is Mt. 10.9.

<sup>2</sup>3 Soc 25.

<sup>3</sup>Test 24; SL 9, 12. Only S. Damiano at the time had a priest in residence who Francis knew well. By moving this event to the Portiuncula, however, Celano was recognizing that this was where Francis, by all accounts, was living at the time.

<sup>4</sup>1 Cel 22.

memory, it is not surprising that he should be inspired by such a concrete description of the apostles' style of life.

[Francis] immediately put off the shoes from his feet, put aside the staff from his hands, was content with one tunic, and exchanged his leather belt for a small cord. He designed for himself a tunic that bore a likeness to the cross, that by means of it he might beat off all temptations of the devil; he designed a very rough tunic so that he might crucify the flesh with all its vices and sins; he designed a very poor and mean tunic, one that would not excite the covetousness of the world.<sup>5</sup>

The habit was, according to numerous eyewitness reports, far from the norm for religious attire of the day (figs. 26, 27, 70).<sup>6</sup> A number of non-Franciscan reports mention that he was always barefoot and the *tau*-shaped tunic, with its rope belt, was of the very poorest cloth or sackcloth. The description in the Dominican breviary of ca. 1254, for instance, mentions that the tunic was of coarse wool which served him as clothing by day and bedding at night, thus forcing Francis to beat it with a stick in order to rid it of vermin.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, "abjection, poverty and meanness of apparel" soon became the signifying *habitus sanctae conversationis* of his followers.<sup>8</sup>

In replacing the hermit's leather belt with a rope, Francis may have been mimicking the

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<sup>5</sup>1 Cel 22.

<sup>6</sup>See Esser, 96-104. "They went about barefoot and different from others in the form of their habit." *Martyrium quinque fratrum*, 207, as cited in Esser, 99. Note, however, that Blessed John the Good, founder of the hermits of Budriolo, was known to appear in a single thin grey tunic, hood, bare legs and bare feet, but sometimes with special wooden shoes designed for mortification. Schmucki, "Place of Solitude," 92, n. 163.

<sup>7</sup>This story is from a liturgical reading in the *Breviary of the Order of Preachers* which, in turn, relies upon Apostolic Notary John, *Quasi stella matutina*, found in *AF X*, 533-35; cited in Esser, *Origins*, 97.

<sup>8</sup>From a 1228 sermon by the (non-Franciscan) Cardinal James of Vitry; see Hilarinus (Felder) a Lucerna, "Jacobi Vitriacensis Sermones ad Fratres Minores," in *Analecta Ordinis Minorum Capuccinorum* 19 (1903): 158, 153 and 115. James of Vitry's authenticity is noted by G. Schreiber in *Gemeinschaften des Mittelalters* (Münster in Westfalen, 1948), calling James, "one of the most sensitive observers of the canonical and monastic life of the world around him" (402). See also Esser, 11, 97-99, 101.

Possibly the earliest accounts of voluntarily wearing a single garment and going barefoot in the Western tradition come from the Cynic and Pythagorean groups of fifth-century BCE Greece. Their attire was a mark of poverty, humiliation, and political rebellion, and useful for philosophers, from Socrates to Origen, to attract many pupils. J.N. Bremmer, "Symbols of Marginality from Early Pythagoreans to Late Antique Monks," *Greece & Rome* 39, no. 2 (1992): 206-07.

rope belt depicted in the image of Christ which spoke to him in S. Damiano (fig. 11). All of the earliest illustrations of Francis, and many of his biographical accounts, portray him barefoot and bearded in the manner of that same image (figs. 37, 38, 56). The rope belt, moreover, was a well-known symbol of penance in ascetic circles—a symbol which Francis used, for instance, in a sermon-performance where he had his brothers lead him by a rope, like a criminal, through Assisi for the sin of eating some meat (fig. 16).<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the entire garb was considered a *cilicium induti*, a habit of penance or *metànoia*, signifying its role in the healing of body and soul through denial of the flesh.<sup>10</sup> Celano, for instance, tells of a visit Francis made to a sick friar who was wearing a fur for warmth. Francis cured him by ordering him to take off the fur and don his proper habit, saying, "Observe your Rule and you will be cured."<sup>11</sup>

Francis writes in his Testament that the friars "were satisfied with one habit, patched inside and out, and a cord and trousers."<sup>12</sup> The patching or *repeciare* calls to mind the approach Francis had to the churches he was working on (fig. 70).<sup>13</sup> Upon a consecrated foundation, the churches were never added to, but mended in such a way as to preserve, if not augment, their simplicity. The habit became the distinguishing mark of the Franciscan friars; it was their only tunic, indeed, the only item they owned personally which could never be added to, but had to be repaired with care for the maintenance of its utter simplicity.<sup>14</sup>

Francis' sartorial creativity was manifest in his youth. The son of a fine-cloth merchant was well known in his younger days for both expensive and eccentric "soft and flowing garments," well beyond what "was warranted by his social position."<sup>15</sup> He knew the social impact of attire. Given the simplicity of his final habit, its performative *tau* symbolism, and the trinity of its parts (tunic, rope belt and trousers), the entire ensemble served as a striking

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<sup>9</sup>1 Cel 52, LP 39, MP 61; LM 8; cf. Jn 21.18. A rope belt became the distinguishing iconographic element in depictions of Francis and his followers. See Rona Goffen, *Spirituality in Conflict: St. Francis and Giotto's Bardi Chapel* (University Park and London, Penn State Press, 1988), 96, n. 23.

<sup>10</sup>Cf. Pazzelli, *St. Francis and the Third Order*, 90; Esser, 96-104.

<sup>11</sup>1 Cel 145. Although there are three known versions of the Rule for the order (in 1209, 1221 and 1223), Francis considered them all as one Rule.

<sup>12</sup>Test 16.

<sup>13</sup>Concerning S. Damiano, in 1 Cel 18, *reparat, resarcit*; and, concerning the Portiuncula, in 1 Cel 21, *reparasset*.

<sup>14</sup>The tunic of Christ in Jn 19.23-24 was seamless and valuable enough that the soldiers at the crucifixion threw lots for it. Either Francis ignored this description, or his adherence to the penitential way of life based on poverty espoused by Christ took precedence.

<sup>15</sup>1 Cel 2; 3 Soc 2. Cf. Manselli, *St. Francis*, 28-61.

memory image for observers, while serving as the only home, the only contemplative cell, for its itinerant bearer.

He always sought a hidden place where he could adapt not only his whole being, but all his members to God. When he suddenly felt himself visited by the Lord in public, lest he be without a cell, he made a cell of his mantle. At times when he did not have a mantle, he would cover his face with his sleeve, so that he would not disclose the "hidden manna." Always he put something between himself and the bystanders, lest they should become aware of the bridegroom's touch. Thus he could pray unseen even among many people in the narrow confines of a ship.<sup>16</sup>

Francis was discovering a more public direction for his life. The careful and unique construction of his tunic may be considered the first architectural construction for a new type of Christian service he was envisioning. From an observer's point of view, Francis presented an image of both Christ, in beard, bare feet, and single poor tunic, and His crucifying cross or *tau*, from the cut of his garment. From the wearer's perspective, however, the simplicity and coarseness of the tunic embodied a desire for penitential healing. It was his only possession, and often his only shelter when on the road. His habit was, literally, the church *in via*. "Wherever we are," said Francis, "wherever we go, we bring our cell with us."<sup>17</sup>

While he was still dwelling at the Portiuncula, Francis was asked to preach at San Giorgio. If, as Raffaele Pazzelli believes, Francis honed his theological thinking between 1206 and 1208, then part of that formation could be attributed to the regular canons of S. Giorgio, who risked much in promoting to their own pulpit this bearded, barefoot and poorly clad church repairer and friend of the lepers.<sup>18</sup> The canons were exponents of both lay preaching and the penitential movement that was gaining momentum in the towns of northern and central Italy.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Cel 94.

<sup>17</sup>SL 80, LP 80, MP 65. Note that the priestly vestment called the "chasuble" comes from the Latin *casula* meaning the "little house".

<sup>18</sup>Pazzelli, *St. Francis and the Third Order*, 90-92.

<sup>19</sup>Among their ranks were Robert of Arbrissel (d. 1117), Bernard of Thiron (d. 1117), Gerard of Salles (d. 1120), Vitalis of Savigny (d. 1122), Norbert of Xanten (d. 1134), all of whom became barefoot, poorly clothed, bearded itinerant preachers dedicated to an ideal of an *ecclesia primitiva*. Pazzelli, *St. Francis and the Third Order*, 46-48; and C.H. Lawrence, *The Friars: The Impact of the Early Mendicant Movement on Western Society* (London, NY: Longmans, 1994), 203.

That Francis could officially preach at a pulpit, without direct papal approval, indicates that probably during his two or three years of renovating churches Francis was ordained a deacon of the church. By accepting to be one who preached but had limited sacramental function, Francis could imitate Jesus who preached in the temples but was not a priest himself.

The resemblance to Jesus would continue after S. Giorgio, when Francis continued to preach itinerantly in town squares and to any group he met along the road, returning to the Portiuncula at night.<sup>20</sup> James of Vitry's *Historia occidentalis* (ca. 1219) describes an atmosphere in the early thirteenth century unusually favourable to preaching of any kind, where almost any charismatic speaker seems to have had a chance of winning a dedicated following.<sup>21</sup> Precursors of Francis' itinerant preaching in the late twelfth century include Peter Waldo and the Waldensians, Durandus of Huesca and the Poor Catholics, Bernard Primus and the Poor Lombards, the Cathars and the Humiliati, all of whom sought a reform of the church through various forms of penance, poverty, an adherence to the actual words of Christ in the Gospels, and mobility for the sake of spreading doctrine. The ecclesial status of these groups fluctuated between approval from Rome and denunciation as heretics.<sup>22</sup>

Inspired by the Gospel passage from Matthew he heard in 1208, the aim of Francis' preaching was to inspire penance. Early documents reveal Francis at this time as an active member of the central Italian penitential movement, and one who took great interest in its genesis (figs. 55, 71).<sup>23</sup> The movement was growing at such a rate that the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 was forced to develop the first medieval legislation concerning the degrees of penance. In 1209 when Francis founded his First Order of brothers, the Friars Minor, he introduced them to Pope Innocent III as "penitents from Assisi." He also founded a Third Order of lay brothers and sisters, married or single, who lived a religious life in their own homes. Francis called this group the "Brothers and Sisters of Penance," and they later called themselves the *Poenitentes beati Francisci*.<sup>24</sup> By 1215, with his First Order numbering in the

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<sup>20</sup>1 Cel 24, 78, and VE 1. The Portiuncula, during these early years, was the place where Francis "was to be found." 1 Cel 178. Cf. Brentano, "Early Franciscans," 41.

<sup>21</sup>James of Vitry, *Historia occidentalis*, in Lemmens, *Testamonia minora*, 81-84. See also D'Avray, *Preaching of the Friars*, 1-63; and, Pazzelli, *St. Francis and the Third Order*, 46-48.

<sup>22</sup>Lambert, *Medieval Heresy*, 35-171. Francis seems consistently to have sought orthodox advice and approval for major decisions in his order.

<sup>23</sup>Pazzelli, *St. Francis and the Third Order*, 87-99.

<sup>24</sup>3 Soc 37. Saint Francis' Letter to All the Faithful has generally been understood less as a letter to all Christians than as a personal directive to the "Brothers and Sisters of Penance." See Cajetan Esser, "La lettera di san Francesco ai Fedeli," in Octavian Schmucki, ed. *L'Ordine della Penitenza di*

hundreds and spreading out across central Italy, Pazzelli notes a similar increase in the number of penitents in the urban centres of Italy; he ascribes the increase to the influence of the Franciscans preaching by word and example.<sup>25</sup> Within five years penitents had established fraternities in most of these cities.

Celano wrote that whenever Francis preached penance to a crowd,

he first prayed peace for them, saying, "The Lord give you peace." He always most devoutly announced peace to men and women, to all he met and overtook. For this reason many who had hated peace and had hated salvation embraced peace, through the cooperation of the Lord, with all their heart and were made children of peace.<sup>26</sup>

Francis states in his Testament that the Lord himself taught him this greeting of peace, or to be more precise, "true peace."<sup>27</sup> In Francis' experience, true peace would be distinct from the false peace of the 1203 *carta pacis*, where Assisi's feudal lords, the *maiores*, imposed a property settlement on the *homines populi* or the *minores*, which eventually had to be renegotiated in 1210. True peace finally did reign in Assisi, but only when the *minores* spoke up.<sup>28</sup> By rejecting all property ownership, and calling themselves by 1210 the *Fratres minores*, Francis was able to align his order with the oppressed while remaining materially neutral as itinerant and regularly sought-out peace negotiators.<sup>29</sup> Francis was considered a skilled ombudsman; in 1225, for instance, he was able to negotiate a peace between the civic *podestà* and the bishop of Perugia.<sup>30</sup> So strong was the linking of penitence and peace in the Franciscan preaching tours that cults devoted to these themes were sparked. One was the Great Devotion, or the Alleluia Movement, which convulsed many an Italian city by 1233.

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*san Francesco d'Assisi nel sec. XIII. Acts of the First Congress of Franciscan Studies, Assisi, July 3-5, 1972* (Rome: Istituto Storico dei Cappuccini, 1973), 14; Pazzelli, *St. Francis and the Third Order*, 102-04; Esser, "A Forerunner," 11-47.

<sup>25</sup>Pazzelli, *St. Francis and the Third Order*, 139-40.

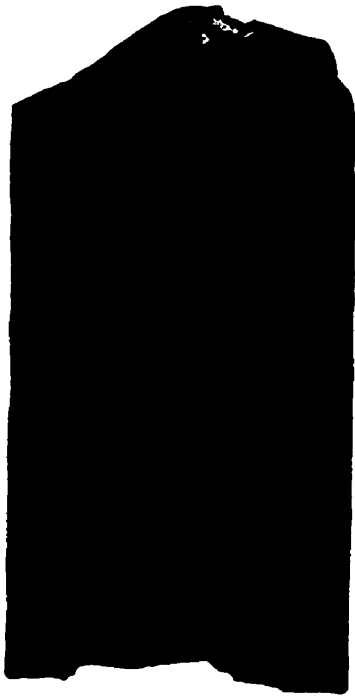
<sup>26</sup>1 Cel 23; 3 Soc 26a.

<sup>27</sup>Test 23; 1 Cel 23b, 3 Soc 26a.

<sup>28</sup>David Flood, "Peace in Assisi," 1-20.

<sup>29</sup>Esser, 24. On the name Friars Minor see chapter 4, note 13.

<sup>30</sup>LP 44, MP 101. However, when his message of peace was ignored, Francis seems to have been indignant. For example, he once preached to the birds which gathered about corpses outside Rome. This has recently been interpreted as a denunciation of the Romans who rejected his preaching a message of peace. See Servus Giebon, "Preaching in the Franciscan Order," in *Monks, Nuns, Friars in Medieval Society* ed. E.B. King and J.T. Schaefer, W.B. Wadley (Sawannee, Tenn.: Press of the University of the South, 1989), 2, 3.



70. Francis' habit of coarse wool and patched all over. In the church of Santa Chiara, Assisi. (Photo by author.)

71. The early order with Francis (at lower left) contemplating before a cross adorned with a crown of thorns, nails, blood and two flagellants' disciplines. (Anonymous of Umbria, second half of the 16th c. Miniature from *Francheschina di Santa Maria degli Angeli*, Santa Maria degli Angeli, Archivio della Porziuncola.)





Lay men and women donned black habits with red crosses on the back, gathered large crowds of children by trumpet calls and preached peace and reconciliation to such a degree that the diffusion of at least one serious threat of war between two Tuscan city-states has been attributed to this movement.<sup>31</sup>

From his words and gestures to his attire and work, Francis sought to imprint on the memory of his listeners a particularly dynamic image of Christ. As a result, his listeners were inspired to imitate Christ in their own lives, if not abandon all and join him. When Francis began to receive these new companions one of the most difficult problems of his new religious life immediately arose: how to shelter his new community in a way consistent with their imitation of a poor and itinerant Jesus?

*b. The Early Hermitages of the Order*

Soon after he began preaching at S. Giorgio in 1208, three residents of Assisi, Peter, Bernard and Giles, joined Francis. Like him they understood the Gospel in its harsh simplicity. They adopted Francis' habit and lived with him at the Portiuncula.<sup>32</sup> Noteworthy, however, is that in the case of Bernard and Giles as well as other early companions such as Sylvester, their decision to join Francis had less to do with his preaching than with his building: "When he saw how [Francis] laboured to restore ruined churches and what a hard life he led, Bernard too resolved to sell his possessions and give all to the poor."<sup>33</sup>

The testimonies of his companions indicate that Francis invited Peter and Bernard to stay with him at the Portiuncula where "they built a hut to serve as a shelter."<sup>34</sup> No other mention is made of this hut, but one can surmise that it was of mud and sticks and that they slept and ate on the ground, in accord with practices documented a little later.<sup>35</sup> Referring to the Gospel

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<sup>31</sup>*Chronica Fratris Salimbene de Adam*, ed. O. Holder-Egger, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores* (1913), 72-3. Lawrence, *Friars*, 116-18. By 1260, public peace rallies evolved into the popular flagellant movements through Europe whose outward expression was probably related to the anxiety caused by the simultaneous emergence of the Black Death.

<sup>32</sup>1 Cel 24-25; 2 Cel 15; 3 Soc 25-30.

<sup>33</sup>3 Soc 27, 30-32; VE 1.

<sup>34</sup>3 Soc 32; VE 1; SL 3.

<sup>35</sup>LP 33, SL 33.

missioning of the apostles by Jesus, they were still too few to be "sent out in pairs," so Francis sent them out alone to preach and beg for their food.<sup>36</sup> When his followers reached a number in which pairing was possible (i.e., after Giles joined and they were four, and later in the year when they numbered eight), they could finally go on preaching tours in apostolic "pairs". Conformity to Scripture was not simply a formality, but the substance of the Primitive Rule for the group which Francis was developing. Francis reports in his Testament:

After the Lord gave me brothers, no one showed me what I should do, but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the form of the Holy Gospel. And I had this written down simply and in a few words and the Lord Pope confirmed it for me.<sup>37</sup>

The brothers were not to follow or interpret the Gospels directly but were to imitate the life and image of Francis who *himself* followed the Gospels. Francis declined to adopt rules established by other orders, even against the advice of a prominent cardinal, on the grounds that he wanted a stricter interpretation of Gospel poverty than was already in practice.<sup>38</sup> He and his companions, now numbering twelve, brought their Primitive Rule to Rome in 1209 or 1210 for approval.<sup>39</sup>

The Rule, now lost, seems to have been entirely composed of Gospel passages with the addition of a few extra points. Esser believes that the opening sentence of the next edition of the Rule, the 1221 Earlier Rule, may be one of the surviving passages from the Primitive Rule: "This is the life of the Gospel of Jesus Christ which Brother Francis asked the Lord Pope Innocent to grant him . . . and confirm the Rule for him and his friars, present and to come."<sup>40</sup> The historical life of Jesus as interpreted by Francis is the Rule. According to Esser, both Francis and his successor as Minister General, Br. Elias of Cortona, consistently placed

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<sup>36</sup>SL 3. Lk 10.1, Mt 11.2, 21.1.

<sup>37</sup>Test 14-15.

<sup>38</sup>3 Soc 48.

<sup>39</sup>1 Cel 32. This, in itself, was not out of the ordinary for the time, since Pope Innocent III was generally open to the itinerant preaching orders, approving the Trinitarian Order in 1198, the Humiliati in 1201, the Poor Catholics in 1206, the Franciscans in 1209/10 and the Reconciled Poor in 1210. See Little, *Religious Poverty*, 150.

<sup>40</sup>ER 1. Note that Francis seems to have considered the three editions of the Rule (1209/10, 1221, and 1223), and perhaps even the Rule for the Hermitages and the Testament, as one Rule. See Esser, 89, 91-92.

the example of Francis, who imitated Christ, above the letter of the Rule.<sup>41</sup> Ruling by example was a new form of political structure for a religious order. Rather than the feudal or decentralized power of the monasteries, where each foundation participated relatively equally in a federation, the Franciscans adopted a quasi-monarchical structure, with one common superior for all the brothers in the person of the Minister General. That is, what the abbot was to a single monastery, the Franciscan Minister General was to the worldwide order. Francis, the Minister General from the inception of the order in 1209 until he resigned the position in 1220, seems initially to have conceived of a fraternity which would always be in direct contact with him. He had to be seen, heard and imitated, for he embodied the Rule. But as the order rapidly expanded after 1211 across central Italy into Spain and France he was challenged by the need to find ways that would permit all of his followers to observe him.

Contact with the Minister General was facilitated by Francis' frequent journeys to the *loci* of his brethren. To ensure regular contact Francis instituted annual Chapter meetings to which all the brothers came to pray, discuss issues of corporate importance and receive their missions for the year to come.<sup>42</sup> The first Chapters seem to have been rather spontaneous; all the friars and friar-novices participated. The earliest recorded Chapter was in the vicinity of Gubbio with approximately 300 men in attendance; all others, it seems, took place at the Portiuncula, which hosted gatherings of as many as 3000 toward the end of Francis' life.<sup>43</sup> These were the Chapters of the Mats, in which the friars dwelt in woven lean-tos in the Portiuncula forest.<sup>44</sup> The meetings were therefore a way to not only behold their poor and holy leader in his proper itinerant tableau, but also to participate in that image as the wandering children of Moses in Exodus, among other allusions. These meetings were necessary if Francis was to legislate by image rather than word.

Perhaps no other document better displays how Francis communicated order by imagery

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<sup>41</sup>Esser, 128, n. 190. The brethren, according to an early friar, Thomas of Eccleston, "served the Lord, not by means of constitutions made by men, but by the free impulses of their devotion, being satisfied by the Rule alone and the very few statutes that had been issued within the first year of the confirmation of the Rule." Eccleston, V, 25.

<sup>42</sup>Esser, 71-81; Brooke, 286-91.

<sup>43</sup>This first eye-witness report is contained in the anonymous *Legenda de passione sancti Verecundi militis et martyris*, in Lemmens, *Testamonia minora*, 10-11. That Gubbio was the first we have on record certainly does not dismiss the possibility of even earlier meetings, probably held at the Portiuncula. Annual Chapter meetings were becoming the norm for all orders at this time, and was demanded of them by Pope Innocent III at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, 216f, as cited in Esser, 71-81.

<sup>44</sup>See Brooke, 287; and Fleming, *Bonaventure*, 76-77.

than his extremely brief Rule for the Hermitages (ca. 1217-21).<sup>45</sup> It begins,

Those who wish to live religiously in hermitages should be three brothers or four at the most; two of these should be mothers and they may have two sons or at least one. The two who are mothers should follow the life of Martha, while the two who are sons should follow the life of Mary and they may have an enclosure in which each one may have his small cell in which he may pray and sleep.<sup>46</sup>

Two extraordinary poetic images are employed to describe what might have been more efficiently and more commonly conveyed as a prescriptive legislation. First, the deepest of familial metaphors underlines the emotional bond necessary for the hermit community; the mothers are to protect the sons from visitors and distractions, cook for them and beg for food; the sons, in turn, are to "seek alms from [the mothers], as little poor ones."<sup>47</sup> Next, Francis underlines this familial image with a scriptural stroke. The lives of Martha, the busy domestic worker, and her sister, Mary, the contemplative, are held up as concrete Gospel images for the friars to emulate.<sup>48</sup> In a later passage of this Rule, Francis permits the sons to converse with the mothers and no others, including, presumably, other friars who may be present. This Rule insures the intimacy of spiritual conversation in pairs or at most threes that Christ himself recommends and displays, for instance, in his stay with Martha and Mary.<sup>49</sup> Finally, each should receive his own *cellula*, or little cell, for prayer, as Jesus recommends.<sup>50</sup> Thomas of Celano describes daily life in one such hermitage in Spain, where the mothers and sons switched roles every week. Here, one of the sons was once observed through the cracks in the stick and mud walls of his cell, where he was

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<sup>45</sup>This text, cited hereafter as RH, is found in the oldest manuscript collection of Franciscan sources, the *Assisi Codex 338*. For its history and meaning see Cajetan Esser, "Die 'Regula pro eremitoris data' des hl. Franziskus von Assisi," *FS* 44 (1962): 383-417; and Oktavian Schmucki, "Franciscus 'Dei Laudator et Cultor.' De Orationis Vi ac Frequentia in Eius cum Scriptus tum Rebus Gestis," *Laurentianum* 10 (1969): 3-36.

<sup>46</sup>RH 1-2.

<sup>47</sup>RH 5.

<sup>48</sup>Lk 10.38-42. (This Mary is not to be confused with the mother of Jesus.)

<sup>49</sup>Mt 18.20; Lk 10.38-42. Schmucki believes that Francis' use of this metaphor in a rule for religious habitation was entirely new for its time; "Mentis Silentium," 69.

<sup>50</sup>Mt 6.6.

prostrate upon his face on the ground stretched out in the form of a cross; and there was no sign that he was alive either from breathing or from movement. Two candles were burning at his head and at his feet, and they lighted up the cell in a wonderful way with a bright light.<sup>51</sup>

The private enclosure, as opposed to the shared dormitories of the monasteries, permits the contemplative to submerge sensually in, and thereby fix in the memory, the poetic imagery of the Gospel or the metaphorical richness of his cell or *tau* habit (figs. 8, 55).

It is likely that an earlier form of the Rule for the Hermitages was adopted very early on by the order and used alongside the 1209 Primitive Rule.<sup>52</sup> The hermitage daily life in the Rule included having the residents say the seven monastic hours of the Divine Office. The question therefore arises whether the architecture of the hermitages, called the *claustrum*, or "enclosure" in the Rule, also followed the monastic tradition.

After approval of their Primitive Rule in Rome, in 1210 the first twelve companions stayed for approximately fifteen days at a site near Orte, along the Flaminian Way (see map, fig. 72). They chose this site because it was "deserted and abandoned, and rarely, if ever, visited by people."<sup>53</sup> Local documents set this at the abandoned church of St. Nicholas of the Rocks.<sup>54</sup> This corresponds with Francis' admission in the Testament: "We remained willingly in deserted churches."<sup>55</sup> At Orte Francis had to decide whether his group should "dwell among men or go to solitary places."<sup>56</sup> The answer was inspired by Jesus as portrayed in the Gospels—to do both. Their work was to be among people through preaching and giving good example, but their dwelling places were to be like the one near Orte, far from the throngs

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<sup>51</sup>2 Cel 178.

<sup>52</sup>Esser, 176-77.

<sup>53</sup>1 Cel 34.

<sup>54</sup>See A. Camilli, *Memorie francescane in Orte* (Subiaco, 1927), 11-15; and, P. Marini, "Il soggiorno di san Francesco e dei suoi undici compagni in Orte," in *La France franciscaine* 18 (1941): 240-68, esp. 266-67.

<sup>55</sup>Test 4. Other abandoned churches of the early order that Francis frequented include the church of St. Peter de Bovara, near the castle of Trevi in 1214, and a church in Monte Casale, Trabaria. See Schmucki, "Place of Solitude," 84-85; and Esser, *Das Testament*, 101. See also Esser, *Das Testament*, 168, where the author adds a comment, and p. 93, where he discusses a later variant reading "in ecclesiis derelictis." Cf. 3 Soc 38-39.

<sup>56</sup>1 Cel 35. See a similar decision in LM 12.1-2.

where they could "commerce with holy poverty" in an "absence of all things."<sup>57</sup> The experience near Orte was decisive for the young order; Francis desired to have a community both in proximity to, yet isolated from, urban settlements.<sup>58</sup> The towns provided food and provisions that they could beg for as well as people to be converted through their preaching and example. "Heavenly solitary dwellings" were necessary if they were to imitate Jesus, who prayed in the wilderness, on mountains and "in the clefts of the rock."<sup>59</sup>

Although the Orte site gave them both isolation and proximity to townspeople, they decided to depart from it for fear of an "outward appearance of ownership" because of the "pleasantness of that place."<sup>60</sup> The reason for their departure raises one of the subtlest of Francis' requirements for the order's dwellings: that their *loci* be entirely without the taint of ownership, in either fact or appearance. A story connected to the next location of the order, at a tiny abandoned hovel at Rivo Torto in the Spoleto Valley, seems to exemplify the point. While the first Franciscans were dwelling there, a stranger drove his donkey into the shed with the intention of taking possession of the hut, blocking any designs the ragged group might have had on expanding the place. After expressing his frustration, Francis and the rest soon got up and left the hovel to him.<sup>61</sup> The stranger may have had good reason for his fears. Already the hut had its beams marked out with the names of the friars to designate their praying and sleeping places. Even by this small action, Francis seems to have violated his own desire "to have no place to lay his head," and to have paid the price.<sup>62</sup> New men were petitioning to join the order, and expansion would have been inevitable. The next site, then, warranted careful consideration and advice. Francis offered his solution:

It seems good and right for us to acquire, either from the bishop or the canons of S. Rufino or from the abbot of St. Beaedict's monastery, some small and poor church where the brothers can say their hours, and which has near it some small, poor dwelling made of mud and withies where the brothers can rest and attend to their needs. For this place

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<sup>57</sup>1 Cel 34.

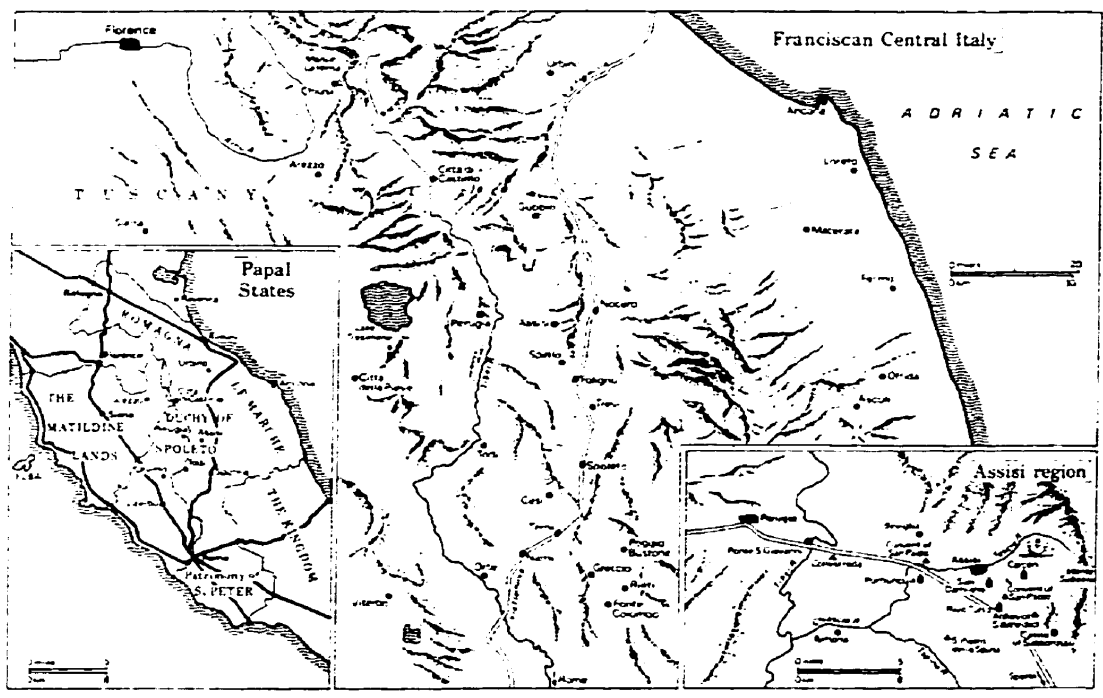
<sup>58</sup>Robert Brentano demonstrates that the distance of thirteenth-century Franciscan hermitages from towns was never so far as to prohibit daily excursions to preach to the urban laity. Brentano, "Early Franciscans," 29-47.

<sup>59</sup>1 Cel 71. See also 1 Cel 122. The passage alludes to Cant 2.14.

<sup>60</sup>1 Cel 35.

<sup>61</sup>1 Cel 44, 3 Soc 55. Obviously following Lk 6.30: "Give to everyone who asks you, and do not ask for your property back from the man who robs you."

<sup>62</sup>Francis is recorded as citing this passage in SL 13. It refers to Mt 8.20, Lk 9.58.



72. Map of central Italy during the time of Francis. (From Mockler, *Saint Francis of Assisi*, fig. following page 52.)

[that is, Rivo Torto] is not reputable and this house is really too small to stay in now that it pleases God to multiply our numbers, and most of all we have no church here where the brothers could say their hours. If any were to die it would not be seemly to bury him here, nor in a church of secular clerics.<sup>63</sup>

According to the *Scripta Leonis*, the monks of St. Benedict on Mount Subasio

granted to Francis and his friars the church of St. Mary of the Portiuncula, as being the very poorest they had. . . . It was also what Francis had wanted. . . . St. Francis was greatly delighted with the site the friars had been given.<sup>64</sup>

Francis and his companions so desired the site that they were recorded as living there even before the church itself was formally rented to them.<sup>65</sup> The Benedictines would retain rights to the property, while the friars would pay a symbolic annual rent of a basket of fish.<sup>66</sup> Francis was quite pleased with this deal, since "he always wanted the laws for strangers to be observed by his sons, namely, to be gathered under the roof that belongs to another."<sup>67</sup> If Francis considered the contract to be the fruit of begging for alms, it seems to have violated his desire not to receive any amount "beyond what was sufficient for them for one day."<sup>68</sup> The problem then was to live there in such a way that appearances would demonstrate that they did not own it.

Francis' 1221 Earlier Rule suggests his answer to the dilemma:

The brothers should be aware that, whether they are in hermitages or in other places, they do not make any place their own [*sibi appropriare*] or contend with anyone about it. And

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<sup>63</sup>SL 8.

<sup>64</sup>SL 8.

<sup>65</sup>3 Soc 55-56.

<sup>66</sup>The arrangement seems to have remained in place at least until 1244 when a Bull of Innocent IV includes the chapel of the Portiuncula among the properties of the local Benedictines. See Paul Sabatier, *Speculum Perfectionis*, 144, n.h. Lambert, 44.

<sup>67</sup>2 Cel 59.

<sup>68</sup>SL 4. Note that earlier, at the site near Orte, the brothers, with Francis' approval, stashed surplus alms in a nearby sepulchre for supplies into the next day. By the time they arrived at Rivo Torto, it seems, this practice was curtailed. See 1 Cel 34.



whoever comes to them, friend or foe, thief or robber, should be received with kindness.<sup>69</sup>

Comparing the words *sibi appropriare* with their use in a parallel writing of Francis, the Admonitions, shows that the intent seems to have been to allow the occupation of property by the brothers, as long as no claim of ownership was made; strangers, however, were welcome not only to visit, but also to entirely take it over if they so chose.<sup>70</sup> Thus the Earlier Rule depends on an awareness of the appearance of itinerancy such that thieves would take no interest in their goods and that their detractors would be repulsed.<sup>71</sup>

To arrive at an understanding of whether or how the architecture of the Portiuncula demonstrates this understanding of the Rule, let us examine the design of early Franciscan settlements. The *loci* of the friars, such as the Portiuncula, usually consisted of four main architectural elements:

1. A *claustrum* or enclosure. The *Scripta Leonis* describes the typical material of a Franciscan enclosure as "a good hedge instead of a wall, as a sign of holy poverty and humility" (see frontispiece).<sup>72</sup> Mention is made of a hedge existing at the Portiuncula in a story involving Francis' communication with a cicada.<sup>73</sup> A sketch of the area from the sixteenth century was discovered in the early twentieth century; it is thought to have been an attempt to depict the original Portiuncula site from the time of Francis. It shows a hedge perimeter which surrounded the entire site except for the entrance to the *domus* and the Portiuncula chapel (fig. 73).<sup>74</sup> In a story concerning the visit of Lady Jacoba to the Portiuncula, a *claustrum* is depicted as that where the individual cells were located and whose

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<sup>69</sup>ER 7.

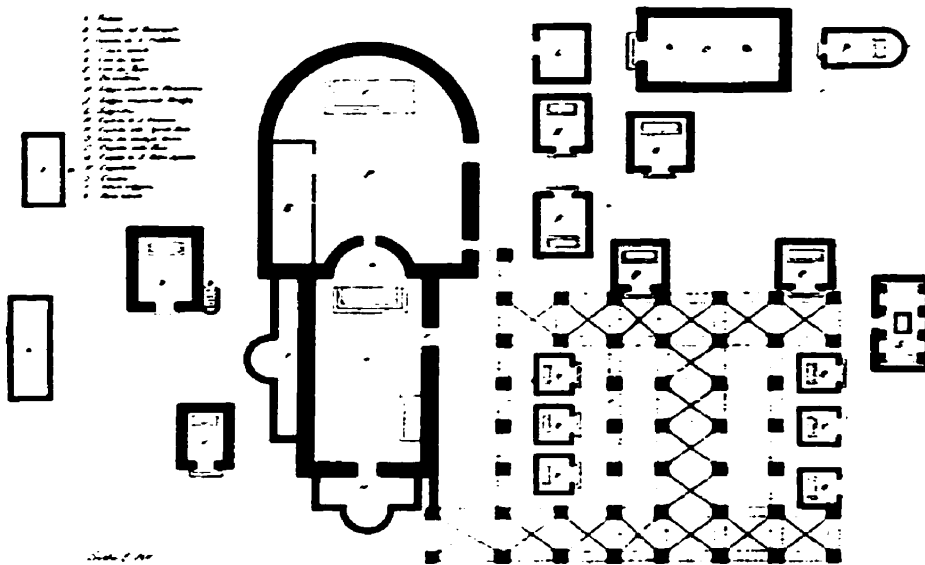
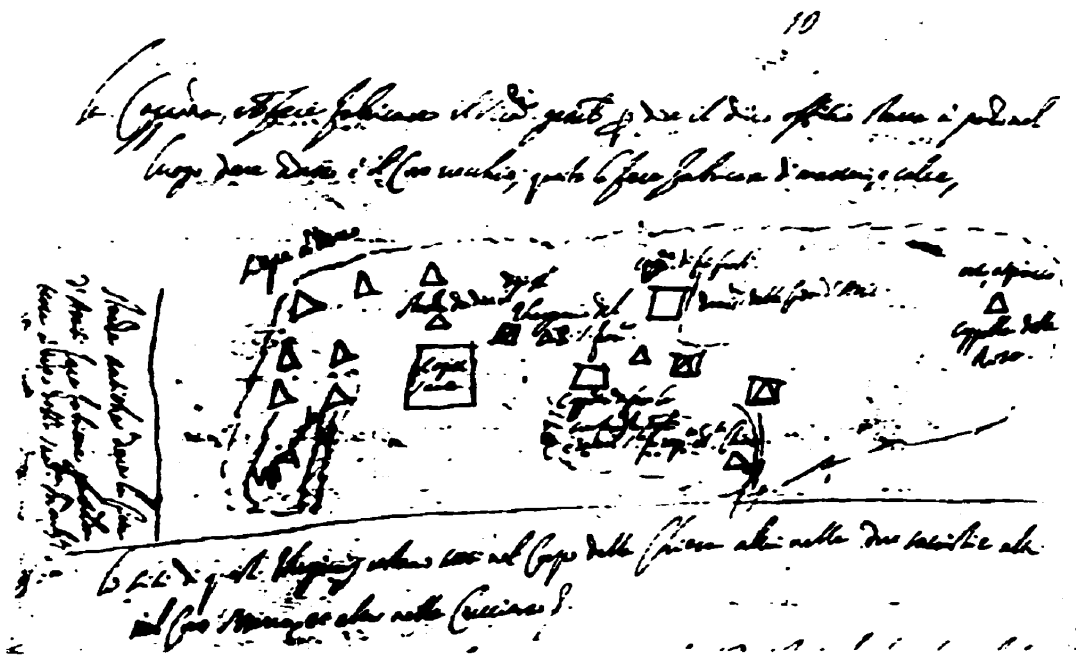
<sup>70</sup>Admonitions, IV, in Armstrong, 28. See 2 Cel 87 where Francis provides a similar example, when speaking about the importance of giving up one's cloak to a beggar. On *sibi appropriare* see Lambert, 51.

<sup>71</sup>A later demonstration of the limits of this rule may be seen in the first mission of friars to Hungary in 1219. Since they could not speak German, peasants set upon them and stole their habits, including their breeches. As a result, they decided to smear their tunics with cow-dung to prevent further theft. But after finally being arrested as heretics, they called the mission a failure and returned to Italy; Jordan, 6.

<sup>72</sup>SL 16, MP 10.

<sup>73</sup>SL 84.

<sup>74</sup>P. Stephano Tofi da Bettona, "Schizzo della piata topographia dell'antico edificio della Porziuncula prima della fabbrica dell'attuale Basilica," in E.M. Giusto, *L'Oriente Serafico* (1916-17): 284ff. The sketch seems to be based on the foundations which were uncovered during the first construction of the immense basilica within which the Portiuncula chapel was eventually enclosed (fig. 59).



73. A schematic diagram of the original Portiuncula site, with hedge in dotted line and, below, a site plan, after the mud and stick huts were rebuilt in 1230, of the Portiuncula chapel, cells and monastery complex just before the 17th c. construction of the Basilica of S. Maria degli Angeli. (From Tofi da Bettona, "L'Oriente Serafico," 170; as reproduced in Mancini and Scotti, *La Basilica di S. Maria degli Angeli*, figs. 65, 66.)

only access was through the *domus*.<sup>75</sup> The Rule for the Hermitages mentions that the entrance into the *claustrum* was barred to all visitors, even visiting brothers; no meals were to be taken within the *claustrum* and it was to be completely silent.<sup>76</sup> All together, the evidence seems to indicate that the Portiuncula chapel was entered from the exterior, but if one wished to enter the hedge-bound compound, passing through the *domus* would be required. Along with the cells of the praying friars, the hedge *claustrum* enclosed both the communal vegetable garden and the private cemetery of the friars.<sup>77</sup>

2. A *domus*, house or friary. At the Portiuncula this was the house of mud and sticks which was built early on by Francis, and presumably enlarged by him and his companions when they returned to the site after Rome and Rivo Torto (fig. 55). The same construction is mentioned again in the *Scripta Leonis* as "a poor little cottage thatched with straw, its walls made of withies and mud, as the friars had made it when they first went to live there."<sup>78</sup> When the Bishop of Ostia came to visit the Portiuncula,

he went to see the dormitory which was in that house [*domo*], with many soldiers, monks and other clergy that came with him. When he saw that the friars slept on the ground with nothing beneath them but a little straw, no pillows and a few poor coverlets, almost completely worn out and coming to pieces, he began to shed many tears.<sup>79</sup>

The *domus* at the Portiuncula had a dormitory where the brothers who were the Marthas slept. It was attached to a room at the main entrance that was large enough to hold a small crowd (fig. 55). From textual and archaeological evidence regarding the hermitage of Greccio, this large room probably served as the main entrance where visitors were received, as well as the community refectory and kitchen. Behind it was the dormitory, with, at its farthest end, a small cell that Francis used (figs. 19, 74, 75).<sup>80</sup> Similar large rooms where the friars greeted beggars and guests, and in which tables could be set for meals, appear in descriptions of other

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<sup>75</sup>LP 101, SL 101.

<sup>76</sup>RH 3, 7-9.

<sup>77</sup>SL 84, 8.

<sup>78</sup>SL 11. A friary-*domus* is also mentioned in LP 13.

<sup>79</sup>LP 33, SL 33.

<sup>80</sup>LP 94, 2 Cel 64, SL 94. Note, however, that because Greccio was a cave, the *claustrum* was bounded by the cave walls and not a hedge.

hermitages during Francis' time.<sup>81</sup> Also considered part of the *domus* was the dormitory of the brothers who had domestic duties.<sup>82</sup> The maximum number of friars to dwell in any one hermitage site seems to hover around a dozen, for Francis "wished the friars not to congregate in large numbers in houses because it seemed to him that it would be difficult to preserve poverty with large numbers."<sup>83</sup> We can conclude that the *domus*, house or friary served as the entrance room, refectory, kitchen and main community space for a small groups of friars.

3. *Cellulae*, cells, or *carceri*, prisons. *Cella* was the term used in the middle ages to denote the shelter of the hermit, pilgrim or crusader. In the Rule for the Hermitages, these were the cells of the contemplative "sons" or "Marys." They were constructed of mud and unhewn wood and were located within the hedge enclosure (figs. 55, 73 and frontispiece).<sup>84</sup> To access them one had to pass through the main entrance of the *domus* and then through a back door which led to the yard enclosed by the hedge.<sup>85</sup> Francis' free-standing cell at the Portiuncula had a door upon which one could knock, a small entry hall (where, according to at least one account from his late years, another brother, perhaps his nurse, stayed), and a second room separated from the first with a rush mat where Francis prayed and slept.<sup>86</sup> The cells were not to be claimed by any friar but rotated among them, as Francis clearly demonstrated when he immediately abandoned a cell after one of his brothers called it "Francis' cell."<sup>87</sup> Only in 1226 is mention made for the first time in the sources that, besides prayer and sleep, silent work could also take place in these cells, "as a precaution against idle words."<sup>88</sup>

The cells were often called *carceri* or prisons by the friars, since Francis considered time spent in one's cell, especially during Lent, as a temporary or voluntary imprisonment. The reference, of course, had deep biblical roots and was a commonplace not only in contemplative circles, but among the practitioners of memory.<sup>89</sup> Hugh of St. Victor made

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<sup>81</sup>2 Cel 44, 61, 178; LP 32, 54.

<sup>82</sup>SL 8.

<sup>83</sup>SL 14, MP 10. Twelve was the usual number of friars at the Portiuncula. See *AFH*, xiii, 295.

<sup>84</sup>2 Cel 56, 59, LP 13, SL 13, MP 5, 9.

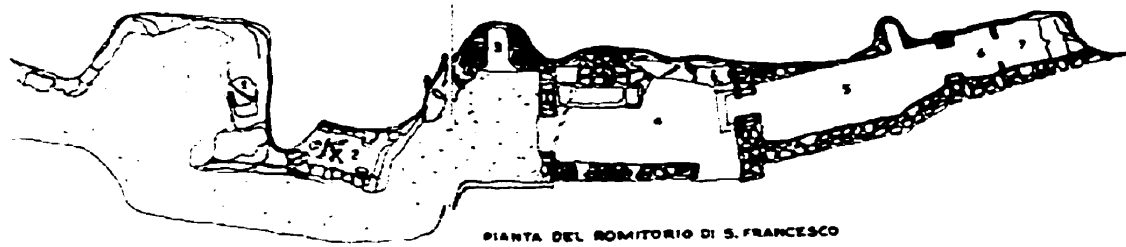
<sup>85</sup>LP 6, 2 Cel 100.

<sup>86</sup>SL 6, LP 6.

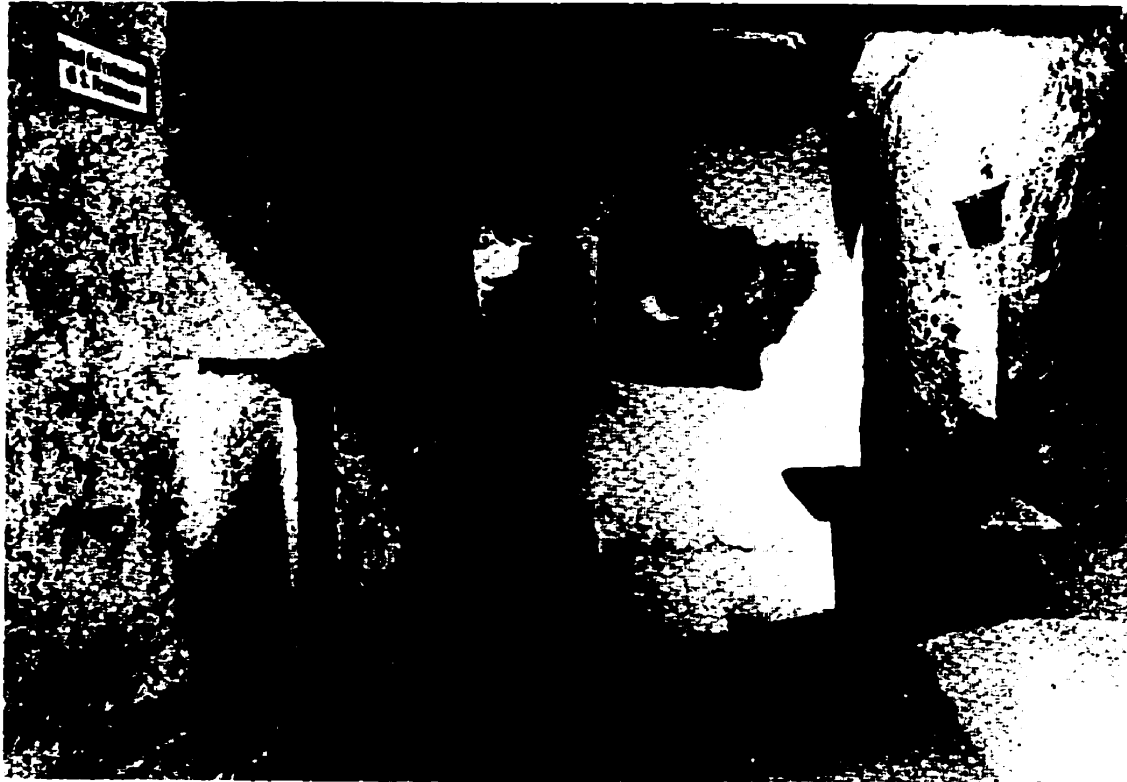
<sup>87</sup>LP 13, SL 13.

<sup>88</sup>LP 16, SL 16.

<sup>89</sup>LP 13, 46, 80, 92; SL 13; 2 Cel 59. *Carcer*, in the Christian tradition, derives from the animal cells mentioned in Mt 8.20 and Lk 9.58 and is implied by Mk 1.12-13. Among hermits, *carcer* is mentioned, for instance, in the *Regula Solitaria* of Grimlaicus, (*PL* 103, 592bc, ch. 14), and was the name used by the hermits of Monte Luca, above Spoleto, to refer to their private quarters. See



74. Cave-hermitage at Greccio, plan showing the communal refectory/kitchen (no. 4), the dormitory of the friars (no. 5) and the private *cellae*, where Francis would stay (nos. 6, 7). (From Mistretta, *Francesco Architetto*, 141.)



75. View of refectory/kitchen of the cave-hermitage at Greccio: the dormitory is through the doorway in the centre of photo. (Photo by author.)

frequent use of the word *cella* as a metaphor for a trained memory, in distinction from the *silva* or the pathless forest of chaotic memory.<sup>90</sup> The association was also made to the *cellae* where bees make their honey, and, like a trained memory, give forth their sweet nectar.<sup>91</sup> Several of Francis' biographers mention the love he exhibited for bees. There is an account of an abandoned hermitage cell where a clay vessel was later found to be inhabited by bees who ". . . had built little cells in the vessel with wonderful skill, signifying the sweetness of contemplation that the saint had experienced there."<sup>92</sup>

4. An *ecclesia*, or chapel. One of the reasons for returning to the Portiuncula was the desire for a consecrated burial ground apart from that of the secular clerics at the parishes.<sup>93</sup> The concern reveals the degree to which long-term thinking prompted the Franciscans' rental of the Portiuncula, where even the ground they were to be buried in would, nevertheless, be borrowed rather than purchased.

Another reason for moving back to the Portiuncula was that Rivo Torto had no chapel "where the brothers can say their hours."<sup>94</sup> The Portiuncula chapel was, therefore, to serve primarily as a private oratory for communal prayer, and not for preaching to the laity.<sup>95</sup> Communal prayer in the early days of the order was a set of simple prayers such as the Our Father (for the benefit of the simpler brothers) which were said from memory.<sup>96</sup> Francis not only said his own office daily from memory, but composed a number of psalmodies and canticles for the use of his followers.<sup>97</sup> Common prayers were generally sung. The Our Father could be sung at any time at the Portiuncula, according to the prompting of the Holy

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Schmucki, "Place of Solitude," 103-106.

<sup>90</sup>For instance, see the use of *cellae* in the preface to Hugh's *Chronica*, in Green, ed. "Hugo of St. Victor," 484-7. See Carruthers, 34-35.

<sup>91</sup>"One should be alert in medieval discussions of honey-bees for a trained memory may very well lurk within the meadows and flowers, chambers, treasure-hoards, and enclosures of hive/books." Carruthers, 38. Virgil, *Georgics*, 4, 163-64 (Loeb Classical Library). Rhabanus Maurus, of the late ninth century, mentions in his *De universo*, 22, I, PL 111, 594C, "Divine Scripture is a honeycomb filled with the honey of spiritual wisdom."

<sup>92</sup>2 Cel 169. See also 1 Cel 80 and 2 Cel 165.

<sup>93</sup>SL 8, 3 Soc 56, LP 8, MP 55.

<sup>94</sup>SL 8, 3 Soc 56, LP 8, MP 55.

<sup>95</sup>SL 16.

<sup>96</sup>1 Cel 47. Esser, 107, n. 261.

<sup>97</sup>Esser argues that Francis and his early brothers recited the office from memory from evidence in 1 Cel 45, and from another story citing Francis as saying his office in the rain, 2 Cel 96. Esser, 133, n. 260. One of the earliest and simplest of the prayers he taught was that which we discussed above: "We adore thee Christ, here and in all thy churches" (Test 4), an appropriate selection for chanting at the Portiuncula chapel.

Spirit.<sup>98</sup> Spontaneous singing can be traced directly back to the conversion of their troubadour founder, who was once observed wandering through forests in "scanty garments . . . singing praises to the Lord in the Provençal language."<sup>99</sup> Francis desired to have those friars stay at the Portiuncula who were not only "holy in all their actions," but who could "sing the office best."<sup>100</sup> This was to ensure that a truly exemplary life would be lived at the Portiuncula for all to see: that is, a life consisting of fasts, vigils, "continuous prayer day and night and continuous silence," and only conversations "about the glory of God and the salvation of souls with much uplifting fervour."<sup>101</sup> The Portiuncula was, however, "not to be profaned in the slightest by any vain and unprofitable words, but may be served wholeheartedly and kept pure and holy with hymns and praises to God."<sup>102</sup>

When these four elements were put together, the result, in the words of Francis, was an *eremus* or *eremitorium*, that is, a wilderness retreat or hermitage.<sup>103</sup> Perhaps the closest precedent for the configuration would be that of the Benedictine hermits at Camaldoli. Given in 1012-15 to St. Romuald (d. 1027) by the Count of Maldoli (hence, the name, *Ca-maldoli*, or field of Maldoli), this settlement seems to have been based upon the form of the early Christian hermitage commune or *laura*, which was probably gleaned by Romuald from his renowned knowledge of the source documents of the early Christian ascetics. Here, high in the forest of the Tuscan-Romagnese Appenines northeast of Arezzo, a small number of hermits' *cellae*, with their own cultivated plots of land, were clustered by Romuald around a central and probably single-naved Romanesque chapel.<sup>104</sup> This area was described as having rushing streams, seven pure fountains, green fields, and paths to and from the mountain ridges (fig. 76). Two miles below this foundation, a building was begun around 1015 to provide a

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<sup>98</sup>1 Cel 85f. The *Legenda* of St. Clare notes a miracle where she heard "a wonderful singing . . . which used to resound in the church of St. Francis," 29; in *Clare of Assisi*, Armstrong, ed., 256ff. After larger numbers of clerics started joining the order in 1215, the breviary became more commonly used; Esser, 104-10.

<sup>99</sup>1 Cel 16. Note that, in the realm of literature, "the vernacular religious lyric of the thirteenth century . . . was perhaps the most explicit witness to the emergence throughout Europe of a pervasive and durable 'Franciscan' style." John V. Fleming, *An Introduction to the Franciscan Literature of the Middle Ages* (Chicago, 1977), 186.

<sup>100</sup>SL 9, LP 9.

<sup>101</sup>SL 9, LP 9.

<sup>102</sup>SL 9, LP 9. See also, Schmucki, "Mentis Silentium," 67.

<sup>103</sup>According to Schmucki, these two words were used interchangeably throughout the various sources. See "Place of Solitude," 86-88.

<sup>104</sup>The single-naved chapel was also common in the architecture of the Carthusian hermits (ca. 1084-). See Braunfels, *Monasteries*, 111-24.

hospice and guesthouse for travellers. It was later organized into a cenobitical or cloistered monastery to both serve and shield the hermits above from outsiders. Intended as a reform of the Benedictine order in both practice and architecture, this hermit-cenobitic arrangement was the basis for all Camaldolese foundations. It was often called an *alter Nitria*, an imitation of the Egyptian desert of St. Antony.<sup>105</sup>

The similarities between the Camaldoli and the Portiuncula sites include the wilderness location, the return to the simplicity of the *ecclesia primitiva* in the poor *cellae*, the centrality of a chapel, the separation between the silent hermits and those who receive outsiders, and the regular exchange of places between the hermits and the cenobitical monks at the entrance. Connections between Francis and the Benedictines with regard to architecture are demonstrated by the numerous property rentals that the Benedictines provided the Franciscans besides the Portiuncula.<sup>106</sup> Noteworthy as well is that two of the earliest Franciscan hermitages founded after the Portiuncula were those of Monte Casale and La Verna. Monte Casale, a castle built in 1010, became, in 1187, a Camaldolese hermitage and in 1213, a *locus* of the Friars Minor. In the same year, Francis also received the entire mountain of La Verna which was close to Camaldoli; it was also donated by a local count.<sup>107</sup> Where the Portiuncula differed from Camaldoli however, was that the Camaldolese property was not in walking distance of an urban centre, the Camaldolese hermits were not free to come and go, a Camaldolese hermit and a novice often lived together in the same cell, their gardens were individually, not communally, cultivated, and, by all accounts, the Camaldolese property had a stone wall, rather than a hedge, to keep outsiders out.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup>See Little, *Religious Poverty*, 71; G. Tabacco, "Romualdo di Ravenna e gli inizi dell'eremitismo Camaldolese," in J. Leclercq, *L'eremitismo in Occidente nei secoli XI e XII*, Miscellanea del Centro di Studi Medioevali, IV (Milan, 1965), 73-119; idem, 'La data di fondazione di Camaldoli', *Revista di Storia d'Italia*, XVI (Rome, 1962), 451-5 and A. Giabbani, *L'eremo, vita e spiritualita eremitica nel monachismo Camaldolese primitivo* (Brescia, 1945). For the early Christian cenobitic and anchorite set-ups, see Derwas Chitty, *The Desert a City* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966).

<sup>106</sup>For instance, the earliest Franciscan hermitages at Narni, Spoleto, Eremo di Carceri outside Assisi, and Santa Maria de Farneto near Perugia, and two unnamed hermitages in Spain were all rented to the friars by local Benedictine monasteries. Clare's rapidly growing order owed almost all of its new convents to the generosity of the Benedictines.

<sup>107</sup>*Actus Beati Francisci*, 9; James of Massa, *Historia Acceptionis Loci Montis Alvernae*, Sbaralea, *BF* 4, 156; translated in Omnibus, 1893. It is also noteworthy that Br. Giles, an early companion, lived with the Camaldolese for a while; *AF* iii, 82.

<sup>108</sup>On the parallels and contrasts between Franciscans and Camaldolese see, P. Doyere, "Complexité de l'érémisme," *Vie Spir.* 87 (1952): 243-54, esp. 244. Note that Peter Damian wrote a biography of Romuald, composed a rule used by the Camaldolese, and resided in a hermitage with a similar set-up which was founded by a disciple of Romuald. On this basis the Camaldolese have



The new type of *eremitorium* that Francis envisioned for the Portiuncula may be understood as a combination of the wilderness, two-tiered, Martha-Mary configuration of the Camaldolese with the poverty of the leprosarium and the inter-urban mobility of the crusader, pilgrim, peasant and trader. Here began an architectural layout for both contemplation and action, memory and ethics, which was truly unique for its time.

*c. Poverty Abuses and Corrections*

In the period between Francis' reception of the Portiuncula site in 1209-10 and his resignation as Minister General in 1220, the Portiuncula became, to a remarkable degree, an example for the construction and way of living for all the settlements of the order. *Loci* of the friars built in the manner of the Portiuncula have been documented at Cortona, Cetona, and Sarteano, in 1212; at Mount La Verna (figs. 57, 77), Foligno, Bologna, Narni, Monte Casale, Campostella, Burgos, Barcelona, and Ciudad Rodrigo, in 1213; and in the next year at Fabriano, Bovara, Spoleto and Cesi, where it is reported that Francis himself constructed "a little church in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which was similar in all things to St. Mary of the Angels."<sup>109</sup> In 1215, settlements are recorded at the Carceri outside Assisi (fig. 63), Perugia, Siena, Greccio (figs. 71, 74, 75), and Santa Maria della Foresta (fig. 78), and in 1216 at Reggio Calabria, Fonte Columbo (figs. 79, 80) and Gubbio (for most of these *loci*, see map, fig. 72). From 1217 onward, special missions of the friars began to found various settlements in Germany, France, Spain, Syria, Dalmietta, and on into northern Europe and the Middle

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long claimed Peter Damian one of their own if not officially, at least in spirit. Like them, he went barefoot, wore coarse clothing, and slept on a hard bed. See Owen Blum, *St. Peter Damian: His Teaching on the Spiritual Life* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1947), 7-12, 92, 114. And after him, the hermit Robert l'Arbrissel, in 1101 is reported to have founded a colony of huts in Fontevrault erected around a small chapel dedicated to Mary. Unlike Francis, however, his followers, who supposedly numbered in the thousands, were primarily "fallen" women whom he sometimes invited to sleep in his bed in order to prove his resistance to sexual temptation. Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World* (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), 355.

<sup>109</sup>Wadding, *Annales Minorum*, year 1213, pp. 173-74. As far as this passage is concerned, the annalist is supported by Mariano of Florence; see Willibord Lampen, "S. Franciscus Cultor Trinitatis," *AFH* 21 (1928): 456; Bracaloni, "S.Francesco architetto," 363; and Nicola Cavanna, *L'Umbria francescana* (Perugia, 1910), pp. 275-76. See also Francis of Assisi, Exhortation to the Praise of God, in Armstrong, 42.

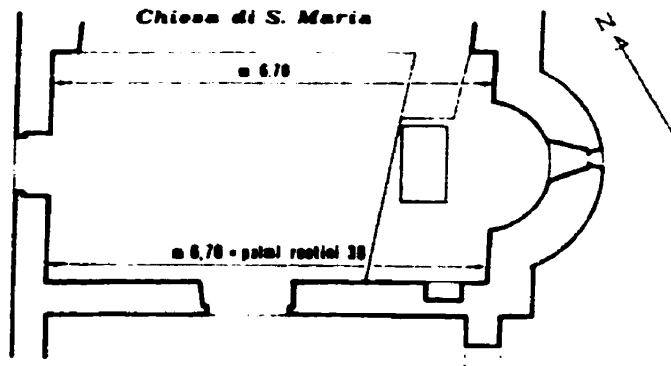


76. Photo of hermitages at the monastery of Camaldoli, Arezzo. (Photo from Mistretta, *Francesco Architetto*, 177.)

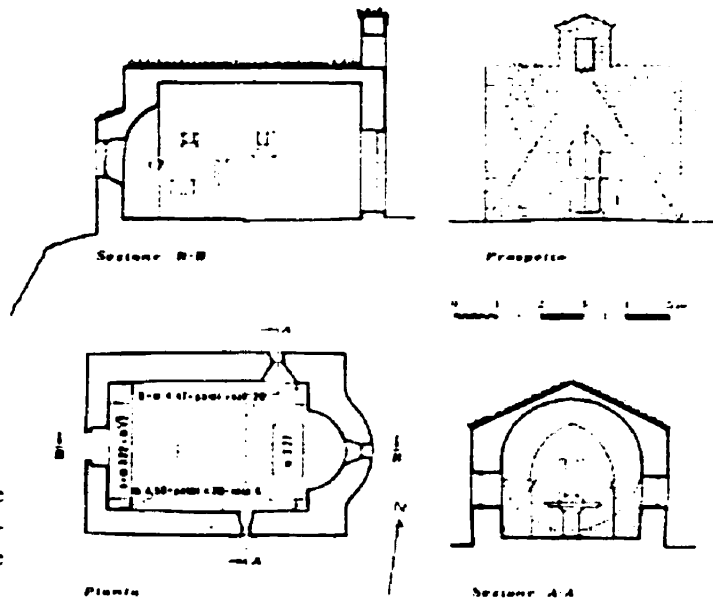
77. Interior of Santa Maria degli Angeli, La Verna, c. 1216-18. The wooden choir stalls are a later addition. (Photo by author.)



78. Chapel of S. Fabiano at the Convent of S. Maria della Foresta. plan. (From Salvatori. "Le prime sedi francescane." fig. p. 93.)



79. Magdalene chapel, Fonte Columbo, interior. (From Salvatori. "Le prime sedi francescane." fig. 3.)



80. Magdalene chapel, Fonte Columbo, plan, sections and elevation. (From Salvatori. "Le prime sedi francescane." fig. p. 93.)

East.<sup>110</sup>

By 1221, the friars had grown in number from twelve to at least three thousand, and were spread all over Europe and the Holy Land.<sup>111</sup> There is a corresponding increase in documents, testimonies and biographies both from within the order and outside it. These sources are quite consistent in characterizing the new order as both hermits and itinerant preachers, as Bishop James of Vitry, an astute non-Franciscan observer of the friars, records in 1216: "By day they go into the cities and villages, winning whom they may by helping where they can; by night they return to their hermitage or the lonely places in which they pass their time in contemplation."<sup>112</sup> The sources are equally consistent in calling their settlements *loci*, or *erimitorium*, in careful contradistinction from the *monasterii* of all other existing orders.<sup>113</sup> In 1219-21 James of Vitry could still say that the Franciscans "have no monasteries, churches, . . . houses or possessions. Nowhere to lay down their heads."<sup>114</sup> Even after the friars arrived in England in 1224, documents in city archives such as Oxford's attest that the new order did not own their settlements, referring to them as guests and renters at various *loci*. Franciscan chronicler Thomas of Eccleston notes how, even in the colder climes of London, the friars "built cells for themselves, with walls of plaited grass."<sup>115</sup> By the late 1230's, the Minister, or local head, of the English province of the friars, Albert of Pisa, tore down a stone cloister, because of its "appearance of arrogance," on land offered to them in Southampton, and had the stone walls of a dormitory in Shrewsbury knocked down so they could be rebuilt in the humbler material of clay.<sup>116</sup>

The *Scripta Leonis* quotes Francis in 1226 on his preferred approach to settlement:

When the brothers go to any city where they have no place, and find someone who wants to give them enough land for them to build a house and have a garden and what is

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<sup>110</sup>1 Cel 63, 92; 2 Cel 46, 168. For the foundation dates of these and all Franciscan settlements see John Moorman, *Medieval Franciscan Houses* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 1983); and John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order: From its Origins to the Year 1517* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 20-122.

<sup>111</sup>Rosalind Brooke accepts the estimate of 3000 friars attending the 1221 Chapter at the Portiuncula. See Brooke, 286-91.

<sup>112</sup>R.B.C. Huygens, *Lettres de Jacques de Vitry* (Leiden, 1960), intro. and Epistolae I, p. 75-76.

<sup>113</sup>Esser, 156-72.

<sup>114</sup>James of Vitry, *Historia orientalis*, ch. 32; Esser, 156.

<sup>115</sup>Eccleston, II, 9; see Esser, 168.

<sup>116</sup>Eccleston, IV, 23; see Esser, 169. Albert of Pisa admits that the Franciscan mission was successful in England mainly because of their poverty; Eccleston, VII.

necessary for them, they ought first to consider how much land will suffice, always bearing in mind holy poverty. . . . Afterwards they ought to go to the bishop of that city . . . [and ask,] "We would like to build there with God's blessing and yours."<sup>117</sup>

Thus, the friars were to beg for both their land (which, of course, they would rent), and for the approval of church authorities to be in their jurisdiction. Francis continued,

let them go then and have a boundary ditch made. . . . Let them plant there a good hedge instead of a wall. . . . Let them have poor hovels prepared, made of loam and wood, and some other small cells where the brothers can sometimes pray and may be free to work. . . . Let them also have small churches built. The brothers ought not to have large churches made for preaching to the people, or for any other reason.<sup>118</sup>

This 1246 document, then, relates the oral tradition from twenty years earlier regarding settlement: a hedge, a *domus* or two for the domestic brothers, some cells for the praying brothers, and a small private oratory. The list includes warnings against stone walls and large preaching churches, reflecting the later, more dire situation that came about at the time of *Scripta Leonis* with respect to the practice of poverty throughout the order; large churches where lay persons could worship were being built and stone construction had begun to augment or replace many of the original mud and stick hermitage *loci* all over Europe.

A number of external and internal factors explain how, by mid-century, Francis' hermitage set-up was abandoned for less humble quarters. As the order expanded beyond the climate and topography of the Mediterranean, the need for shelter more appropriate to harsher weather was an obvious factor. Mud and stick houses in Germany, for instance, would only sentence the friars there to constant rebuilding.<sup>119</sup> Second, by insisting that ownership be given to wealthy layfolk or church authorities, it was inevitable that these people would influence how their property would be altered. The friars slowly became accustomed to

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<sup>117</sup>SL 14-15. The early companions also note, in 3 Soc 59-60, that when the brothers arrived in a new town, "they preferred to lodge with priests than with layfolk, but if the priest couldn't accommodate them, they sought out the houses of God-fearing layfolk. At every village and place they came to, the Lord inspired some good person to receive them until houses could be built and set aside for their use."

<sup>118</sup>SL 16.

<sup>119</sup>Esser, 170-72.

accepting donated property with strings attached.<sup>120</sup> Third, Francis and his original followers tended not to discriminate among those who wished to join their ranks. Anyone from any walk of life could become a disciple. After 1217, however, the majority of those entering the order were, for the first time, educated clerics—that is, men who had previously become accustomed to the privileges, wealth and settled life of an ecclesial class, and who had developed the literacy and eloquence to persuade others of its value. As these educated friars settled into the order, the itinerancy of the order began to lessen.<sup>121</sup> And fourth, the popes and the Roman church authorities placed constant pressure upon Francis and his early successors as head of the order to recognize that legislation by example alone would be disastrous for an order so widespread, whose members often had only second- or third-hand contact with their founder and prime exemplar.<sup>122</sup> Only in 1221 (and in a revised version in 1223) did Francis finally begin to compose an official Rule for the order—reluctantly and with a conspicuous absence of explicitly architectural directives. As more and more friars joined who never had any experience of the Portiuncula site, let alone its renovator, when it became their turn to build, often in different cultures and climates than central Italy, the unique Franciscan hermitage model came into question.

What is remarkable, however, is the degree to which Francis' oral precepts for architectural design for his order remained active at all. The first recorded instance of a hermitage becoming a settled *locus* occurred in 1214 when Francis accepted Br. Giles' request to live a life of strict contemplation at the St. Paul of Favarone hermitage in the plain of Perugia.<sup>123</sup> When the order divided into provinces and subdivided them into custodies in 1216-17, physical boundaries, for the first time, were placed upon the itinerancy of individual friars, forcing them to remain within designated locations, and under the eye of their superiors.<sup>124</sup> The parts of the 1221 Earlier Rule composed at this time indicate that a more settled life and an itinerant life existed side by side.<sup>125</sup> In Francis' understanding, however, the settled life was always to be an exception, at least architecturally, rather than the rule:

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<sup>120</sup>Duncan Nimmo, *Reform and Division in the Medieval Franciscan Order: From Saint Francis to the Foundation of the Capuchins* (Rome: Capuchin Historical Institute, 1987), 54-55.

<sup>121</sup>See David Flood, "The Domestication of the Franciscan Movement," *FS* 60 (1978): 311-27; Nimmo, *Reform and Division*, 55; Esser, 32-40; and Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 92-94.

<sup>122</sup>Brooke, 83-177.

<sup>123</sup>VE 6-7.

<sup>124</sup>Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 62.

<sup>125</sup>Esser, 163.

"Everything should show forth our state as pilgrims, everything bespeak our exile."<sup>126</sup>

On the issue of ownership, however, Francis seems to have been the first to transgress his own restrictions. In 1213 he permitted the mountain of La Verna to be donated to the order in its entirety as a free gift without rent.<sup>127</sup> It seems that Francis was prepared to accept full property rights to La Verna from Count Orlando so long as they were held in a remote and mountainous area where the occupation of the friars would not exclude others from the reasonable enjoyment of the land.<sup>128</sup> In 1220, however, a similar contract was made in Bologna for a house of studies, but without Francis' permission. In this case, a lawyer, Accursius Magnus, "bestowed a small dwelling" upon Peter of Stachia, the local Franciscan Provincial Minister, who in turn set up a school there.<sup>129</sup> For ignoring Francis' restrictions, on ownership and creating houses of study, Peter received the brunt of Francis' anger: all brothers were to leave the house at once, including the sick.<sup>130</sup> They eventually returned when Cardinal Hugolino intervened by publicly stating the house was his and not the brothers'.<sup>131</sup> Three years later a house of studies was established there as well as in Paris, but not, at least in the second case, without controversy. Thomas of Eccleston, for instance, begged Francis in a letter to have the "long and lofty house" in Paris destroyed since it went directly against the spirit of poverty.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>126</sup>Cel 60. In John Moorman's estimation, "There must have been very little actual building of convents during the lifetime of St. Francis. He would not allow it." *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 63.

<sup>127</sup>*Actus Beati Francisci*, ch. 9, *Historia Acceptionis Loci Montis Alvernae* in *BF* 4, p. 156; Lemmens, *Testamonia minora*, 37; Omnibus, 1893.

<sup>128</sup>Lambert, 51.

<sup>129</sup>*Chronicon Normanniae*, ch. 24, in Lemmens, *Testamonia minora*, 20-21.

<sup>130</sup>Cel 58; MP 6. "When Francis heard of this he went at once to Bologna and sharply reproved the Minister saying, 'You are trying to destroy my order! After the manner of Christ Jesus I have always wanted my friars to pray rather than to read.' And upon leaving Bologna, Francis cursed the Minister with a mighty curse." *Actus Beati Francisci et Sociorum Ejus*, ed. P. Sabatier (Paris, 1902), 183-4, translated in Omnibus, 1851. The curse, according to tradition, resulted in the Minister's sudden death.

<sup>131</sup>The friars had a house of studies there in 1224 and supplied the university with a theological faculty by 1231. In 1236 Pope Gregory IX (formerly Cardinal Hugolino) permitted the friars to receive restitution money from those involved in the sin of usury in order to enlarge their study house; *Illius qui timentium*, 2 June 1236, *BF* I, no. 201. See Laurentio Landini, *The Causes of the Clericalization of the Order of Friars Minor* (Chicago: Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1968), 108, 111. See also Lambert, 45; Esser, 157, and Brooke, 64.

<sup>132</sup>Eccleston, X, 47. "But when Francis heard [of the Paris house] he sighed and said: 'I am afraid, brothers, that such men will end by killing my little plant [that is, the young order]. The true masters are those who set a good example to their neighbours in good works and kindness.'" Angelo Clareno, *Chronicon seu Historia septem tribulationum Ordinis Minorum*, ed. Alberto Ghinato, vol. I (Rome, 1959); trans. in Omnibus, 1840.

In the tradition of the hermits, Francis made a direct connection between avarice and learning.<sup>133</sup> In his *Admonitions*, circulated since the earliest days of the order, Francis demanded educated priests to abandon their learning since he could see no other reason for education than for winning wealth and esteem. After quoting St. Paul, "the letter kills, but the spirit gives life,"<sup>134</sup> Francis states:

Those are killed by the letter who merely wish to know the word alone, so that they may be esteemed as wiser than others and be able to acquire great riches to give to [their] relatives and friends. In a similar way, those religious are killed by the letter who do not wish to follow the spirit of Sacred Scripture, but only wish to know [what] the words [are] and [how to] interpret them to others. And those are given life by the spirit of Sacred Scripture who do not refer to themselves by any text which they know or seek to know, but, by word and example, return everything to the most high Lord God to Whom every good belongs.<sup>135</sup>

According to Etienne Gilson, Francis was opposed to learning in his order because it was both unnecessary and dangerous: "Unnecessary, since a man may save his soul and win others to save theirs without it; and dangerous because it is an endless source of pride."<sup>136</sup> To this end, the uselessness of books was emblematic of his stance on learning. The brothers, Francis warned, who are,

led by curious craving after learning will find their hand empty on the day of retribution . . . for tribulation will come such that books, useful for nothing, will be thrown out of windows and into cubby-holes . . .<sup>137</sup>

To a local Minister who wanted to keep several expensive books, Francis appealed to the Gospel basis of their Rule: "I do not want to lose the book of the Gospel, which we have promised, for your books." Similarly, when one of Francis' friars asked to own a breviary,

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<sup>133</sup>See ch. 3, n. 6.

<sup>134</sup>2 Cor 3.6.

<sup>135</sup>*Admonitions*, in Armstrong, 30; Omnibus, 81.

<sup>136</sup>*The Philosophy of Saint Bonaventure*, trans. I. Trethowan and F. Sheed (London, 1938), 45.

<sup>137</sup>2 Cel 195.



Francis appealed to his own example as a Rule by rubbing ashes over his body, all the while repeating, "I, a breviary! I, a breviary! . . ." <sup>138</sup> Francis' disciple Roger of Ancona asked why book ownership was banned in the Rule and Francis replied,

Brother, my first and final intentions and desires are as follows: if my brothers had been willing to listen to me, none of them would have had anything else but the habit granted to them by the Rule, with a cord and breeches. <sup>139</sup>

Francis had legitimate concerns over the ownership of books. In his era, books were often illuminated with real or painted gems as objects of personal or liturgical devotion. Michael Clanchy has shown that books, precious documents, relics of saints and jewellery were usually not kept separate from one another, and therefore may be equated to one another in value. <sup>140</sup> Ownership of more than a few books was a serious matter, requiring money to produce, copy, upkeep them; loans had to be policed and storage secured. Production of books was entrusted to a very expensive and specialized professional scribe for whom the cost of desks, parchment, stylus, knives for scraping, pumice for smoothing, pencil, straight ruler, quill pens, inkhorn and sealing wax was prohibitive. Francis had no choice but to ban personal ownership of books (and therefore learning) if he wished to keep poverty the unifying charism of his order.

The Bologna house controversy marked a turning point in Francis' relation with his order. He had just returned from the Holy Land in 1219-20, from his third attempt to gain what was considered the crown of Christian discipleship: martyrdom. (He may have also wanted to distance himself from the moderating of his ideals within the order). Before leaving in 1217, he had appointed Matthew of Narni and Gregory of Naples as vicars (administrative leaders) of the order in his absence. <sup>141</sup> Once he left they enacted so many changes to the statutes of the 1209 Primitive Rule, that one of Francis' early companions sped off to Damietta to beg Francis to return and fix things. Upon arriving back in Venice, Francis learned of the

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<sup>138</sup>LP 73; MP 4.

<sup>139</sup>MP 3.

<sup>140</sup>Clanchy, *Memory to Written Record*, 125-26.

<sup>141</sup>*Chronica XXIV generalium Ordinis Minorum*, in *AF*, iii, 22, cited hereafter as 24 Gen. This chronicle is dependent upon Eccleston in part and could be dated to the late thirteenth century. See also Jordan, ch. 10-11.

Bologna house transaction and travelled immediately to Rome to request the Pope to appoint his friend, Cardinal Hugolino, as an official advisor.<sup>142</sup> The appointment of the cardinal made him the Protector of the order; this meant he took over nominal ownership of the Franciscan properties which were in question. According to Rosalind Brooke, Hugolino, the future Pope Gregory IX, was a would-be friar who loved but never understood Francis' relationship with evangelical poverty.<sup>143</sup> The cardinal, a canon lawyer by training, supported policies which seemed to be opposed to the Primitive Rule. He encouraged the setting up of schools of theology, the acceptance by friars of ecclesiastical privileges, and the lessening of the restrictions that aimed at preserving poverty.

Perhaps Francis had had another reason for seeking the cardinal's protection for the order: in 1221, Francis decided to abdicate his administrative role as Minister General.<sup>144</sup> While health was given as the official reason, the sources depict a saintly man who was both unable and unwilling to carry out the leadership and legislative responsibilities required to govern an international brotherhood.<sup>145</sup> Francis, however, did retain a quasi-leadership position as the chief exemplar, founder of the order and symbolic image of a true Franciscan—and Francis played this role expertly during the final six years of his life. From the time of his abdication he seems to have increased the number of his preaching tours around Italy, even though his health was rapidly deteriorating. It was during this period that Francis arranged the crèche at the Christmas mass in Greccio.

By this time only a few Franciscan hermitages had a private oratory such as the one at the Portiuncula site. To do their hours and preach to the laity friars were generally encouraged to walk to the nearest local parish church.<sup>146</sup> No Franciscan site had a church for the use of lay visitors until the Portiuncula chapel was designated as such in 1220-21. A small choir was added onto the apse of the Portiuncula chapel during the time when Peter Catanii, whom

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<sup>142</sup>1 Cel 74-75, 100; 3 Soc 15-16 (61-67); 2 Cel 24-25.

<sup>143</sup>Brooke, 69-71.

<sup>144</sup>2 Cel 143.

<sup>145</sup>Lambert, 36-37; Brooke, 76-83.

<sup>146</sup>Francis is quoted in SL: "it is more humble and gives a better example when the brothers go to other churches to preach; so they observe holy poverty," 16; MP 10. Esser, 104-111. A papal document of 1222 gives the friars an indult to recite the office in churches "if you happen to have any." Honorius III, *Devotionis vestrae* (29 March 1222), I, 9b. Matthew Paris, in his *Chronica Majora* (London, 1874), II, 511, says, "these preachers, called Minores, on Sundays and holidays leave their dwellings in order to proclaim in the parish churches the Gospel of the word."

Francis designated as his successor, became the Minister General.<sup>147</sup> The addition, according to the archaeological evidence, was semi-circular, approx. 3.5 meters in diameter with a stone foundation, and presumably stone walls (figs. 81, 82).<sup>148</sup> The reason given for the addition was that crowds, perhaps taking advantage of the special Portiuncula indulgence, were now visiting the miraculous chapel regularly. The brothers desired to have a private community place, "where they might rest and say their office."<sup>149</sup> The *Scripta Leonis* records that Francis was neither consulted nor present when this construction was undertaken, but that he was extremely upset when he finally learned of it and saw it for himself. Since he was no longer Minister General, he did not have the authority to stop the construction, but the new Minister General did not get away without a strong warning:

Brother, this place is the model and example for the whole order. Therefore I would much rather the brothers of this house put up with the discomforts they have to face for the love of God, so that brothers from all over the order who come here take back a good example of poverty to their houses.<sup>150</sup>

The next year Francis was able to offer his brothers an unforgettable image of his displeasure at the continuing alterations to the Portiuncula site. In 1222, the civic commune of Assisi constructed a large *domus* made of stone and lime on the Portiuncula site to house the friars coming for the annual Chapter meeting.<sup>151</sup> When Francis arrived for the meeting, in front of the thousands of friars,

he looked at the house and became angry and bewailed it in no gentle tones. Then he himself went up first to destroy the house; he got up on the roof and with strong hands tore off the slates and tiles. He also commanded his brothers to come up and tear down completely this monstrous thing contrary to poverty. For he used to say that whatever

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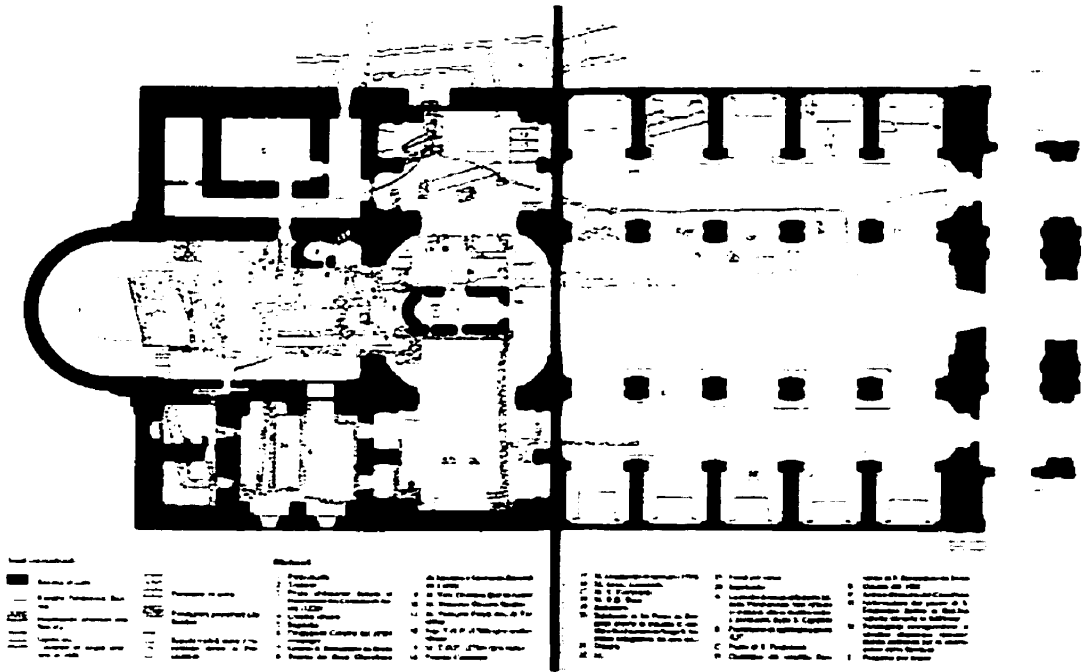
<sup>147</sup>SL 12, LP 12, SP 8. The addition may also have been the result of the 1220 papal directive, against the wishes of Francis, that the order finally adopt at the Portiuncula a permanent novitiate or seminary. See Cajetan Esser, *Rule and Testament of Saint Francis of Assisi* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1977), 148.

<sup>148</sup>Romanini, "*Reliquiae e documenti*," 53-87.

<sup>149</sup>SL 12.

<sup>150</sup>SL 12, LP 12, MP 8.

<sup>151</sup>2 Cel 57, MP 7, LP 11, LM 7.2.



81. Site plan of the original Portiuncula site from 1966-67 excavations beneath the basilica of S. Maria degli Angeli in Assisi. In the centre of the plan is the Portiuncula chapel with two radiating foundations of semi-circular additions attached to its apse, the inner one generally considered to be that which was constructed in 1221. (From Mancini and Scotti, *La Basilica di S. Maria degli Angeli*, fig. 35.)

82. Portiuncula chapel, photo of excavations, June 1967, showing the earlier foundations of the choirs attached to the apse, the inner one generally considered that from 1221. (From Mancini and Scotti, *La Basilica di S. Maria degli Angeli*, fig. 67.)



might have the appearance of arrogance in that place would quickly spread throughout the order and be accepted as a model by all (fig. 56).<sup>152</sup>

The situation was only defused when a visiting knight informed Francis that the building was owned by the commune and not by the brothers. That cooled Francis' anger, but the arrogant structure remained as a witness to the most significant early failure of Francis' desire for buildings to preach poverty and itinerancy not only in the fact of ownership but also in appearance.

The controversies here and at Bologna seem to have prompted a major shift in the way Francis subsequently decided to frame the vow of poverty for his followers. After his resignation as Minister General, Cardinal Hugolino and the pope requested that Francis focus his efforts on rewriting his sketchy Primitive Rule into a form which could receive full ecclesiastical approval. In so doing, he became adamant about poverty restrictions, no doubt reflecting his disapproval of the current leadership of his order and the support Cardinal Hugolino was giving to their decisions. For instance, the 1223 Later Rule drives home the strictest version of the vow of poverty seen in any Franciscan document to date:

The brothers shall not acquire anything of their own, neither a house nor a place nor anything at all. Instead, as "pilgrims and strangers" (1 Pet 2.11) in this world who serve the Lord in poverty and humility, let them go begging for alms with full trust. Nor should they feel ashamed since the Lord made himself poor for us in this world.<sup>153</sup>

The condemnation of property ownership now extended to all their goods, in fact, "anything at all." Celano reports succinctly: "He wanted to have nothing to do with ownership that he might possess all things more fully in God."<sup>154</sup> More significantly, however, the previous prohibition against an "outward appearance of ownership" received a very specific image for the friars to sear into their memories and to put into practice: the imitation of the poverty of Christ as a "pilgrim and stranger." Francis' Testament, dictated three years later, repeats the image:

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<sup>152</sup>2 Cel 57.

<sup>153</sup>LR 6.

<sup>154</sup>1 Cel 44.

Let the brothers beware that they by no means receive churches or poor dwellings or anything which is built for them, unless it is in harmony with [that] holy poverty we have promised in the Rule, [and] let them always be guests there as "pilgrims and strangers."<sup>155</sup>

This passage indicates a context very different from that of the 1221 Earlier Rule which was only concerned with random appropriation of hermitage hovels by a relatively small and itinerant order. In the Later Rule the concern was to stem the tide of churches offered to be built and financed especially for the Franciscans. The appeal to an inner disposition of "pilgrim and stranger" among the friars ingeniously solves the problem of the outward appearance of ownership. Earlier, they had been asked to live in a hermitage such that, if a stranger were to visit and want to own it, they would gladly give it over.<sup>156</sup> Francis obviously saw the flaws in this restriction: first, the Rule assumed that the visitors were more likely to be poorer and more itinerant and needy than the occupants, and second, the construction of this directive lacked the authenticity of a concrete Gospel image worthy of reflection and imitation. By rewriting this section of the Rule whereby the friars were to live there as strangers, and illustrating this with a direct scriptural metaphor—one offered by St. Peter, the first among Christ's disciples—Francis was proposing an image worthy of contemplation among the brothers, and one which he hoped would lead to habitual ethical action. The image not only reverberated throughout the hermit and penitential tradition of the church but would find its most concrete expression in the throngs of wandering poor, lepers, pilgrims and strangers in the rising mobility of post-feudal society. Finally, the image was none other than that exemplified by their father and founder who, in turn, was imitating Christ's relationship to his material world, such that "everything should show forth our state as pilgrims, everything bespeak our exile."<sup>157</sup>

Politically or architecturally, prudence demands prescriptive legislation for large organizations. Francis, however, preferred an open-ended, non-limited hermeneutic of Gospel life—in the tradition, one might say, of Augustine's dictum "Love, and do what you will." Not to legislate the dimensions for hermitage building, but to instill an interior disposition of perpetual itinerancy would, once imprinted upon the heart, result in a practice

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<sup>155</sup>Test 24.

<sup>156</sup>ER 7, 2 Cel 87; Lambert, 51.

<sup>157</sup>2 Cel 59-60.

of building and dwelling like that of Jesus Christ. With this approach, however, Francis took upon himself the unusual and weighty responsibility to legislate architecture by poetic image. The final two years of his life testify to this effort.





## ***Exempla Refined: the Tau and the Portiuncula***

### *a. The Tau: An Image of Identity*

Not long after 1209-10, Francis declared the Portiuncula chapel to be the mother church of the Friars Minor, following a request made by the Benedictine owners of the site who asked that, "if the Lord causes this congregation of yours to grow, we wish this place to become head of all your churches."<sup>1</sup> It was already the main site of the annual Chapter meetings, the seat of the order's power. Here the Rule was read, legislation was determined and promulgated, novices were received, missions were initiated, and here the early Ministers General lived and worked. Obedience radiated from the Portiuncula. Even the birds and insects were believed to follow Francis' commands there.<sup>2</sup> Francis specified in his later years that the Portiuncula be "always under the control of the Minister General, that he may provide for it with the most care and attention, and especially that he put there a good and saintly community."<sup>3</sup> Francis also "commanded his brothers to venerate this place with a special reverence; this place he willed to be preserved as a model of humility and highest poverty for their order."<sup>4</sup> The Portiuncula was to be a holy *speculum*:

a mirror and good example to the whole order, a candle before the throne of God and the blessed Virgin, by which the Lord may be propitiated for the failings and sins of the brothers and may always nurture and protect his little plant, this order.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>MP 55, SL 8, LP 8, 3 Soc 56.

<sup>2</sup>SL 84, 110.

<sup>3</sup>SL 10.

<sup>4</sup>2 Cel 18.

<sup>5</sup>SL 10. Augustine, in his *Enarratio in Psalmum 103*, 30, *Sermo III* (PL 36, 248), uses the word *speculum* as a metaphor for Scripture. Similarly, both the rule attributed to Augustine, *Regula ad Servos Dei* (PL 40, 1384), and Benedict's Rule refer to themselves as *specula* for the monks. Building on this understanding, Hugh of St. Victor, in his *Expositio in Regulam Beati Augustini* (PL, 176, 928D-

According to Celano's *Vita prima*, Francis attributed to the Portiuncula an unusual spiritual authority.

He often said to his brothers, "See to it, my sons, that you never abandon this place. If you are driven out from one side go back in at the other. For this place is truly holy and is the dwelling place of God. Here when we were but a few, the Most High gave us increase; here he enlightened the hearts of his poor ones by the light of wisdom; here he set our wills afire with the fire of his love. Here he who prays with devout heart will obtain what he prays for and he who offends will be punished more severely. Wherefore my sons, consider this dwelling place of God to be worthy of all honour, and with all your heart, with the voice of joy and praise, give glory to God in this place."<sup>6</sup>

The heavenly reputation of the Portiuncula was born not only out of Francis' conviction that it was a place "visited by heavenly spirits," but also from the experience of visitors such as the layman who,

had a vision of a multitude of people, all blind; they were kneeling on the ground around Sancta Maria de Angelis with joined hands and upturned eyes and they cried pitiably to God, praying that, in his mercy, he would give them sight. While they were praying, a great light came from heaven and rested above them, shedding its healing radiance.<sup>7</sup>

Other hermitage sites would share in the holiness of the Portiuncula to the degree that each one was a *similitudo*, *forma*, or copy, of its configuration.<sup>8</sup> A significant example was

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924A), emphasizes how a *speculum* is to be memorized since it shows us both what we are and what we ought to be. As an example of built Scripture, a rule and a mnemonic for the order, the Portiuncula seems to be expressed here in terms of a particularly apt metaphor. See *The Northern Metrical Version of the Rule of St. Benet in Three Middle-English Versions*, ed. Ernst Kock (Early English Text Society, O.S., 120), 76; and R. Bradley, "Backgrounds of the title *Speculum* in Medieval Literature," *Speculum* 29 (1954), 100-115.

<sup>6</sup>1 Cel 106.

<sup>7</sup>1 Cel 106; 3 Soc 56; 2 Cel 20. It is quite possible that this vision was based upon actual rituals or practices of prayer that took place at the Portiuncula chapel.

<sup>8</sup>On how copies of venerated prototypes in medieval architecture were never exact and yet were considered "a sufficient stimulus to arouse all the religious associations which were connected to the prototype," see Richard Krautheimer, "Introduction to an 'Iconography of Medieval Architecture'" *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* V (1942): 1-33.

the hermitage on Mt. La Verna. From the time of the donation of the site to the order in 1213, Francis favoured it for a number of his 40-day retreats. Between 1216 and 1218 a church was constructed there whose site and measurements, according to local tradition, had been revealed by an angel to Francis along with its dedication to Santa Maria degli Angeli (figs. 57, 77, 83).<sup>9</sup> It was similar to the Portiuncula in being located within a forest and having a *claustrum* area for the cells to the right of the entrance. La Verna's original chapel, minus its later additions, has a shape and volume almost exactly in proportion to those of the Portiuncula. La Verna is only slightly larger, approximately 12.2 x 5 meters in plan and 7 meters high compared to the 10.7 x 4 meter plan and 6 meter height of the Portiuncula.<sup>10</sup> La Verna's interior elliptical arch seems to trace out the same gentle "pointed" curve as the Portiuncula's and the building is made of the same rough stone construction, with an exterior gabled roof. La Verna's only difference is that the apse is rectangular in plan rather than semi-circular, otherwise the original main doorway and original windows are in similar positions (fig. 77, 83; cf. figs. 41, 44). Thus, from its name to its form, the La Verna site was an imitation of the mother church and hermitage at Assisi: an *alter-Portiuncula*. As such, La Verna also guaranteed its visitors the reception of the celestial rewards usually reserved for the Portiuncula.

While on retreat on Mt. La Verna between August 15 and September 29, 1224, Francis was staying in a *cella reclusus*, or *carcere*, and had a vision where he saw,

a man standing above him, like a seraph with six wings, his hands extended and his feet joined together and fixed to a cross. Two of the wings were extended above his head, two were extended as if for flight, and two were wrapped around the whole body (figs. 57, 84, 85).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>There is mention of an "oratorio del luogo dei frati" in the *Considerazioni*. See Luigi Canonici, ed., *I fioretti di San Francesco. Considerazioni sulle stimmate; Vita di frate Ginepro* (Portiuncula, 1966), 258, 269. S. Charon de Guersac, *Le Mont Alverne* (Rocca San Casciano, 1905), 24; *Codice diplomatico della Verna e delle SS. Stimmate di San Francesco d'Assisi nel VII centenario del gran prodigio* (Firenze, 1924); *The Shrine of La Verna* (Genova: n.d.); and Moorman, *Franciscan Houses*, 14-15.

<sup>10</sup>The measurements of the La Verna chapel are my own. Note that the interior length in both cases was calculated from the entrance doors to the back of the apse.

<sup>11</sup>1 Cel 94; SL 93, Appendix, 2; 2 Cel 49. In another La Verna story, which may or may not be from this same retreat, Francis' cell catches fire, signifying his *cella* as a type of mud and stick construction, MP 117. The local tradition, however, designates an immense rock overhang and a cave where Francis usually resided.

Francis was unable to interpret the vision. Its "beauty beyond estimation" brought great happiness to him, yet the suffering of the figure fixed to the cross "filled him with fear."<sup>12</sup> As he reflected on the vision for its meaning, "the marks of nails began to appear on his hands and feet, just as he had seen them a little before in the crucified man above him."<sup>13</sup> The first written account of the stigmata came two years later in Br. Elias' letter announcing Francis' death: "His hands and feet were pierced through as by nails; they retained these wounds and showed the black colour of nails. His side was opened as by a lance and bled frequently."<sup>14</sup> Celano's description was written eighteen months after Elias' and seems to be based on an eyewitness report which was recently found in the Assisi municipal archives; it differs only slightly from Elias' account. This report reads:

The marks were round on the inside of his hands, on the outside elongated; and a small bit of flesh appeared like the head of a nail, bent and turned back, which lay on top of other flesh. In the same way also in his feet were marks of nails raised up from the rest of the flesh. His right side was pierced as with a spear, the wound being closed up, and this used to often bleed so that his tunic and breeches were often stained with holy blood.<sup>15</sup>

Francis, out of humility, chose to conceal these marks, as best as he could, from

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<sup>12</sup>1 Cel 94.

<sup>13</sup>1 Cel 94. Cf. LM 8.3, where St. Bonaventure designates this seraph-man clearly as "Christ crucified."

<sup>14</sup>LE 1958. The *Encyclical Letter* of Brother Elias, cited hereafter as LE, was written the day after Francis' death, October 4 1226, as an announcement of the death to the entire order. No manuscript editions of this letter have survived. The earliest copy of this letter was printed in the 1620 Antwerp publication of the *Speculum vitae beati Francisci et sociorum eius*. Felice Accrocca argues that the letter that comes to us is not the original but as a constructed compilation of references to Thomas of Celano's and Julian of Speyer's biographies of Francis; as well, the suffrages requested by Elias at the end of the letter are the prescriptions found in the Narbonne Constitutions of 1260. Although the suffrages may have been added at a later date, it is, in my opinion, equally possible that Celano, a thorough researcher who probably had access to the letter before arriving in Assisi to begin his biography, and Speyer, who drew mostly from Celano but also had access to the widely disseminated letter, built sections of their biographies upon Elias' story rather than the reverse. See Felice Accrocca, "Un Apocrifo la 'Lettera Enciclica di Frate Elia sul Transito di S. Francesco'" *CF* 65 (1995): 473-509; and J.A. Wayne Hellmann, "The Seraph in Thomas of Celano's *Vita Prima*," in Michael Cusato and F. Edward Coughlin, eds. *That Others May Know and Love: Essays in Honor of Zachary Hayes* (St. Bonaventure N.Y.: The Franciscan Institute, 1997), 23-41.

<sup>15</sup>Cited in *Omnibus*, p. 1896; 1 Cel 95.



83. Exterior, side facade of Santa Maria degli Angeli, La Verna. The chapel is in the centre of photo, that is, to the right of and behind the large bell tower of the much larger Basilica which was constructed later. (Photo by author.)



84. Francis receives the stigmata on La Verna. Earliest known depiction, 13th c. (Marble. Sanctuary of the Stigmata, Mt. La Verna.. Photo by author.)

observers.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, according to testimonies in the Assisi archives, four Assisi laymen attested to seeing the stigmata while he was alive, and Celano adds at least five more Franciscan witnesses in his *Vitae*.<sup>17</sup> After Francis' death, however, Celano reports that the stigmata was seen, touched and kissed by all the local Franciscan brothers, visiting dignitaries, St. Clare and her sisters at San Damiano, as well as a great many townspeople from Assisi (fig. 86).<sup>18</sup>

We find out from Br. Leo, who was present on Mt. La Verna with Francis and Brothers Masseo and Angelo, that Francis was fasting and observing silence between the feast of the Assumption of the Mary and the feast of Michael the Archangel and in honour of them.<sup>19</sup> One of the earliest depictions of the event shows Francis on Mt. La Verna beneath the seraph vision kneeling half outside a church structure, presumably the chapel of Sancta Maria de Angeli (fig. 84). This marble bas-relief also shows a conflation of the crucified man and the six-winged seraph, an image which would become common in Franciscan iconography. The source is obviously Celano, the first to not only describe the vision, but to explain the meaning of each wing and each feather of each wing, based upon the visions in Isaiah and

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<sup>16</sup>1 Cel 95; 2 Cel 135-38.

<sup>17</sup>They include Brothers Elias (the Minister General of the time), Rufino, Pacificus, a brother from Bescia and another unnamed brother. All of these sightings seemed to involve some sort of accident of Francis' or a deliberate deception on the part of his brothers, in order to verify what seems to have been a well-known rumour. 1 Cel 95, 2 Cel 135-38; *AF*, iii. 46 and n. Cf. Fortini, *Nova Vita*, 206-7.

<sup>18</sup>The Assisi municipal document lists at least fifteen layman who attested to the miracle after seeing Francis' corpse. As for relics, a piece of chamois leather, which once covered Francis' side, is preserved with visible blood stains in Assisi; see a photo of this in Von Matt, *St. Francis of Assisi*, fig. 140. Although the veracity of Francis' stigmata has been questioned off and on throughout the centuries, few scholars today argue against the medieval accounts. See Nitza Yarom, *Body, Blood, and Sexuality: a Psychoanalytic Study of St. Francis' Stigmata and their Historical Context* (New York: P. Lang, 1992), 1-44. After Francis, thirty-one further cases of stigmata are recorded in the thirteenth century, and at least 321 stigmatics have been documented from the time of Francis until 1962. See R. Biot, *The Enigma of the Stigmata* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1962). Some of the more recent cases have been verified by the scientific community as occurring naturally, although there have been some in the past, such as Mary of Oignies, whose stigmata was self-induced; Caroline Walker Bynum, "Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?" in *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 106, n. 56. The phenomenon has not been limited to Christians, there are cases on record of devout Muslims on whose bodies have appeared the wounds incurred by Mohammed in battle; see, Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, "Christ—and the Second Christ," *Yale Review* 74 (Spring, 1985): 321-45, 337.

<sup>19</sup>Omnibus, 124. The number on retreat respects the maximum number of four which Francis specifies in his Rule for the Hermitages. Since Francis took the part of the contemplative Mary, Leo was his Martha.

Ezekiel (fig. 87).<sup>20</sup> Celano's interpretation of the vision may have been based either directly or indirectly on Francis' own understanding of the image.<sup>21</sup> Its metaphoric depth and complexity, however, designate it as a powerful and unmistakable memory image. Its similarity to the vision of the talking crucifix at S. Damiano was pointed out by Celano in his *Vita secunda*, based on stories from the early companions that he gathered in 1246.<sup>22</sup> Br. Leo, however, noted much earlier how Francis would often contemplate an image of Christ as a substitute for attending mass.<sup>23</sup> The influence of this image over the spiritual discipline, if not theological speculation, of the early order is exemplified, for instance, in the mystical reflection, the *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, composed by St. Bonaventure after a retreat on Mount La Verna in 1260 which included a similar vision structured on the wings and feathers of this crucified seraph.<sup>24</sup>

Before descending Mt. La Verna Francis asked Br. Leo to perform a curious ritual in honour of the vision:

The holy man pointed to a certain stone and said, "O Brother Leo, little sheep, wash that stone with water." Then, when Br. Leo had done this, he said: "Wash it with wine." When he had done that the saint said: "Wash it with oil." This also Br. Leo did; and then Francis said, "Wash it with balsam." "And how," said Br. Leo, "am I to find any balsam here?" Then Francis said to him, "Know, O little sheep of God, that that is the stone on

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<sup>20</sup> Cel 114. Is 6.1-3; Ezk 1.5-14, 22-25. The earliest use of a six-winged angel as a mnemonic device for contemplation was by the regular canon Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173), in his *Mystical Ark*, I, x, trans. Grover Zinn (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1979), 168. That either Francis or Celano described this angel to be a seraph would be in keeping with its spiritual rather than intellectual role specified in the *Celestial Hierarchy* of Pseudo-Dionysius (VI, ii). The seraph signified the affective rapture of Francis into the warmth of this Dionysian "firemaker." See Hellmann, "The Seraph," 23-41, esp. 35.

<sup>21</sup> Francis freely spoke about the vision, even though he kept the stigmata relatively secret.

<sup>22</sup> Soc 13c; 2 Cel 10. Note that the La Verna seraph, like the crucifix at S. Damiano, spoke with Francis also.

<sup>23</sup> Francis used to say, "When I cannot hear Mass I adore the body of Christ in my mind's eye in prayer in just the same way as I adore it when I see it at Mass." *FSt*, n.s. ix (1949): 20-1, esp. 13 ff; *SL*, introduction, p. 8. Note, as well, that the contemplation and envisioning of Christ crucified is traditional among Christian ascetics. Peter Damian claimed to have had a vision of Jesus nailed to the cross with blood flowing from his wounds during a state of rapture. *Opuscula 19: De abdicatione episcopatus*, cap. v (*PL* 145, 432 A; Vat. f 170v).

<sup>24</sup> That the seraph in Celano serves as a pedagogical and contemplative device is also noted by Hellmann in "The Seraph," 24. See also my "Memory and Representation: St. Bonaventure's *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* in the Franciscan High Middle Ages" (unpublished Master's dissertation, Cambridge University, 1989).



85. Francis receives the Stigmata. (Late 13th c. fresco by Giotto. Cappella Bardi, Basilica Santa Croce, Firenze.)

86. Death of Francis with a townperson investigating his miraculous wound. (Detail of a late 13th c. fresco by Giotto. Basilica S. Croce, Cappella Bardi, Firenze.)





which the Lord once sat when He appeared before me."<sup>25</sup>

Francis seems to associate his vision with that of Jacob who anointed his stone pillow with oil at Bethel after his vision of angels, and later poured "drink offerings upon [the stone]" and anointed it with oil because God appeared to him and asked him to increase and multiply (fig. 88).<sup>26</sup> Francis explains his fourfold anointing ritual by saying that God made a fourfold promise to him, including the prophecy that his order shall multiply and "last to the end of the world."<sup>27</sup> That his followers also saw Francis as another Jacob (and themselves, therefore, as his "nation of Israel"), seems clear from Elias' letter where Francis is referred to as the patriarch Jacob, who, after being taught directly by God, gave the covenant of peace to Israel (i.e., gave the Rule to the Franciscan order).<sup>28</sup>

The earliest primary source artifact relating to Francis' La Verna experience is the Blessing for Br. Leo. The *chartula* was produced on the mountain immediately after the reception of the stigmata, and still exists relatively unscathed in the basilica in Assisi. Honouring a request for a written blessing that Leo could always keep with him, Francis dictated to him a passage from Numbers concerning a blessing God had given to Moses to give to Aaron and the children of Israel:

May the Lord Bless you and keep you;

May He show His face to you and be merciful to you.

May he turn His countenance to you and give you peace.<sup>29</sup>

Francis, in this instance, took the part of Moses, and, as Elias mentioned in his letter, offered a "covenant of peace to Israel."<sup>30</sup> These "words of God and praises," were the fruits of

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<sup>25</sup>24 Gen 67-68, translated in *Omnibus*, 1904.

<sup>26</sup>Gn 28.18, 35.14. The ritual, as well, relates to the consecration rite for altars and churches, which, in turn, also relies upon the example of Jacob. According to pictorial evidence, Francis was at just such a consecration (fig. 88). On the medieval consecration rite for altars see Durandus, *Rationale divinarum officiorum*, 136ff.

<sup>27</sup>24 Gen 67-68; translated in *Omnibus*, 1904.

<sup>28</sup>LE, 1958.

<sup>29</sup>Num 6.24-26.

<sup>30</sup>LE, 1956.

Francis' contemplative memory, now offered to Leo for his memory.<sup>31</sup> Beneath this blessing Francis wrote with his own hand an enormous *tau* figure which emerges from the mouth of a head, as verified by Leo, and around which letters seem to be carefully arranged (figs. 21, 22, cf. 18).<sup>32</sup> The entire configuration seems to be an acrostic or cryptogram (with the *tau* used as a Latin "t") which yields at least two translations: "May the Lord bless you, Brother Leo," and "Let the Lord say, 'Well shall you weep.'"<sup>33</sup> It seems to be in the form of a medieval cross-puzzle, whose enigmatic configuration has often stumped scholars.<sup>34</sup> In the first interpretation, the *tau* would be read into the sentence in such a way as to cut right through Leo's name, thereby making the sign of the cross over him.<sup>35</sup> But, whereas a sign of the cross usually has four legs or radii, the *tau* has only three, thus emphasizing a particularly trinitarian connotation.<sup>36</sup> Given that the *tau*-puzzle follows the blessing Francis dictated from Numbers—also considered to be an Old Testament witness to the Trinity, as well as a blessing by God to Moses to Aaron (the *tau*-writing prophet himself)—then Francis may be placing himself in the role of the ascetic "Nazarite" Aaron.<sup>37</sup> In the letter of Br. Elias, however, the two prophets from the Numbers passage both merge into the person of Francis, when he bids his brothers to "imitate the people of Israel as they wept over their great leaders, Moses and Aaron."<sup>38</sup>

What has also puzzled interpreters is that the *tau* figure seems to have been drawn in such a way that it emerges from a head. The head has often been argued by scholars to be that of Br. Leo, but it is more successfully demonstrated, in my opinion, by John Fleming to be in

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<sup>31</sup>Francis seems to directly refer to the seat of memory, the heart, when, according to Leo, he said "Give me paper and ink, as I want to write down some words of God and his praises which I have been meditating in my heart." SL, appendix, 2.

<sup>32</sup>Clanchy notes that all notaries had a distinctive *signum* to sign with, as did master masons on the stones of their buildings. The four-quarter cross was a common *signum*, often used symbolically even though their name could have been written. Clanchy, *From Memory*, 242, 246.

<sup>33</sup>This extremely enigmatic picture-poem has been the subject of ongoing interpretations by scholars over the centuries. The most recent treatment of the subject is John Fleming, "The Iconographic Unity of the Blessing for Brother Leo," *FS*, 63 (1981): 203-220. See also Duane Lapsanski, "The Autographs on the 'Chartula' of St. Francis of Assisi," *AFH* 67 (1974): 18-37; S.J.P. van Dijk, "Saint Francis' Blessing of Brother Leo," *AFH* 67 (1954): 200; and O.O. Münsterer, "Das Pest-Tau ein Trinitätssymbol," *Deutsche Gaue* 46 (1954): 86-94.

<sup>34</sup>Fleming, "Iconographic Blessing," 208. On the relationship of text and image see, Hans-Georg Müller, *Hrabanus Maurus—De Laudibus sancti crucis—Studien zur Überlieferung und Geistesgeschichte* (Ratingen, 1973), 144.

<sup>35</sup>Following Lapsanski, "The Autographs on the 'Chartula'," 35.

<sup>36</sup>See, Münsterer, "Das Pest-Tausee," 86-94.

<sup>37</sup>See Fleming, "Iconographic Blessing," 210-12.

<sup>38</sup>LE, 1959.

87. The Moralisacio Seraph, a memory image based on the wings and feathers of a seraph, depicted at the beginning of the book of Isaiah, in *Postilla in Prophetas*, by the Franciscan Nicolaus of Lyra. Utrecht, 1423-25. (HS. 252, fol. 43v.)



88. Consecration of the Benedictine church of S. Gregorio by Pope Innocent III with Francis (centre, behind the pope.) (Fresco, wall no. 1., Church of S. Gregorio, Subiaco, c. 1228. Photo by author.)

the tradition of the skull of Adam which was typically depicted in medieval iconography at the base of the cross.<sup>39</sup> I would add, however, that since the head seems to be more alive than dead, as well as bearing the capuche, whiskers and sunken eyes of a Franciscan ascetic, it could be Francis himself, from whose mouth issues the *tau* blessing. The jagged figure in which the head is situated may be, as Fleming has suggested, the rough hole or cavern wherein the skull of Adam was often depicted, but it is equally probable that it is an outline of Francis' cave hermitage on La Verna, taken up in honour of Jesus in the desert who, in Francis' understanding, hid beneath a rock and was administered to by angels (fig. 89).<sup>40</sup> That this *tau*-puzzle is truly a signature of Francis is further supported by the vision of Sylvester who

saw an immense cross reaching to the sky, and its foot was planted in the mouth of Francis, while the arms spread from one end of the world to the other. . . . Thus Sylvester was brought to fear God and he began to do penance.<sup>41</sup>

Francis would certainly have known of this vision which directly inspired Sylvester to be one of the first to join the new order.<sup>42</sup> By drawing the *tau* issuing from his mouth, Francis seems to be blessing Leo orally.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, Sylvester's penitential response to the image supports the second, more penitential, interpretation of the blessing based upon Isaiah where the *Dominus* calls for weeping.<sup>44</sup> The reality, however, is probably closer to what John Fleming suggests, that the two interpretations of the Blessing were meant to exist simultaneously, indeed, mysteriously in honour of the momentous occasion.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>39</sup>Fleming, "Iconographic Blessing," 213-15.

<sup>40</sup>SL 13, 2 Cel 59; Mt 4.1ff, 24.3, Is 33.16ff.

<sup>41</sup>3 Soc 31. Cf. 2 Cel 109.

<sup>42</sup>Although this story was recorded rather late (1246), it probably came directly from Sylvester, and Celano deemed it authentic enough to repeat in his *Vita secunda*, 109.

<sup>43</sup>If we consider that the initial letter of the canon of the mass was, as Innocent III believed, the *tau* of Ezekiel 9.4, then from Francis's mouth was also coming the salvific eucharistic words themselves. Innocent III, "Epistola 46," PL 214, 1012a; 217, 840ff. Schmucki directly connects the *tau* to Francis' eucharistic apostolate from 1216 onward. "Passion of Christ," 18-21.

<sup>44</sup>PL 217: 673ff. (Mansi, xcii, 968ff.), as noted in Fleming, *Bonaventure to Bellini*, 114-15. The Scriptural passage is Is 10.12. Francis' relation to the penitential Angel of the Sixth Seal (Rev 7.2-3), pointed out by Bonaventure, may also support this reading. In Bonaventure's case, the attribution takes on the exegetical urgency of Joachimite speculation on the Angel in the mid-thirteenth century; LM, Prologue.

<sup>45</sup>Fleming, "Iconographic Blessing," 207.

The *tau* signature indicates Francis' understanding of his identity, his ethical character, recognized, as Jesus' was, through a transfiguration. In the Gospels, Jesus climbed a mountain with three of his disciples to pray, as Francis did on La Verna, where "the appearance of [Jesus'] countenance became altered."<sup>46</sup> God conversed directly with Jesus about his fate, as he did with Francis through the stigmata, and, like Jesus, Francis was determined to keep the fruits of this vision a secret. During the transfiguration Moses and Elijah appear and converse with Jesus. All of them, including Francis, were prophets and desert ascetics, indeed, mountain cave contemplatives who undertook 40-day fasts while leading an outcast people.<sup>47</sup> Francis received the "angelic refreshments" of Elijah whose eremitic shabbiness Francis emulated.<sup>48</sup> With Moses, Francis was a religious founder and legislator, in direct communication with God, one who walked barefoot, healed the sick with a *tau*, and could strike water from a rock (fig. 90, cf. fig. 53).<sup>49</sup> As well, Moses received a covenant on a rock on Mt. Horeb written on tablets, while Francis, received his on a rock on Mt. La Verna, written on his flesh.<sup>50</sup>

The *tau* blessing was given to Br. Leo as a cure for his spiritual temptations. For Leo it was not only an object to be valued for its message and beauty, but also a mnemonic talisman or relic, through which "many great miracles were worked by God for those who were touched by the parchment in their severe illnesses."<sup>51</sup> Together with the vision and stigmata, the *chartula* confirmed that a hermitage based on the Portiuncula prototype would, given the reverent interaction of its occupants, share in its graces. Thus the *tau* parchment may stand as a prefigurative representation for the subsequent performance of Francis' death. As on La Verna, Francis now had to ensure that the most appropriate architectural tableau be selected such that the demise of his mysteriously wounded figure would effect, in a similar way, vision and healing at a universal scale.

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<sup>46</sup>Mt 17.1-8; Mk 9.2-8; Lk 9.28-36.

<sup>47</sup>Ex 24.18, 3Kgs 19.8, Mt 4.2.

<sup>48</sup>1Kgs 19.9; 2Kgs 1.8. Fleming, *From Bonaventure to Bellini*, 32-74. Fleming also notes the parallel made by Celano between a further vision of Francis in a fiery chariot in 1 Cel 47 and LM 4.4 and the same of Elijah in 4Kgs 6.17.

<sup>49</sup>Ex 3.1-5, 17.6, 34.35; Num 21.6-9. Fleming, *From Bonaventure to Bellini*, 47-48. Francis drew water from a rock in a miracle described in 2 Cel 46 and LM 7.12.

<sup>50</sup>LM 6.4. Ex 33.18. Fleming, *From Bonaventure to Bellini*, 48.

<sup>51</sup>SL, appendix, 2. 3 Cel 159; LM, Miracles, 10.6; 2 Cel 49; LM 11.9. On the *tau* as a healing sign see chapter 3, note 69.

b. *The Portiuncula: An Image of Passage*

Due to the pain of the stigmata in his feet, Francis continued his preaching tours by donkey, in imitation of Christ, following the prophecy of Isaiah, in his last days.<sup>52</sup> Francis soon "began to be oppressed with various sicknesses more grievous than before."<sup>53</sup> He suffered from fevers, blindness with continual tearing (fig. 91), edema of the legs (dropsy), extreme anemia, emaciation, liver and spleen failure, debilitating pain from the marks in his hands and feet and the continuously bleeding wound from his side.<sup>54</sup> The symptoms were aggravated by Francis' practice of mortification by self-flagellation, eating food mixed with ashes, going barefoot in the winter, wearing a hair-shirt and, on occasion, iron wrist fetters. "Seldom indeed did he relax his severity; so much so, that on his deathbed he confessed to having sinned grievously against Brother Body" (fig. 55).<sup>55</sup> For his eye problems, in 1225-26 Francis had had to undergo, by order of Br. Elias the Minister General, the excruciating medieval remedy of cauterization by hot poker across his face.<sup>56</sup> Francis admitted at this time that his life-long desire for martyrdom was finally being granted to him in his illnesses: "This

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<sup>52</sup>Mt 21.1-9; Is 62.11. Note, as well, that Francis often called himself *Frater asinus*, LM 5.4. For the humility, if not comic absurdity of the ass in medieval understanding, see Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 78ff. For the biblical tradition and Franciscan understanding of the symbol of the *onager*, or ass, see Fleming, *From Bonaventure to Bellini*, 29-31, 34-36.

<sup>53</sup>1 Cel 97.

<sup>54</sup>Francis was a sickly child: "From his youth he could live only surrounded by constant care" as he "was always unwell, as in the world he was a fragile and weak man by nature." *Legenda Antiqua*, AF XV (1922), 23-70, 112, 278-332, as cited in Haines, "The Death of Saint Francis," 27, n. 2. When he died at age forty-four, he was relatively young for his time (the average age of death for males then being the mid-fifties). After an extensive analysis of the sources from a medical perspective, Haines specifies a number of likely causes for Francis' symptoms, such as malaria, picked up while on mission to Morocco, a type of dormant leprosy, tuberculosis and/or Hodgkins disease, all of which were prevalent in Francis' time and context.

<sup>55</sup>3 Soc 14. See also, Edward Hartung, "St. Francis and Medieval Medicine," *Annals of Medical History* 7 (1935): 85-91.

<sup>56</sup>1 Cel 97, LP 38, 43, 46-48. By the time of his death, his face was such "a mass of scars and burned tissue" he wore a specially made cap and face cover (2 Cel 215). See Haines, "The Death of Saint Francis," 40. The *purgatio capitis*, or the cleansing of the head by cauterization, was often in the form of a T-shape in the forehead and relates to early Christian exorcisms. See Calvin Wells, *Bones, Bodies and Disease: Evidence of Disease and Abnormality in Early Man* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964), 147.

infirmity is harder for me to bear even for three days, than any martyrdom."<sup>57</sup>

After the cauterizations, Francis' travels drew to a close. In late summer 1226 Br. Elias arranged to have him brought from Siena to Assisi, where he wished to die. On the last leg of the journey the citizens of Assisi sent armed soldiers to accompany him home via Sartiano rather than through Perugia, for fear that he might die there and his valuable corpse be claimed by their long-standing rivals.<sup>58</sup> Even though the Assisians were jubilant to have their beloved Francis back home and safely installed in the bishop's palace for his last days, they did not trust the friars to keep the holy remains in Assisi after his death. The city insisted on posting guards outside the palace.<sup>59</sup>

In medieval times an extended death was much longed for, as opposed to a *mors improvisa*, or sudden death, which would rob the dying of the opportunity to render themselves penitentially in a state of grace.<sup>60</sup> Since Francis claimed to have had foreknowledge of the day of his death through a 1224 dream of Br. Elias, he therefore had two years to choreograph carefully his rite of passage in emulation of Jesus. Indeed, "the closer his death approached the more careful he was to bear in mind in all perfection how he might live and die in all humility and poverty," because, as Celano notes, even in his death Francis longed to "show himself to be a true imitator of Christ in all things."<sup>61</sup>

Francis first asked his brothers to sing loudly night and day "so the guards could hear" a canticle he himself wrote, his famous *Laudes creaturarum*.<sup>62</sup> Composed in various sections during the time after his stigmata, it remains to this day a seminal piece of Italian vernacular poetry.<sup>63</sup> Evoking the majesty of the Davidic psalmody, the poetry of the Latin hymnal, and the folk popularity of the *jongleur* tradition, this canticle lays bear an intensely familial

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<sup>57</sup>1 Cel 107. Julianus of Spira's *Vita sancti Francisci* (1232-35), follows Thomas of Celano's *Vita prima* in almost every place except, when it comes to Francis' thoughts on martyrdom, he makes Celano's implicit reference explicit, stating clearly that Francis' penance and the stigmata was his martyrdom (ch. 3, 5, 7, 11 in *AF* x, 43-44).

<sup>58</sup>1 Cel 105; SL 59.

<sup>59</sup>1 Cel 108; SL 64; MP 121.

<sup>60</sup>Paul Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation* (Ithaca: Cornell U. Press, 1996), 36.

<sup>61</sup>SL 106; 2 Cel 216.

<sup>62</sup>SL 64; MP 121; LP 43.

<sup>63</sup>Armstrong, 37-39. It may also be the earliest recorded example of Italian vernacular language. For the history of its composition see LP 43-46. See Fleming, *Introduction to Franciscan Literature*, 177ff; and Eloi Leclercq, *The Canticle of Creatures: Symbols of Union*, trans. Matthew O'Connell (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1978), 4. For further studies consult F. Bajetto, "Un trentennio di studi (1941-1973) sul Cantico di Frate Sole. Bibliografia ragionata," *L'Italia Francescana* 49 (1974): 5-62.



89. The Projecting Rock, one of the traditionally designated sites for St. Francis' meditations on Mt. La Verna. (Photo by author.)



90. Francis prays for water of behalf of a thirsty pilgrim, and water miraculously flows from a rock. (Fresco by Giotto, late 13th c., Upper Church of S. Francesco, Assisi.)



91. Francis with Egyptian eye sickness, continually wiping tears. This is a 14th c. copy of an early 13th c. original, Precipio Chapel, Greccio. (Photo by author.)



relationship to creation. Brothers Sun, Wind and Fire receive his praises, as do Sisters Moon, Water, Earth; and, in a concluding stanza that Francis composed during this time, he praised Sister Bodily Death. The joyful singing unfortunately horrified the citizens of Assisi who thought Francis would be better off meditating quietly and more seriously on his death.<sup>64</sup> After a visit by a doctor to confirm that his death was not far away, he asked to be taken as quickly as possible to the site of the Portiuncula, "for he wished to give back his soul to God in that place where, as has been said, he first knew the way of truth perfectly."<sup>65</sup> Francis seems to make an allusion to the last wishes of the patriarch Jacob who insisted that he be brought out of the courts of Egypt to be buried in a humble wilderness cave east of Mamre where Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Leah were already buried—a cave thought to foreshadow Jesus' own in the garden at Golgotha, outside Jerusalem.<sup>66</sup> On the way, Francis requested to have his stretcher set down at the leper hospice just outside Assisi, and, raising himself a little, he blessed the city, begging God's forgiveness for its wickedness, in the manner of Christ and the Hebrew prophets for Jerusalem.<sup>67</sup>

Upon arriving at the Portiuncula, Francis began to direct all the material preparations for his death. First, he ordered a new grey tunic, "like the one the Cistercians manufacture overseas" to be sewn as a type of shroud, overtop of which he specified that sackcloth be sewn as a "sign of humility."<sup>68</sup> The cloth was brought from Rome by his friend Lady Jacoba whom Francis called "Brother Jacoba," in order to grant her entrance into the restricted *claustrum*. She began, by the request of Francis, to sew the shroud, face veil and pillow for the corpse, to make a large quantity of candles, and to prepare the incense.<sup>69</sup> Next, he called his companions to him and asked them to observe closely: he lowered himself down from his bed with great difficulty and sat on the bare earth, *in nuda terra*, and undressed himself, taking care to hide the scar in his side with his hand (fig. 92). His brothers did not understand why he did this, but, "seeing him thus sitting on the ground ill and naked, they began to weep bitterly out of compassion and love." The Guardian of the Portiuncula then offered him back

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<sup>64</sup>SL 64; MP 121.

<sup>65</sup>MP 122, 1 Cel 108.

<sup>66</sup>Gn 23, 49.28-33, Jn 19.38-42.

<sup>67</sup>MP 124; LP 99, 1 Cel 108; Mt 23.37-39, Lk 13.34-35, and Jer 22.

<sup>68</sup>SL 101, LP 101, MP 112. The Cistercians were known to have austere customs for burying their monks, see Braunfels, *Monasteries of Western Europe*, 67-110.

<sup>69</sup>LP 101; MP 112; 3 Cel 37. While there, Francis asked her to also make him, curiously enough, her famous sugar and almond *mostacciolo* cake, but he barely tested it and passed it on instead to Br. Bernard, 3 Soc 107.

his ragged tunic, insisting, for Francis' sake that, that it was only lent to him. Satisfied with what the Guardian said, Francis received the habit back, saying to everyone "it is as poor as this that I wish to die."<sup>70</sup>

At this point Francis called all his brothers to him and "exhorted them," speaking "a long time about practicing patience and poverty, setting the councils of the holy Gospel ahead of all other prescriptions." What Celano seems to allude to here is that Francis was dictating his "recordatio, admonitio et exhortatio," that is, his final Testament.<sup>71</sup> The time and place for delivering the Testament would not have been accidental. Francis discussed with his brothers the contents of the Testament, in preparation for its final version, as early as six months before his actual death.<sup>72</sup> As a will or *testamentum*, it was meant to be bestowed as close to death as possible, so the Testament had a greater chance of retaining its authenticity; the last words of a dying saint would be preserved as carefully as relics. If he wished to continue to imitate other Testament-bearing prophets, Francis would certainly desire to place himself on, and dictate from, the property he wished to bestow.<sup>73</sup> An earlier reference to the Testament seems to clearly designate the Portiuncula as the property Francis wished to give *through* the Testament:

I want to ordain and leave the friary of St. Mary of the Portiuncula to my brothers by my Testament, in order that it may always be held in the greatest reverence and devotion by the Friars.<sup>74</sup>

A comparable situation may be that of the final testament of Clare (circa 1252). She left a

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<sup>70</sup>SL appendix, 3; 2 Cel 214-15, 217.

<sup>71</sup>2 Cel 216. Celano, however, probably did not need to say so directly since, by the time of his *Vita secunda* in 1246, the Testament was declared non-binding. The Papal Bull *Quo elongati* tells us that the Testament was written *circa ultimum vitae suae*, and the *Scripta Leonis* mentions that even before dictating the document, "he was really ill and seemed near to death: he lived only a short time afterwards," SL 77. It was probably composed at the Portiuncula since he seems to have spent a few days there, and perhaps over a week, during which he had dictated at least two other letters; MP 108; SL 101. Placid Hermann believes it was dictated "during the month of September, or perhaps even on the first or second day of October, just before Francis died, October 3, 1226," Omnibus, 65. See also Esser, *Das Testament*, 9ff. Omer Englebert places the dictation of the Testament at the bishop's palace, but does not state why. *Saint Francis of Assisi*, 333-39. The Testament in both its original Latin and in an English translation is reproduced in the Appendix.

<sup>72</sup>SL 9, 14, 77; MP 10; LP 17; 1 Cel 105.

<sup>73</sup>See, for example, Dt 34.

<sup>74</sup>SL 9.

number of directions concerning the ongoing maintenance of poverty at the S. Damiano site where the text itself was dictated in her last days.<sup>75</sup> The Portiuncula, according to the companions who were present at his death, was the place where Francis hoped to initiate a reform, through his Testament, of the order's overly large and ornate chapels.<sup>76</sup>

The Testament, as a *recordatio*, or memory-text, was to bestow the Portiuncula as its memory-image:

And so that the memory of it [the Portiuncula] would remain engraved in the hearts of the brothers, he wished, as his death was drawing near, to have it written down in his Testament that the brothers should do likewise.<sup>77</sup>

In the text of the Testament, Francis specifies its use: "Let the brothers not say: This is another Rule," but a type of aid, "so that we may observe . . . the Rule we have promised."<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, the leaders of the order were to

always have this writing with them along with the Rule. And in all the Chapters which they hold, when they read the Rule, let them also read these words . . . and observe [both the Rule and the Testament] with [their] holy manner of working until the end.<sup>79</sup>

Many friars soon came to equate the Testament and the Later Rule, some proposing that it even surpassed the Rule in its authority.<sup>80</sup> The relation of the Testament to the Rule seems to echo the relation of the covenant of the ark to the law of Moses in Deuteronomy. Here, the covenant was always commemorated with the law, inviting the Israelites greater observance of both.<sup>81</sup> Moses and Francis also declare in their respective texts that the words came

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<sup>75</sup> *Testament of Saint Clare*, 8-17, 52-55, in *Clare of Assisi*, ed. Armstrong, 56-58.

<sup>76</sup> SL 77. Although, in this case, it may very well be a criticism suited to the order in 1246 when this event was finally documented.

<sup>77</sup> SL 9.

<sup>78</sup> Test 34.

<sup>79</sup> Test 36-39.

<sup>80</sup> On its reception see Auspicious van Corstanje, *The Covenant with God's Poor: An Essay on the Biblical Interpretation of the Testament of Saint Francis of Assisi* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1966.), 61; and Esser, *Das Testament*, 203-5.

<sup>81</sup> Dt 5.2.

directly from God, and both strongly warned that no glosses whatsoever should be added.<sup>82</sup> Concerning the discourse on the "new covenant" in Paul's letter to the Hebrews, however, the similarity in structure to Francis' Testament is striking; both begin with an autobiographical remembrance of penance in exile, then speak of the necessity of a rite of blood, that the law should be read on specific days, and that it not be tampered with.<sup>83</sup> In Paul's case, it is especially noteworthy that the entire discussion of the new covenant was framed within architectural metaphors such as the "ark of the covenant," the "heavenly sanctuary," the "holy of holies," and the "true tent" which Christ enters through the sacrifice of his own blood.<sup>84</sup> If the Testament was conceived as a type of Mosaic covenant, then its ark, attended to by cherubim angels, may be similarly seen to have been the Santa Maria degli Angeli chapel (fig. 93). Furthermore, in the Letter to the Hebrews, the entire new covenant discussion derives from the words of Jesus at the Last Supper: "This is the blood of my new covenant, which is being shed for many for the forgiveness of sins."<sup>85</sup> In the Gospel of John, the event creates the opportunity for Jesus to deliver his final prayer and discourse on Christian life, a testament worthy of imitation.<sup>86</sup> From the actual Last Supper to the Latin mass of Francis' day, the defining ritual in memory of Christ comes as a combination of discourse (the eucharistic prayer), and sacrificial act (the breaking of bread/body, sharing of wine/blood), which hinges on the central mnemonic directive "Do this in memory of me."

After the Testament exhortation, Francis called together a select group of brothers who knelt before him and "he, another Jacob, blessed all his sons."<sup>87</sup> The comparison to Jacob was reinforced in that, among other similarities, both he and Francis were blind at the time, and both had trouble recognizing who they were blessing.<sup>88</sup> Upon completion of the blessing, Francis, like Jesus at the Last Supper in John, predicts how "a very great trial will come upon you and a great tribulation is approaching. Happy will they be who will persevere in the

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<sup>82</sup>Test 35, 39; Dt 4.5; 5.22, 12.32.

<sup>83</sup>Heb 8.8-10; 9.19; 10.19, 28-30, 32. Test 1-6, 10, 37-39. See Van Corstanje, *Covenant with God's Poor*, 71-73.

<sup>84</sup>Heb 8.1-10.17.

<sup>85</sup>Mt 26.26-29.

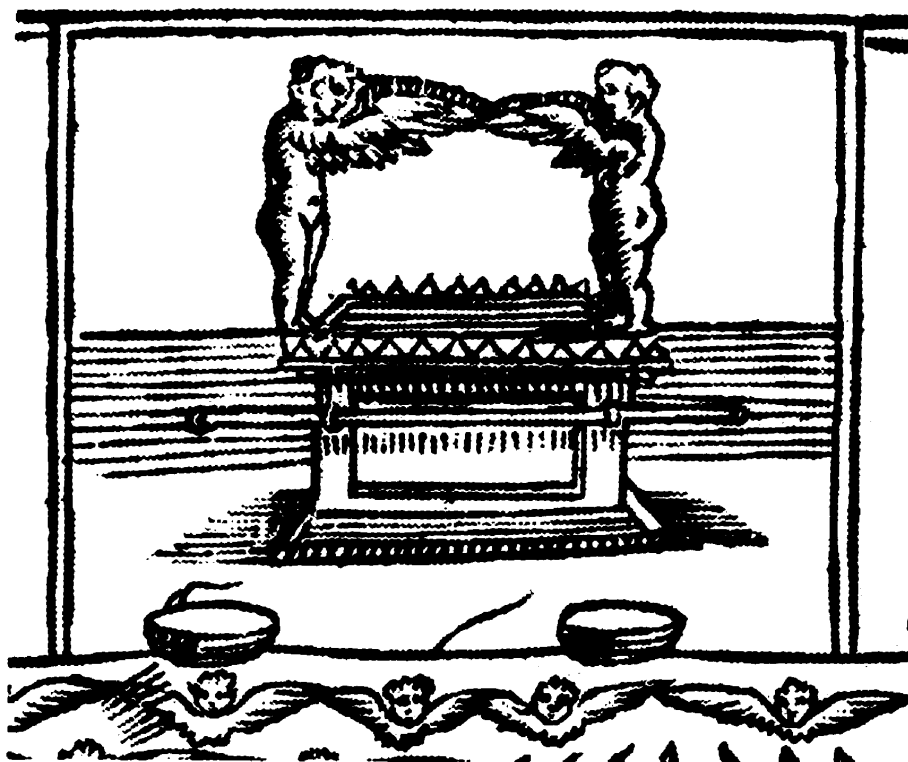
<sup>86</sup>Jn 14.1-17.26.

<sup>87</sup>LE 1958. Celano expands on this to include an allusion to Moses: "As the patriarch Jacob of old had blessed his sons; indeed, like another Moses who, when he was about to ascend the mountain appointed by God, enriched the children of Israel with blessings," 1 Cel 108.

<sup>88</sup>Gn 48.8.



92. Francis strips his body and lays it out on the ground in front of his brothers, being careful to hide the bleeding wound in his side, as a rehearsal for his death. (From the 14th c. *Codice Latino Bonaventure* at the Convent of the Laurentianum, Rome.)



93. The ark of the covenant with cherubim. (Detail from Philippe d'Aquin's *Discours du Tabernacle*, 1623.)

things they have begun."<sup>89</sup> Francis, then, continued his ritual:

He ordered loaves to be brought before him and blessed them. Because he could not break them on account of his weakness, he asked one of his friars to break them into many fragments. Taking these he offered each friar a piece, ordering them to eat it all. For just as on Holy Thursday the Lord wished to eat with his Apostles before his death, so it seemed somehow to those friars that St. Francis wished before his death to bless them and . . . eat the blessed bread.<sup>90</sup>

Insisting that the day was Thursday, even though it was not, Francis finally drives home the meaning by asking, during this para-liturgy, that the Last Supper of the Gospel of John be read aloud.<sup>91</sup>

"Then," says Celano, "he spent the few days remaining before his death in praise," and teaching his companions about the praise of Christ.<sup>92</sup> His brothers sang his *Laudes creaturarum*, and for his part, he chose to sing Psalm 141, attributed to the dying King David, which, as I mentioned earlier, contains the line in reference to the Portiuncula: "Thou art my hope, my *portion* in the land of the living." Afterwards, Francis, honouring a request of Elias, forgave and absolved all the offenses and faults of his followers. By beginning this absolution with the words, "Behold . . . I am called by God," the act of forgiving sins at his death once again harkens to the authority of Jesus in the Last Supper of John 17.<sup>93</sup> As his final hours grew near, Francis had a hair shirt placed on him and ashes sprinkled over his head, then he began to "exhort death itself," and ordered the doctor to declare that he was about to die.<sup>94</sup> Referring to his earlier rehearsal, Francis turned to his brothers and said,

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<sup>89</sup>1 Cel 108. Celano places these events at the bishop's palace, but all other sources place it at the Portiuncula. Celano himself, probably realizing his error, corrects the mistake in 2 Cel 216.

<sup>90</sup>SL 117; LP 117.

<sup>91</sup>Jn 13.1ff. 2 Cel 217.

<sup>92</sup>2 Cel 217.

<sup>93</sup>1 Cel 109; LE 1958.

<sup>94</sup>This practice appears to have been a common custom at a deathbed in monasteries. After receiving last rites, the dying monk was sprinkled with blessed ashes and placed on the bare floor or on sackcloth marked with a cross. Gougaud, *Dict. Spir.*, s.v. "Cendres"; see also the prescriptions of the *Constitutiones Hirsaugienses*, 1.2, ch. 64, PL 150, 1334, where further details of "coram eo (morbundo) passiones legere" are given. King Saint Louis IX of France (d. 1270), who was very devoted to Francis, asked his son to lay out ashes on the floor in the form of a crucifix, upon which Louis laid himself out and died. See, Binski, *Medieval Death*, 35-36; R.C. Finucane, "Sacred Corpse, Profane Carrion: Social Ideals and Death Rituals in the later Middle Ages," in J. Whaley, ed., *Mirrors*

"When you see that I am brought to my last moments, place me naked upon the ground just as you saw me the day before yesterday, and let me lie there after I am dead for the length of time it takes to walk a mile unhurriedly." The hour therefore came, and all the mysteries of Christ being fulfilled in him, he winged his way joyfully to God.<sup>95</sup>

Celano's reference to the mysteries of Christ could not have been more deliberate. By putting his stigmatized body on display, hundreds of Francis' fellow friars and the entire population of Assisi were able to finally see, touch and kiss the rumoured but previously hidden stigmata (fig. 86). "For he seemed," Celano tells us, "as though he had recently been taken down from the cross."<sup>96</sup>

How, then, through the intricate composition and symbolic density of this extraordinary performance, can we understand it as a type of architectural promulgation? If we were to rely on the Testament as the sole documentary evidence for distinct legislative guidelines for constructing future buildings in the Franciscan manner, we might be disappointed. Unlike the clear and detailed regulations for architecture enshrined in the decrees of the Cistercians (in 1134), Francis constructed his architectural vision on the poetic foundation of a concise metaphor: his followers were to dwell, to receive property, to construct, indeed, to exist as *peregrini et advenae*, pilgrims and strangers.<sup>97</sup> By accepting the existential condition of *homo viator* for his order, Francis had little choice but to discard both the architecture and the traditional means of legislating an architecture associated with the monastic virtue of stability. The Christian ascetics and hermits who had gone before may have provided Francis with the necessary symbolic prototypes for dwelling *in via*, but since these were always small groups or individuals, Francis was faced with an entirely new problem: how to ensure a consistent continuation of this tradition among thousands of followers scattered all over western Europe and the Levant?

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*of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death* (London, 1981); A. Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago, 1960), 50ff.; and F.S. Paxton, *Christianizing Death: the creation of a ritual process in early medieval Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

<sup>95</sup>2 Cel 217, SL appendix, 3.

<sup>96</sup>1 Cel 112.

<sup>97</sup>Note that the Testament refers to the Rule, but the Rule only repeats the metaphor. LR 6.1. Cf. *Instituta generalis capituli apud Cistercium in Analecta Divionensia: les monuments primitifs de la Règle Cistercienne*, ed. Ph. Guignard (Dijon, 1878). For a translation of selected passages see Braunfels, *Monasteries of Western Europe*, 232-33, 243.

Francis deliberately chose to present his final architectural vision by an *exemplum* through which any textual metaphor must be understood. An architecture *in via*, would be received *in via*. That is, the direct and vigorous participation in the world implied by penance undertaken as a pilgrimage, mission or perhaps martyrdom, would indicate how to engage the world architecturally through performative imitations of archetypal narratives of passage, which themselves were communicated performatively. Moreover, the means of recording, documenting and subsequently adapting this architectural vision to various sites would necessitate an equally vigorous practice of memory.

Francis' *exemplum* confronts one with an array of narratives traditionally associated with the rites of passage communicated less as directives than as images worthy of contemplation and enactment. We have already seen how the rite of dying in Francis' final exhortation and Testament resonated with the covenant of Moses, thereby transforming the Portiuncula chapel into a type of ark. The exhortation seemed to parallel the final words of Christ during the Last Supper, the Christian rite of passage *par excellence*. If the *domus*, the kitchen/dining hut at the Portiuncula, is considered the most likely location for this ritual, the *domus*, which normally houses a maximum of twelve brothers, transforms into the "upper room", the *diversorium* for strangers or guests as described in the Passover/Last Supper with the twelve apostles.<sup>98</sup> But the narrative resonances of Francis' death, within which to understand the Portiuncula as the architectural prototype for the order, are hardly exhausted in these two readings.

To fulfill Francis' request that his body be stripped and displayed so the citizens of Assisi—exactly one "unhurried" mile away—could witness his miraculous wounds, it would have to have been displayed in a location near the Portiuncula *claustrum* where the laity would be free to enter, yet where the body could be guarded from relic seekers. This would seem to imply the Portiuncula chapel as the location to display the corpse, but given that its floor was paved and Francis wished to be set upon the bare ground, the body may have been set just outside the chapel—where in 1216 a temporary platform had been set up in front of the church for the announcement of the Portiuncula indulgence. This would free the chapel for the friars to sing the office for the dead, while the crowds could circulate in front of the church to touch and kiss the stigmatic wounds. The miracle-bearing corpse, the holiest of

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<sup>98</sup>Lk 22.11.



relics, would have been framed by the tiny Portiuncula chapel which would thus serve as its reliquary. Both the church and his body expressed Francis' careful design, the first to honour Mary and Jesus' simplicity, the second to signify its subordinate position to his soul. It was a body emaciated and diseased, but blessed with the five marks of the poor Christ he longed to imitate. As a reliquary exists to represent the miracles, biography and celestial abode associated with the relic it holds, the two seem of a piece. As a liturgical implement associated with the rite of passage, Francis' relic and the Portiuncula reliquary invite devotional and ritual participation in the culminating liminal space: between a holy life and a heavenly afterlife.

As a relic the body of Francis would also participate in the miraculous action of all holy relics in the community of saints. Chief among these was the primary "relic" of Christ that Christians had access to: the bread and wine transformed into his body and blood in the mass.<sup>99</sup> In this era, the blessed bread had an extra-communion status; it was often reserved alongside relics, displayed to initiate healings and miracles, brought out to witness public oaths, or, like relics, encased in altar stones.<sup>100</sup> With his stigmata, Francis, in a way, provided christendom with the body of Christ as a corpse-like relic denied to them through the Ascension. The tiny Portiuncula chapel would then not only take on the role of the special reliquaries typically dedicated to the eucharist—the tabernacle or pyx—but, with the body set in front of the chapel, the chapel could also be seen as a type of altarpiece. In Francis' time the demand for altarpieces was beginning to increase with the initiation of the practice of raising the host during mass. The altarpiece would then act as a frame for the elevation. Appropriately enough, the raising of the host also commemorates the transfiguration and another rite of passage narrative, the presentation of the child Jesus (figs. 15, 94).<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup>The relics of Christ's foreskin, tears, nail clippings and such came to grace western Europe after the return of the crusaders, but were placed in doubt almost immediately since the question was raised whether all these parts of Jesus ascended with him or not. See Patrick Geary, *Furta Sacra: Theft of Relics in the Central Middle Ages* (Princeton: University Press, 1978), 28ff.

<sup>100</sup>The flood of eastern relics of universal saints such as Jesus or Mary which returned with the crusaders, led to the diminishment of local relics, and often had to be placed alongside them to increase their efficacy. Geary, *Furta Sacra*, 27-29; see also, Nicole Hermann-Mascard, *Les reliques des saints: Formation coutumière d'un droit* (Paris, 1975).

<sup>101</sup>Cf. Anne Derbes, *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy: Narrative Painting, Franciscan Ideologies, and the Levant* (Cambridge: University Press, 1996), 18. Derbes notes that the framing of the risen host by the altarpiece was a late thirteenth-century addition to legislation in Italy, but this does not exclude the possibility of the practice having taken place, as it often did, before the legislation was written. The legislation, in fact, derives from the Franciscans and could very well have included Assisi during Francis' time, given the his own eucharistic devotion.

Given Francis' desire not only to die but also be buried at the Portiuncula, and the pivotal importance of issues regarding building construction in his later discourses and Testament, the relic of his corpse may also be seen to participate in the long tradition of human sacrifice in foundation ceremonies.<sup>102</sup> Ritual killing of both humans and animals to ensure the safe erection of a structure had been practiced by the early Hebrews, and was implied by the sacrifice of Christ for the temple of Jerusalem. It was a well-known narrative tradition in Europe from the time of the foundation of Rome, where Romulus kills his brother Remus, to the medieval legend of Master Manole who, to keep a palace from falling, bricked up his wife inside.<sup>103</sup> The construction was believed to become animated by the spirit of the person immolated, a spirit considered supremely holy in the case of willing victims. The conception of architecture as alive, and even requiring regular feedings, was current throughout the Middle Ages and was possibly indicated by Francis once when, speaking of the importance of the feast of Christmas, he declared, "It is my wish that even the walls should eat meat on such a day, and if they cannot, they should be smeared with meat on the outside."<sup>104</sup> The anthropomorphic metaphor of the Portiuncula reverberating with Mary's living presence in its promise of miracles and pardon would be sustained by Francis' participation in the ancient practice of self-sacrifice and self-immolation so that "one should die for the many."<sup>105</sup>

To have his dead body displayed without clothing raises the question of the status of nakedness during Francis' era. According to Margaret Miles nakedness in the medieval West had a number of negative connotations. It signified the humiliation and powerlessness as well

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<sup>102</sup>Near the end of his life Francis is recorded as wanting to die at the Portiuncula, 1 Cel 108. This is supported by Francis' concern that, when he was first considering the Portiuncula as a home for him and his early companions, finding a place for burial of the brothers was an important factor; SL 8.

<sup>103</sup>On Rome see Plutarch, *Life of Romulus*, ed. John Dryden, rev. A.H. Clough (London, 1927-28), I, 36; and Joseph Rykwert, *Idea of a Town* (Princeton: University Press, 1978), 27-40. On Master Manole see Mircea Eliade, "Master Manole and the Monastery of Arges," in *Zalmoxis: The Vanishing God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 164-90; and Manuela Antoniu, "The Walled-Up Bride: An Architecture of Eternal Return," in Deborah Coleman, et al, eds., *Architecture and Feminism* (Princeton: University Press, 1996). On human sacrifice and architecture see Lewis Burdick, *Foundation Rites with some Kindred Ceremonies* (New York: Abbey Press, 1901); Nigel Davies, *Human Sacrifice in History and Today* (New York: W. Morrow, 1981); and Giuseppe Morici, "La vittima dell'edificio," *Annali del R. Istituto Superiore Orientale di Napoli* IX (1937): 177-216.

<sup>104</sup>2 Cel 199. The importance of feeding buildings appears as late as the early Renaissance treatise by the architect Filarete. See Antonio di Piero Averlino, *Trattato di architettura di Antonio Filarete*, Book N, Fol. 25r-27r; translated in A. Spencer, ed. *Filarete's Treatise on Architecture*, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965).

<sup>105</sup>Davies, *Human Sacrifice*, 67-71. This is the concept of the "scapegoat" of Lev 16.20-22, where Aaron, on the Day of Atonement, placed the sins of his people on a goat, which was then led into the wilderness.

as the sin and crime associated with marginalized people such as prisoners, slaves, fools and prostitutes.<sup>106</sup> It also had a number of positive meanings; twelfth-century authors including Bernard of Clairvaux breathed new life into the early desert fathers' and mothers' advice that "the monk ought to be naked of everything worldly and crucify himself against temptation and the world's struggles."<sup>107</sup> Nakedness could symbolize the vigorous struggle and fearless discipline of the Christian spiritual athlete, who strove to reclaim both the shameless chastity of Eden and the humiliating suffering of Christ (fig. 47). "*Nudus nudum Jesum sequi*," said St. Jerome: "Naked to follow the naked Christ."<sup>108</sup>

Francis was reported to have removed his clothes in public on a number of occasions. He stripped to renounce his inheritance at the bishop's palace. He gave a performance on penance in mime where he asked to be led naked by a rope through the square. On at least one occasion he rolled naked in the snow to ward off a sexual temptation (figs. 95, 16, 92).<sup>109</sup> By asking his brethren, in his last hour, to remove his crucifying *tau*-shaped tunic in order to display the five wounds, Celano's description that he seemed "as though taken down from the cross," may have been especially accurate. With respect to the Portiuncula, however, its cave-like stone vault set within the wilderness, could also serve as a type of Holy Sepulchre like the one in the garden within which Christ's crucified body was set: the acme of scriptural caves of passage.<sup>110</sup>

Besides death, three archetypal situations in the human life cycle involve the disrobed body: bathing, birth and erotic union.<sup>111</sup> Ritualized bathing as the Christian rite of baptism would have the closest relation to the Christian rites of death: both involve anointing, washing in water, blessings, signs of the cross, candles and similar psalm and Gospel readings. The journey from mere existence to Christian life, and from that life to the afterlife, exposed the subject to the most dangerous temptations of the Evil One. Hence, the full public

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<sup>106</sup>Miles, *Carnal Knowing*, 81.

<sup>107</sup>*Sayings of the Fathers* 6.16; cited in Miles, *Carnal Knowing*, 66.

<sup>108</sup>Jerome, *Epistle 52.5*; *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 6, 91. See Peter Brown, *Body and Society*, 3-211.

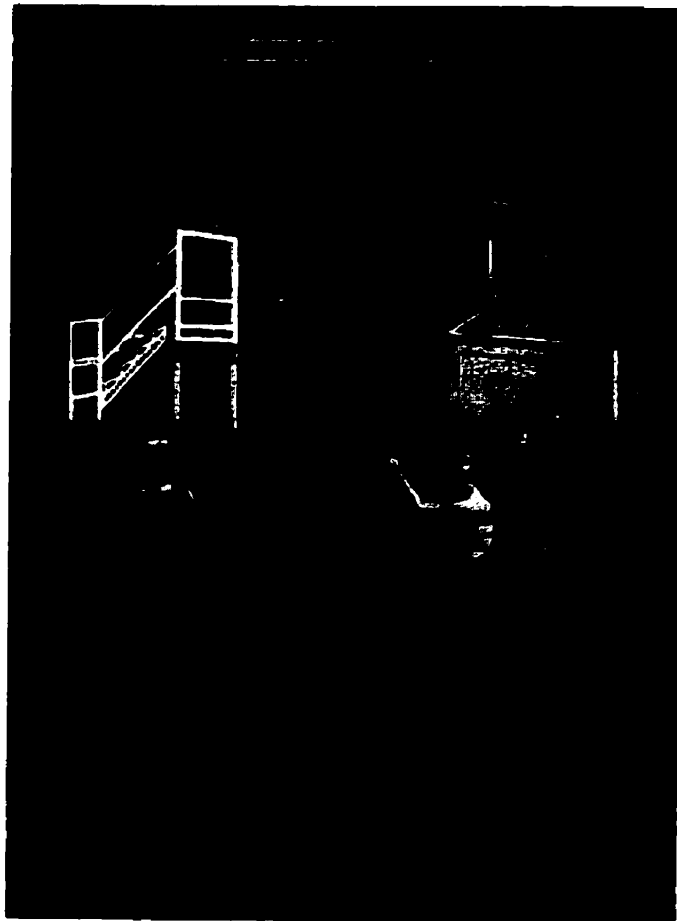
<sup>109</sup>2 Cel 116-17; *Actus B. Francisci*, 30, in *Omnibus*, 1376. It would also be difficult to imagine that the young Francis could have been a troubadour *dominus* for the local "feast of fools" and avoided participating in, if not leading, the indecent gestures, disrobing and drunken orgies associated with this event all over Europe. See Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, 74-75.

<sup>110</sup>Jn 19.38-42.

<sup>111</sup>See Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*; and Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, Bollingen Series, XLVI (New York: Pantheon Books, 1954).



94. Elevation of the host. (Initial to the prayer "Deus qui" of the Corpus Christi mass. Vatican, Archivio San Pietro B 63, fol. 227v. Italian Franciscan missal of 1340-60, painted by Andrea da Bologna)



95. Giotto, *St. Francis Renounces His Inheritance*. Fresco, late 13th c. (Assisi: Basilica Superiore di S. Francesco.)

participation of the church in these sacraments through prayers and, before the baptism and after the death, in personal sacrifices. The catechumen and the dying had to prepare their soul and body for combat—this was no time to have the taint of the world upon them. In speaking of the rite of baptism, John the Deacon observed: "They are commanded to go in [the baptismal font] naked, even down to their feet, so that [they may show that] they have put off the earthly garments of mortality."<sup>112</sup> With respect to Francis' baptism into the afterlife, the Portiuncula wilderness and stream (as depicted in fig. 55), may recall the wilderness of the Jordan where Christ was baptised by John.<sup>113</sup> Even though the chapel does not have the typically circular or eight-sided plan of a baptistry, it would, in part, share in the strong verticality of these structures through the height of Francis' stone vault, if not its designation by Francis as a place where angels frequently descended.<sup>114</sup>

Perhaps an even stronger case could be made for the Portiuncula as the site of a birth. As the birthplace for the three Franciscan orders, and the mother church of the First Order, the site of the special Marian indulgence for pilgrims and the missioning of friars, the Portiuncula was a fecund mother continually giving birth. As the angelic site of the nativity, S. Maria degli Angeli gives birth to an infant Francis, born tiny, shrivelled and stained (as he was) in blood, who in turn, according to Celano, "bore naked in his heart Him Whom she bore naked in her hands."<sup>115</sup> By dying in front of the true mother of his vocation, Francis seemed to bring to vivid life the verses of architectural significance which he wrote in her name: ". . . the Virgin made church. . . Hail, His Palace! / Hail, His Tabernacle! / Hail, His Home!"<sup>116</sup> By offering up his body before her threshold, Francis could now add the words of Peter Damian, who described Mary as "the Gate of Paradise, which restored God to the world and opened heaven for us."<sup>117</sup>

And finally, I would venture one further interpretation of Francis' naked death before the

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<sup>112</sup>Cited in Jonathan Smith, "The Garments of Shame," *History of Religions* 5, no. 2 (Winter, 1966): 224; Mabillion-Germain, *Museum Italicum* 1, no. 2 (Paris, 1687), 71-72; and Miles, *Carnal Knowing*, 34.

<sup>113</sup>Lk 3.1-22.

<sup>114</sup>On the archetype of the circle in plan see Krautheimer, "Introduction to an Iconography," 1-23. Marked verticality, for instance, upon an otherwise small plan of a typical shaman's hut provides space for the coming and going of spirits while the shaman is in trance for the sake of healing someone or a community. See Spencer Rogers, *The Shaman: His Symbols and His Healing Powers* (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 1982), 35, 123-24. See note 128, below.

<sup>115</sup>2 Cel 83.

<sup>116</sup>*Salutations to the Blessed Virgin Mary*, in Armstrong, 149-50.

<sup>117</sup>*Sermo*, 46 in *PL* 144, 752 B-D.

Portiuncula, that is, as a participation in the metaphor of union—the erotic rapture of the mystical or divine marriage. He would have learned the symbolism of idealized and mystical marriage in his youth as a troubadour. Francis incorporated Provençal, jongleur and courtly language into his poetry, canticles and other compositions, he was a merchant of fine French fabrics and thereby a likely visitor to the Champagne region where the troubadours originated, and he had a lifelong love of France and "all things French", summed up in his early desire to die in France.<sup>118</sup> Among the troubadours, boundless desire, passion and eros took the form of perpetual vows of chastity, the renunciation of earthly marriage and voluntary suffering. According to Denis de Rougemont, these were ultimately expressed as an aspiration for death.<sup>119</sup> Likewise, those tormented by the madness of love typically banished themselves to the wilderness; examples include Dante's confused wandering in the forest at the beginning of the *Inferno*, or Virgil's Dido who, because of her lost love, banishes herself to the wilderness.<sup>120</sup> It is both as the site of suffering, and as the *locus amoenus*—the promised land for the recovery of Adam and Eve's chaste love and shameless nakedness—that the wilderness and creation in general were praised throughout the verses of the troubadours.

Francis' poetic relationship with the wilderness and the desire to suffer and die naked in the Portiuncula wilderness were particularly poignant with respect to the object of his love:

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<sup>118</sup>1 Cel 1, 2, 16; 2 Cel 7, 13, 127, 201; 3 Soc 1; See also Cheriyaappattarambil, *Troubadour Influence*, 138. On Francis' troubadour youth, see chapter 1.

<sup>119</sup>Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World* (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), 341. The troubadour Almeric de Belenoi wrote: ". . . this wild desire / Is bound to be my death, no matter if I stay or go. / For she who could deliver me, no pity will she show. / . . . and this desire. / Although it hath from frenzy sprung, it certainly prevails / Above the others all;" cited in, de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, 87.

Even though de Rougemont attempts to connect the troubadours directly to the Cathars, who also originated in southern France, his thesis has since been generally dismissed. Nevertheless, it is difficult to deny that the troubadours and Cathars shared with the early Franciscans a commitment to poverty and chastity for an ideal which is reached through a mystical rapture. See Roger Boase, *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love: A critical Study of European Scholarship* (Manchester: University Press, 1977), 77-80 and Lambert, *Medieval Heresy*, 97, 119, 145. On medieval love in general see J. Chyeniuss, "The Symbolism of Love in Medieval Thought," *Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum* 44, no 1 (1965): 1-140; and Jean Leclercq, *Monks and Love in Twelfth-Century France: Psycho-Historical Essays* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).

<sup>120</sup>Dante, *L'Inferno*, Canto I.1; Virgil, *Aeneid*, IV.68-73, VI.442-44, 450-51; See Deirdre Kessel-Brown, "The Emotional Landscape of the Forest in the Mediaeval Love Lament," *Medium Aevum* 59, no. 2 (1990): 228-47; and Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953), 183-202.

Lady Poverty.<sup>121</sup> The troubadour vocation typically derived from a vow, either implicit or explicit, to a lady, often already married, of royal blood and high station such that she, in turn, would become his patron (fig. 96).<sup>122</sup> By cleverly, if not humorously, inverting the aim of troubadour desire, Francis invited Lady Poverty to be his and his order's object of desire (fig. 97).<sup>123</sup> Francis first mentioned the personification of poverty in his Salutations to the Virtues: "Lady, holy Poverty, may the Lord protect you. . . . Holy Poverty destroys / the desire of riches / and avarice / and the cares of this world."<sup>124</sup> But more significantly he admonished his brethren to devote themselves to her in the first Siena version of his Testament: "Let them always love and be faithful to our Lady Holy Poverty."<sup>125</sup> A mythology quickly sprung up in the order concerning Lady Poverty, initiated, for the most part, by the 1227 prose-poem the *Sacrum Commercium*, perhaps the earliest extant piece of Franciscan literature produced after the death of Francis, and generally attributed to Thomas of Celano. In it, the figure of Lady Poverty narrates her autobiography from her nakedness with Adam and Eve in Eden, and with Christ on the cross, to her special relationship with Francis and his order. The culminating scene has Poverty feast with Francis and his brothers on stale bread and cold water, and, after a nap on a stone pillow, she asks to see the brothers' cloister. So, "taking her to a certain hill, they showed her the whole world, as far as the eye could see, and said, 'This, Lady, is our cloister.'" She responds, with what seems to be a direct allusion to the metaphor Francis chose for the Portiuncula at the indulgence ceremony, "Thank you, friends, for welcoming me into your home. It feels like paradise."<sup>126</sup> Just as Lady Poverty was once naked in Eden and at Golgotha, or Francis in the Portiuncula wilderness—dripping blood from his side like a ribless Adam in paradise—so may we consider, quite literally, the architecture of the early order, with only hedges for walls, to be stripped naked before the entire world.

<sup>121</sup>1 Cel 58, 59, 61, 80; 2 Cel 166-67, 171. SL 110, LP 110, MP 118-20. See Sorrell, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature*, 70-71, 106-08, 114, 131, 140.

<sup>122</sup>Cf. D. Scheludko, "Über den Frauenkult der Troubadours," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 35 (1934): 1-40. Noteworthy, as well, is the troubadours' veneration of Mary as the *templum trinitatis*, the daughter (of God), mother (of Christ) and the spouse (of the Holy Spirit) although this could in no way be considered a trend. See Cheriappattaparambil, *Troubadour Influence*, 37-40, 118.

<sup>123</sup>On Lady Poverty see Raoul Manselli, ed. *San Francesco e Madonna Povera* (Firenze, 1990); and Joan Mowat Erikson, *Saint Francis and His Four Ladies* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1970).

<sup>124</sup>Salutations to the Virtues, 2.

<sup>125</sup>LP 17, Armstrong, 164.

<sup>126</sup>SacCom, 64. See Fleming, *Introduction to Franciscan Literature*, 78ff. In the early *Antiphon of Vespers from the Octave of Christmas* of the Franciscans, an explicit reference to the Testament through the words of Lady Poverty, directly connects the two texts: "He left a Testament to his faithful elect concerning me." Cited in Van Corstanje, *The Covenant*, 134, n. 34.

The *Sacrum Commercium* established the iconography for Francis' mystical marriage. While the text may not depict this union explicitly, it does set into high relief the object of his rapture. It could be argued that in his death Francis demonstrated the climax of a lifetime of poetic madness. The Middle Ages, according to Ernst Curtius, knew of the divine frenzy of poets, without knowing Plato's famous discussion of this state in the *Phaedrus*.<sup>127</sup> The numinous inspiration of a feminine archetype may have been a long-standing element in local Italian cultic life, as can be seen in the medieval Benandanti.<sup>128</sup> The Benandanti were shaman healers from a centuries-old tradition who claimed to be able to send their souls into combat for God and Christ. They did this by undergoing an ecstatic trance, triggered by a drum beat and dancing, until their bodies fell down and lay motionless as if dead. While in the trance, an angel or a Benandanti ancestor appeared to the healer and guided his or her soul to wrestle with and defeat evil spirits that plagued their community.<sup>129</sup> Fortini links Francis' habit of dancing when he preached to that of the holy and warlike dance performed by Assisians for their local saint, Victorinus—a dance which grew faster and faster until it "expressed the celestial ecstasy."<sup>130</sup> As in shamanism, the privations of the body necessary for mnemonic work aimed at an ethics whose goal was communal healing.<sup>131</sup> Francis and the Portiuncula were vehicles through which documented healings took place; when brought together for his death, death itself became a type of healing.<sup>132</sup>

Francis' interest in troubadour poetics and "all things French" may also be connected to his desire for the land of the historical Jesus and all things Eastern. Southern France and the Holy Land could be theoretically fused by considering the complex origins of the troubadour phenomenon. According to Roger Boase the most important influence for the troubadours

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<sup>127</sup>Curtius, *European Literature*, 474-75.

<sup>128</sup>The Benandanti phenomenon was carefully described in the annals of the inquisition during the sixteenth century. See G. Klaniczay, "Shamanistic Elements in Central European Witchcraft," in Mihaly Hoppal, ed., *Shamanism in Eurasia* (Göttingen: ed. Herodot, 1984), 404-410.

<sup>129</sup>Klaniczay, "Shamanistic Elements," 406.

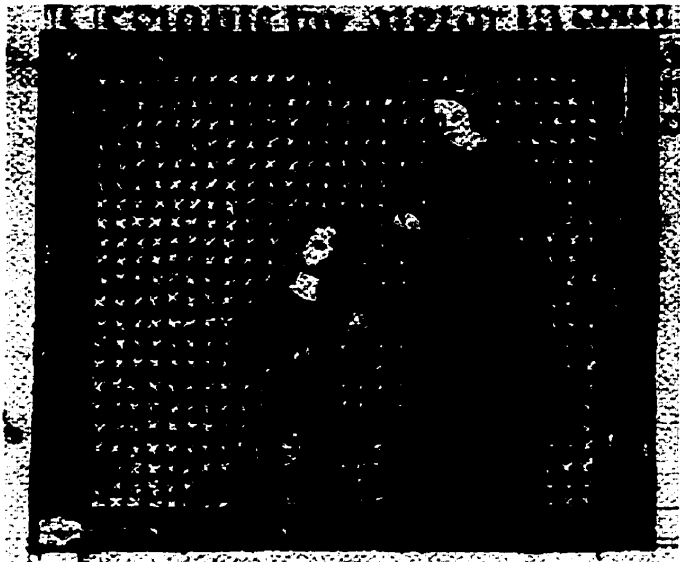
<sup>130</sup>Fortini, 133.

<sup>131</sup>Note, in the hermit tradition, "True discretion is to put the soul before the body and, where both are threatened and the health of one can only be obtained at the price of suffering for the other, one should neglect the body for the health of the soul." From the "Rule and Life of the Recluse," cap. 23, in D. Knowles, ed., *Works of Aelred of Rievaulx*, I (Cistercian Fathers Series 2) (Spencer, Mass., 1971), 70, n. 40; Haines, "The Death of Saint Francis," 46, n. 158.

<sup>132</sup>1 Cel 67, 68; 2 Cel 20. Death considered as a type of healing cannot, of course, be limited to Christ and the Christian saints. One important Western example, with respect to architecture, is Socrates; see my "Socrates and the Agora," in *Chora: Intervals in the Philosophy of Architecture 2* (1996): 1-16.



96. Lady and Troubadour Lover.  
(From Matfre Ermengaud's *Breviari  
d'amor*. Paris, B.N. fr. 857, fol. 196v  
[photo Bibl. nat. Paris.] As reproduced  
in Kendrick, *The Game of Love*, 45.)



97. Francis' mystical marriage with  
Lady Poverty. (Detail, late 13th c.  
Fresco by Giotto, Basilica Inferiore di  
S. Francesco, Assisi.)



was the Hispano-Arabic cultural supremacy of the tenth century. From Islam came prose romances and the concepts of chivalry and courtly love as well as theories on profane love and insatiable desire. Troubadour verse forms, music and musical instruments derived almost exclusively from Arabic sources, coming to Europe at the same time as the recovery of Hellenic and Byzantine philosophy, also through Arabic sources. Indeed, the etymology of the word troubadour, *trobar*, traces its earliest roots to the Arabic *tarabī*.<sup>133</sup> Both politically and culturally, southern France was more Spanish than French in the eleventh century and displayed a remarkable tolerance if not avid interest in Middle Eastern and Moor culture.<sup>134</sup>

According to the Rule, Francis gave special preference to those of his order who preached among Saracens.<sup>135</sup> Indeed, when missioning his brothers, Francis chose for himself, upon three occasions, the Holy Land, twice attempting the journey by sea, and once by land through Spain.<sup>136</sup> When he finally succeeded in arriving in the East, but was denied martyrdom, Francis secured a *signaculum*, a type of passport from the Sultan Al-Kamel Mohammed, to visit the Holy Land.<sup>137</sup> No description of the trip exists, but we can assume that Francis made a visit to the Holy Sepulchre, because when writing on the topic of the eucharist, he seems to speak from direct experience there.<sup>138</sup> Thus, Francis' death before his own Holy Sepulchre

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<sup>133</sup>Boase, *The Origin and Meaning*, 62ff. Boase provides a scholarly overview and bibliography of recent scholarship in this area.

<sup>134</sup>Boase, *The Origin and Meaning*, 70; and Robert S. Briffault, *The Troubadours* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965), 5. It is difficult to describe the unique richness at this time of, for instance, Troyes, where commerce and art, politics and religion, humanist monks and mystical rabbis, spilt over all traditional cultural boundaries. See Le Clercq, *Monks and Love*, 111-12. The Norman-Saracen court under Frederick II (1194-1250), for instance, fused the East and West like no other. Frederick corresponded with sufis on metaphysics and wrote poetry in Arabic and Provençal. He even stopped court business at midday for the Muslim prayers of his servants, court officials and counsellors. Boase, *Origin and Meaning*, 70-72.

<sup>135</sup>ER 16; LR 12.

<sup>136</sup>1 Cel 55-56; 2 Cel 30, 152; 3 Cel 34; MP 75.

<sup>137</sup>On the *signaculum*, see Martiniano Roncaglia, "S. Francesco in Oriente," *Studi Francescani* 25 (1953): 104-06; and his book, *St. Francis of Assisi and the Middle East* (Cairo: Franciscan Centre of Oriental Studies, 1954), 29. Since most of these pilgrimage sites were cared for by the memory-teachers of Francis, the regular canons (and, soon after, the Franciscans), the journey to these shrines could very well have carried a mnemonic and therefore a profound sensual/gestural experience for Francis. Such was the interest in the East at that time in general, that upon his return in 1220, the legend of the Francis' mission among the Saracens had caused a sensation across Europe. His first true wave of popularity throughout Europe was initiated through this undertaking. Roncaglia, *St. Francis of Assisi and the Middle East*, 26.

<sup>138</sup>"If the tomb in which He lay for some time is so venerated, how holy, just and worthy must be the person who touches Him with his hands." Letter to the Entire Order, 21-22 in Armstrong, 55. This quote is from the letter addressed to the 1226 Pentecost Chapter which Francis was unable to attend due to his sickness. His interest in the veneration of the Holy Sepulchre therefore coincides with his

seems to take on the flavour of "all things Eastern," especially if we include the singing of his troubadour canticle and the dedication unto death to his Lady Poverty.

Interpretations complement and build upon each other; a well-deployed metaphor, in this case the final tableau of Francis' death, can entice participation through interpretation. Its thematic mobility not only invites contemplation, but also suggests a metaphoric role in which its participants can respond in character according to the situation: as apostles, knights, fellow troubadours, or the children of Israel, for instance. The Portiuncula site may therefore be understood as a boundary, as this term is used in Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens*, marked off for play.<sup>139</sup> Within this boundary, Francis' free imitation of Gospel, monastic, liturgical, fool or troubadour personae drew others to play their parts in the performance as well. For a medieval memory practitioner the text taken in becomes woven into every word, gesture and creative act, threaded through the fibres of one's entire being, so as to strengthen the ethical fabric of society. How this ethics influences the actions and architecture of Francis' immediate followers is the subject of the final chapter. What is at stake is the persistence of memory, that is, the efficacy and/or peril of attempting architectural legislation by poetic *exemplum*.

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imminent death.

<sup>139</sup>Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (London: Beacon Press, 1955), 19-22. On Francis, Huizinga declares that "The saint's whole life is full of pure play-factors and play-figures," 139. Note that Boase supports the emergence of play elements such as eroticism in Western culture through the troubadour phenomenon. *The Origin and Meaning*, 107.

## Elias of Cortona and the Basilica of San Francesco

We can now say with confidence that both the Portiuncula as a prototype and Francis' architectural legislation based on the metaphor of strangers and pilgrims held fast throughout the Franciscan order until his death in 1226. His vision did not go unchallenged but his redoubled efforts in later years, through his Rules, Testament and death performance, seemed to ensure an enduring adherence to poverty in the buildings of the order.<sup>1</sup> The question remains, however, whether his vision influenced the architectural program of the Franciscans after his death.

In Europe and the Levant, at least into the late 1230's, Franciscan settlements remained more or less consistent with the Portiuncula site—from the hedge walls to the tiny private oratory. What has been generally considered, however, as the first major departure from Francis' architectural vision was, ironically enough, the basilica constructed in Assisi to house the remains of Francis himself (fig. 98). The basilica was initiated and financed by Pope Gregory IX in 1227 and supervised by Br. Elias, breaking ground the next year. Its size, architectural conception and fresco program, however unique, were the result, according to historians, of a partial or complete departure by Elias, in collusion with Pope Gregory IX, Emperor Frederick II and the Assisi commune, from the poverty of Francis. The order was generally opposed to the project from the beginning. It was the first evidence, historians say, of Elias' avarice and life-long desire for power—which was exposed during his 1239 deposition as Minister General, his departure from the order, and his excommunication from the Catholic church.<sup>2</sup> With Elias safely depicted as the Judas of the order, the anti-Francis,

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<sup>1</sup>John Moorman, perhaps the foremost authority on the chronology of construction and settlements within the Franciscans, believed that, "There must have been very little actual building of convents during the lifetime of St. Francis. He would not allow it." *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 63.

<sup>2</sup>For some of the earliest interpretations of Elias see Salimbene de Adam, *Cronica fratris Salimbene de Adam*, ed. F. Bernini (Bari, 1942); Eccleston, I-VI; Lempp, ed. *Speculum vitae b. Francisci et sociorum eius* (Antwerp, 1602), part II, 99ff; and Angelo Clareno, *Rendiconti della Reale*

any examination of the architecture of the basilica could be conveniently divorced from the architectural vision of its main occupant, Saint Francis.<sup>3</sup>

This story has, beyond its chronology, a number of serious errors and needs to be re-evaluated in terms of recent archaeology and a close reading of the source texts themselves. I propose that Elias' vision for the basilica was, in fact, a narrative continuation of Francis' vision and death performance. To this end, the relationship between Francis and Elias needs to be determined with some specificity. Only thus can we evaluate the basilica and later Franciscan architecture in Italy with respect to the possibility and limits of a shared poetic and ethical vision.

a. *From Francis to Elias*

Although the date of Elias' birth is unknown, he seems to have been born in Castel Britti or Brittignano, a village just outside Assisi (fig. 99).<sup>4</sup> There is some evidence to suppose that, before joining Francis, Elias earned his living by a trade as well as teaching the Psalter to young boys. His widely acknowledged reputation for learning, however, seems to support Thomas of Eccleston's claim in the 1258 historical *tractatus* of the order that Elias had been

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*Accademia dei Lincei, Classe di Scienze morali, storiche e filologiche, serie 5a, XVII* (Rome, 1908), 97ff. Modern scholars who continued to lay blame for the early order's ills on Elias include Sabatier, *Vie de S. François*, 277ff and E. Lempp, *Frère Élie de Cortone, Étude Biographique Collection d'études et de documents*, III (Paris, 1901). More recent authors have been more sympathetic, including Lorenzo DiFonzo, "Elie d'Assise," in *Dictionnaire d'Histoire et de Géographie Ecclésiastique* XV (1963), 167-83; Giulio Barone, "Frate Elia," *Bulletino dell'Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo*, 85 (1974): 89-144; and, with perhaps the most balanced account to date, Brooke, 83-105, 137-67.

<sup>3</sup>Salimbene, *Cronica*, 148. Only with the most vague and elliptical statements, if at all, do modern authorities on the basilica attempt to link Francis' vision to it, e.g., Krautheimer, *Die Kirchen der Bettelorden*, 12ff; Braunfels, *Monasteries of Western Europe*, 125ff; Frankl, *Gothic Architecture*, 121-25; White, *Art and Architecture in Italy*, 16-36; Romanini, "L'Architettura degli ordini mendicanti," 8-10; Silvestro Nessi, *La Basilica di S. Francesco in Assisi e la sua documentazione storica* (Assisi: Casa Ed. Franciscana, 1982); Wolfgang Schenkluhn, *San Francesco in Assisi: Ecclesia Specialis: die Vision Papst Gregors IX. von einer Erneuerung der Kirche* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1991); and idem, *Ordines Studentes: Aspekte zur Kirchenarchitektur der Dominikaner und Franziskaner im 13* (Jahrhundert Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1985).

<sup>4</sup>Salimbene, *Cronica*, 135.

a *scriptor* or notary in Bologna.<sup>5</sup> Before he chose the name Elias upon entry into the Friars minor, his name was Bonusbaro.<sup>6</sup> The first consul of Assisi, called Bonusbaro, is recorded as affirming the town's independence from its feudal occupiers in the cathedral of San Rufino in 1198 in the name of the Trinity and not that of the Emperor.<sup>7</sup> If this person was not Elias himself, it was probably a relation; a consul named Bonusbaro also appears in government documents in other neighbouring towns.<sup>8</sup> Governance and leadership may have been Elias' family business. Thus, not only did Elias and Francis probably share the same district and good education, but they may also have shared the same politics—the support of the Assisi *minori*—for which Francis was willing to lay down his life as a soldier in 1202.<sup>9</sup>

There is a tradition, which cannot be completely verified, that Elias was received into the Franciscans in 1211 in Cortona by Francis himself.<sup>10</sup> He spent six years in solitude in a cell beside a gorge outside Cortona, the same cell in which he lived out his last ten or so years, exiled from the order and the church.<sup>11</sup> Elias' desire for the contemplative life was so well known that Francis himself once wrote to Elias in 1221-22 urging him, as Minister General, to value charity among his brethren more than the fruits of the hermitage.<sup>12</sup> The first indication, however, of Francis' profound trust in and respect for Elias comes in 1217 when Francis selected him, among all his companions, to lead the first Franciscan mission to the Holy Land.<sup>13</sup> This mission was most cherished by Francis because it was the birthplace of Jesus, and it offered the preacher an almost guaranteed possibility to win the crown of martyrdom, for which Francis so longed.<sup>14</sup> Elias seems to have done well there since we know that he left an established province to his successor.<sup>15</sup> When Francis finally visited him

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<sup>5</sup>Eccleston, 65; Bernard of Bessa, *Chronicon XIV vel XV Generalium Ministrorum Ordinis Fratrum Minorum*, in *AF* iii (1897), 695.

<sup>6</sup>Salimbene, *Cronica*, 96.

<sup>7</sup>Arnoldo Fortini, *Assisi nel Medio Evo* (Rome, 1940), 79-81; Brooke, 50; Moorman, *History of the Franciscan Order*, 23; and S. Attal, *Frate Elia, Compagno di San Francesco* (Rome, 1936), 37.

<sup>8</sup>Bernard of Bessa, *AF* iii, 695ff; DiFonzo, "Elie d'Assisi," 170.

<sup>9</sup>Paul Riley, "Francis' Assisi: Its Political and Social History," *FSt* 34 (1974): 393-424, esp. 421.

<sup>10</sup>Marianus of Florence, *AFH*, i (1908), 105-06. Cited in Brooke, 173n.

<sup>11</sup>According to Wadding, *Annales*, I, 108-09.

<sup>12</sup>*Letter to a Minister*, in Armstrong, 74-76. The recipient of this letter remains in dispute. Sabatier and Brooke maintain it was Elias, but Esser argues for its anonymity. See Armstrong, 74, n. 2; Brooke, 173, n. 3. This admonition, however, could only have come from one such as Francis who also knew the temptation to permanent solitude throughout his life, as seen in 1 Cel 35 or LM 12.1-2.

<sup>13</sup>Jordan, 7, 9, 14.

<sup>14</sup>1 Cel 55-57.

<sup>15</sup>Cf. Attal, *Frate Elia*, 28-29, 34-35; Marianus of Florence, *AFH*, I (1908), 105-06.

in the East in 1219-20, he was obviously pleased enough with Elias' achievement that, when Francis was suddenly summoned back home to deal with the Bologna house controversy and the alterations to the Rule by the vicars in Assisi, he chose Elias to be among the companions with whom he sailed back.<sup>16</sup> It was only a few months later that Francis selected Elias to be the next Minister General, which, in the opinion of Rosalind Brooke, may "also be regarded as one of the measures that were taken to counteract the subversive tendencies [of the vicars]."<sup>17</sup> There is no indication that Francis' selection of Elias was a concession to the innovators, but, in the words of Celano, Elias was "chosen to take the place of a mother with regard to Francis [concerning his illnesses], and to take the place of a father for the rest of the brethren."<sup>18</sup>

Biographers and chroniclers writing after his deposition in 1239, have gone to great lengths to blame most of the order's subsequent calamity on the figure of Elias. Many of the purported despicable designs of Elias (this "thoroughly bad lot," in the words of Salimbene), have been determined, by Brooke and others, to be without any factual basis. If we trust the pre-1239 sources, in particular the *Vita prima* of Celano, Elias' responsibility to Francis and the order, from 1221 to Francis' death in 1226, was consistent and sound.<sup>19</sup> For instance, at the annual Chapter at the Portiuncula on May 30, 1221, Elias presided over the gathering of approximately 3000 friars, made sure they were all fed, announced any wishes of Francis, addressed the brothers himself, assigned them to new missions and provinces, settled all difficulties arising out of the proceedings, and determined the date for the next meeting. During his tenure, he was responsible for all day-to-day business, the correction of brothers who transgressed the Rule, and the examination and licensing of new preachers.<sup>20</sup> Elias is recorded as sending at least one mission of seven friars to preach to the Muslims at Ceuta, thereby continuing Francis' Eastern missionary focus.<sup>21</sup> Finally, he seems to have remained in constant communication with Francis concerning Francis' requests and advice on matters, travelling with Francis on preaching tours, and even sharing sleeping accommodation with

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<sup>16</sup>Jordan, *Chronica*, 14.

<sup>17</sup>Brooke, 105.

<sup>18</sup>1 Cel 98.

<sup>19</sup>Celano's depiction of Elias in the *Vita prima* can be considered one of the most authentic due to the nature of the writing. It was commissioned by Rome in 1226-28 to facilitate Francis' canonization and to become the official biography of the order. Cf. Eccleston, 75.

<sup>20</sup>ER, 18; LR 9; 2 Cel 67, 182; Jordan, 17-18; Brooke, 113-14.

<sup>21</sup>E. Randolph Daniel, *The Franciscan Concept of Mission in the High Middle Ages* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1975), 44.

him on one occasion.<sup>22</sup> We can safely say, however, that Francis, as the exemplar of the order in his contemplation and preaching tours, generally took the part of Mary, and Elias, with his administrative responsibilities, that of Martha.

Two affairs in particular, however, caused a number of erroneous stories to be spun about Elias. The first tells how Francis, after writing his Later Rule of 1223, entrusted the freshly inked text to Elias and a party of Provincial Ministers, who, displeased with its strictures on poverty, destroyed it, forcing Francis to rewrite the Rule.<sup>23</sup> While the loss of the Rule seems indisputable, it was probably accidental; but even if it were intentional, Elias played "no energetic or influential part in the proceedings," since he was, at most, an envoy simply representing the concerns of a group of Ministers, as would be expected of a Minister General.<sup>24</sup> The second event concerns the blessing of Elias by Francis as recounted in the *Vita prima* of Celano: Francis placed his right hand upon Elias and said, "You, my son, I bless above all and throughout all. . . . I bless you as much as I can and more than I can."<sup>25</sup> Later biographers were intent to lay Francis' hand instead upon Br. Bernard or simply remove Elias' name altogether from this event, making it a general blessing. In both cases the attempt was to divide the two men, the saint and the sinner, and thereby sanitize Francis from being implicated in Elias' future affairs.<sup>26</sup>

The role of Elias, however, during Francis' last days emerges in the sources as one of compassion and true motherly care. Elias secured the best medical treatment for Francis' eyes; he hastened to Siena when Francis' health deteriorated; he personally accompanied him to his cell in Cortona so he could recover while on route to Assisi, and he posted an armed guard around Francis for the last six months of his life.<sup>27</sup> It was through the dream-vision of Br. Elias Francis came to know of the exact time of his death. Elias was granted the rare privilege to see Francis' stigmata before his friend died. He asked for and received Francis' blessing on at least two occasions, and, during Francis' final para-liturgy, reports the *Legenda*

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<sup>22</sup>Celano records Elias travelling with Francis through Narni during a preaching tour and interceding on behalf of a woman for whom Francis cast out a devil; 1 Cel 69. The two shared sleeping quarters in Foligno: 1 Cel 109.

<sup>23</sup>1 Cel 32; 2 Cel 209. Brooke, 88-95.

<sup>24</sup>Brooke, 95.

<sup>25</sup>1 Cel 108.

<sup>26</sup>1 Cel 105, 108; 2 Cel 217; MP 30; P.G. Abate, *La Leggenda Napolitana di S. Francesco e l'Ufficio rimato di Giuliano da Spira secondo un codice umbro* (Assisi, 1930), lectio 2; Brooke, 19, n. 1, 99.

<sup>27</sup>1 Cel 105; Geary, *Furta Sacra*, 1-30.



*Napolitana*, Elias wept so much he was unable to consume his portion of the blessed bread.<sup>28</sup> In the letter to the Provincial Ministers that Elias composed on the day of, or very soon after, Francis' death, he records what seems to be a genuinely deep and personal grief:

. . . greetings from Brother Elias, a sinner. Before I begin to write, I must give expression to my sorrow, and indeed I have reason to do so. As overflowing waters, so is my grief. For the fear I feared has come upon me and upon you . . . for us, there must needs be sorrow; without him darkness envelopes us, and the shadows of death enshroud us. If it is a great loss for all, it is fraught with particular danger for me whom he left in the midst of darkness, oppressed and harried on all sides by countless anxieties. Hence I beseech you, brethren, weep with me who am immersed in deep sorrow.<sup>29</sup>

Elias was held in great affection by Francis, is depicted in a consistently favourable light by Celano and was a close friend and compatriot of Francis' confidant, Clare.<sup>30</sup> To Elias we must attribute the organization of the funeral procession, which, including ecclesial and civic dignitaries and the crowds waving olive branches, took a long detour to the church of S. Damiano where Clare and her order resided (fig. 100). Elias had the door to the chapel opened up (which was usually forbidden by their rule of strict enclosure) so that Clare and her sisters could come out and weep over the body, kissing his stigmatized hands.<sup>31</sup> In 1235-37, Clare wrote a letter to her companion Sr. Agnes, urging her fidelity to the advice of "our venerable father, our Brother Elias."<sup>32</sup> The letter concerns the desire of Agnes to have her convent warrant, as had S. Damiano, the strict *privilegium paupertatis*: to live without legal ownership of their lodgings. Elias seems to have advised Agnes to hold firm in her desires

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<sup>28</sup>1 Cel 95, 98, 105. Note that afterwards Leo begged Elias for the unconsumed bread, preserved it carefully and used it, as he did with the *tau chartula*, to heal the sick; see Abate, *La Leggenda Napolitana*, 35.

<sup>29</sup>LE, 1956-57.

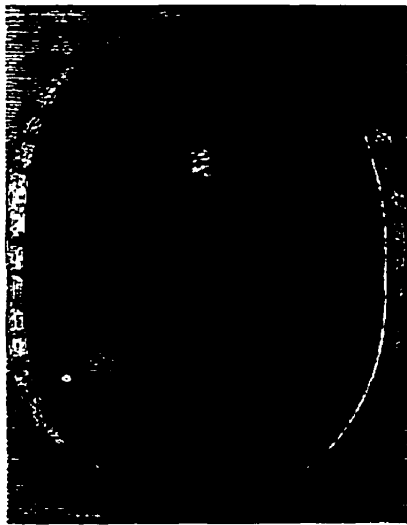
<sup>30</sup>1 Cel 109; Michael Cusato, "Elias and Clare: An Enigmatic Relationship," in Mary Francis Hone, ed., *Clare of Assisi: Investigations*, VII (Kalamazoo, 1992): 95-115.

<sup>31</sup>1 Cel 116; 3 Soc 109; MP 108; SL 109. Similar charity of Elias' can be seen with regard to Lady Jacoba, another dear friend of Francis'. After Francis' death he came up to her as she stood weeping and lay the body of Francis in her arms, saying, "You loved him while he lived; hold him now that he is dead," 3 Cel 39.

<sup>32</sup>Walter Setton, "The Letters from Saint Clare to Blessed Agnes of Bohemia," *AFH* 17 (1924): 514-516; and *Clare of Assisi*, ed. Armstrong, 39.



98. Aerial view of the Basilica of S. Francesco in Assisi. Entrance to Upper Church is through the double portals on the facade in front of the lawn; the city of Assisi is off the photo to the bottom right. (Photo courtesy of Plurigraph, Narni.)



99. Portrait of Br. Elias, copied from his figure which he had painted on the Giunta Pisano cross, 1236. (F. Venuti, *Vita di Fra Elia*, 1st ed., *Magazzino Toscano d'Intrusione e di Piacere* II [Livorno, 1755], facing p. 391; cf. 443.)



100. Funeral procession of Francis of Assisi with Clare of Assisi and her sisters in the upper right. (Anonymous of Umbria, second half of the 16th c. Miniature from *Franchescina di Santa Maria degli Angeli*, Santa Maria degli Angeli, Archivio della Porziuncula.)

and he pleaded later on behalf of the sisters to Pope Gregory IX.<sup>33</sup> Finally, there is evidence that he continued contact with the Second Order even after his deposition.<sup>34</sup>

Along with Celano and Clare, Elias was politically and theologically aligned with the original companions of Francis, the authors of the *Scripta Leonis* and their associates.<sup>35</sup> Like Elias, these were mostly the Umbrian-born lay brothers who were vowed Friars Minor but who were bereft of a priestly education and status.<sup>36</sup> They endorsed Celano's version of Francis' special blessing upon Elias, campaigned on his behalf in 1227, and eventually secured his re-election as Minister General in 1232.<sup>37</sup> With Clare, Elias and these companions supported a version of poverty which was primarily a spiritual condition, rooted in scriptural ascetic metaphor first, and socio-economic reality second. They shared an interest in the practice of poverty as a mystical mimesis of Christ whose manifestations ranged from the configuration of buildings to their kitchen utensils. Opposition to this desire came from the more relaxed, moderate wing composed of the Provincial Ministers, the Custodians (the administrators of the custodies or inter-provincial divisions), priests and educated friars, as well as the more strident "spirituals", those brothers who practiced poverty quite literally as a type of revolutionary destitution.<sup>38</sup>

The consistency between Elias and Francis' thinking was especially apparent in the letter Elias wrote concerning Francis' death. He decoded the scriptural metaphors through which Francis understood himself. Elias thus set the poetic agenda for the subsequent interpretation of Francis by his biographers, including Celano.<sup>39</sup> In the letter, Elias explicitly referred to Francis as another Jacob, Moses and Aaron, and he used biblical references to imply that Francis was another John the Baptist, Elijah, Solomon, and, of course, the *alter Christus*.<sup>40</sup> What launches these interpretations above and beyond the medieval funerary commonplaces

<sup>33</sup>This instance is especially revealing of Elias' commitment to poverty even during the time in which opposition to his leadership among the brethren was beginning to surface.

<sup>34</sup>Eccleston, 29, 66.

<sup>35</sup>Leo, Angelo, Rufino, Giles, Juniper, Masseo, etc., all of whom were buried either at the basilica with Francis or at the Portiuncula. Brooke, 149.

<sup>36</sup>Flood, "Domestication," 311-20, and Harold Goad, "Brother Elias as the Leader of the Assisian Party in the Order," in Burkitt, et al., *Franciscan Essays*, II (Manchester, 1932), 67-83.

<sup>37</sup>1 Cel 108; 24 Gen 215; cf. Lempp, *Speculum vitae*, 163.

<sup>38</sup>See David Flood, *Hugh of Digne's Rule Commentary* (Grottaferrata: Editiones Collegii S. Bonaventurae ad Claras Aquas, 1979), 93, 106, 158, 165; Nimmo, *Reform and Division*, 51-107; Cusato, "Elias and Clare," 111; Brooke, 169.

<sup>39</sup>The letter, as John Fleming has noted, was "half way to being a bull," *From Bonaventure to Bellini*, 47.

<sup>40</sup>LE, 1955-60; Lempp, *Frère Élie*, 70-71.

which were typically spoken of holy people, was the announcement to the world of the blessing of God imprinted on Francis' body, "a new miracle . . . the genuine stigmata of Christ."<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, in a note attached to copies of this letter, Elias summoned all Provincial Ministers and Custodians to a Chapter meeting at the Portiuncula to elect a Minister General.<sup>42</sup> Thus Elias continued to act responsibly not only in the promptness of this summons, but also by choosing not to invite his constituency of Umbrian lay brothers, whose votes would have assured his election. Indeed, until the Chapter convened on May 1227, Elias deliberately took the part of an interim vicar and not a self-appointed Minister General.<sup>43</sup>

That he was not elected at this Chapter may have less to do with ill-will towards Elias and more with his decision, following Francis' lead, not to spend time garnering political support. He preferred to rule autocratically or imperially based on the right of his investiture by the living saint himself. This was the way Francis had ruled and the two shared an approach to leadership (taking into account Elias' later tenure as Minister General) that placed concrete example—and the arbitrary if not eccentric decisions which came from relying on a personal vision and divine inspiration—above a legislative or lobbying approach to governance.<sup>44</sup> Francis' authority, however, was widely accepted on the basis of his holiness, miracles, popularity and charisma. These Elias, to his detriment, clearly lacked. John Parenti, the winner of the election, had the support of the voting Ministers due to his proven leadership abilities. Parenti was one of their own, and the general desire among the Ministers that non-permanent leaders be elected, with shorter terms than Francis', may be the reasons why Elias, the Minister General since 1221, lost the vote in 1227.<sup>45</sup>

Despite what many of his later detractors and biographers charged, opposition to the construction of the basilica could not have been the cause of Elias' electoral loss, because the conception and initiation of the project post-dates the 1227 elections.<sup>46</sup> Nor can Elias be

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<sup>41</sup>LE, 1958.

<sup>42</sup>Jordan, 50.

<sup>43</sup>Brooke, 118.

<sup>44</sup>Esser, 58-71; Brooke, 59-76. Like Francis, Elias tended to govern symbolically. For instance, according to Eccleston, Elias is supposed to have wanted to have 72 provinces under him in memory of Christ's 72 disciples; Eccleston, 68-69.

<sup>45</sup>Peregrinus of Bologna, mentioned in Eccleston, 142; Brooke, 122-136. Unfortunately, we know nothing of the actual circumstances of the election.

<sup>46</sup>The site was not acquired until March 1228, consequently no building was in progress 1226-27 when the election was held. See the chronology in Nessi, *La Basilica di S. Francesco*, 385ff. See also, Salvatore Nicolosi, *Il Francescanesimo tra idealità e storicità* (Assisi: Ed. Portiuncula, 1988), 32.

accused, as he was, with conspiring to acquire papal privileges for the order and for the construction of the basilica, which were otherwise prohibited by the Rule. The two new privileges recorded in 1227, along with the bulls concerning the basilica and the translation of the body of Francis from its temporary crypt in the church of S. Giorgio to the basilica in 1228, were granted explicitly to John Parenti, the new Minister General, and not to Elias.<sup>47</sup> To John Parenti, in fact, can be attributed much of the relaxation of the rule of poverty, probably from pressure due to his alignment with the constituency that elected him.<sup>48</sup> John was a scholarly and efficient cleric who supported learning and detachment from ecclesiastical dependence. He had proven powers of persuasion, and was twice sent by the pope on key diplomatic missions.<sup>49</sup> During his eight-year tenure the order was irrevocably set upon a new path towards institutional domestication.

It was in this political climate in which Elias, now freed from office, was asked by Pope Gregory IX to oversee the construction of a special church in Assisi to house the body of a holy man whom he would soon canonize.<sup>50</sup> The project was enthusiastically supported by the citizens of Assisi who, encouraged by the succession of miracles reported around Francis' temporary tomb at S. Giorgio, immediately produced two donations of adjoining plots.<sup>51</sup> A month later, in April of 1228, Gregory informed all Christians in the bull *Recolentes qualiter*, that Francis should be glorified by more donations, promising an indulgence of forty days to those who contributed toward the expenses.<sup>52</sup> Labour from the locality was immediately pledged, and the entire undertaking was done under papal auspices.

On July 16, 1228, amidst great fanfare, Francis was canonized by Gregory IX at S. Giorgio. The next day the pope laid the foundation stone for the basilica, renaming the plot of land *Collis Paradisi*; its previous name, *Collis Inferni*, referred to its former use as the

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<sup>47</sup>Francis' very clear prohibition against ecclesiastical privileges can be found in his Testament, 25-26; see also, *BF*, 9-10, 19-26, for privileges granted during Francis' time, compared to *BF*, I, 31, 46 60-62, 64-65, nos. G9, 8, 9, 29, 49, 52 (32-33, 50, 68, 71); cf. I, 66, no. G9, 54 (72). Brooke, 131-36.

<sup>48</sup>*BF*, I, 74ff., nos G9, 63-6 (v and n.). On Parenti's role, see Lempp, *Frère Élie*, 15; and Brooke, 135-36.

<sup>49</sup>*BL*, I, 70-71, no. G9, 57 (74); *AF* III, 211.

<sup>50</sup>" . . . ut pro ipsius patris reverentia specialis aedificetur ecclesia," *BF*, I, 40, no. G9, 21; *Bull.*, I/7 (Assisi: Biblioteca comm., Archive of the Sacro Convento); The full text is reproduced in C. Pietramellara, *Il Sacro Convento di Assisi* (Assisi: Ed. Laterza, 1988), 65. For a comprehensive documentary analysis see Nessi, *La Basilica*, 41.

<sup>51</sup>I Cel 121, 127-50. Archive of the Sacro Convento, Instrumenta, II, n. 2, 4; for the texts of these see Pietramellara, *Il Sacro Convento*, 65.

<sup>52</sup>*BF*, I, 40-41, no. G9, 21; *Bull.*, I/7 (Sacro Convento).

Assisi gallows (figs. 101, 102).<sup>53</sup> Elias was now working under the authority of Pope Gregory IX. His actions with respect to the program, materials and plan of the church, were therefore not subject to the restrictions laid down by Francis. Nevertheless, the choice of Elias to oversee this project was obviously made to ensure that the saint would be appropriately glorified. The pope also had a particular interest in honouring Francis, who had asked him, as Cardinal Hugolino to be Protector of the order and to help govern it. His devotion to Francis was unwavering although his understanding of Franciscan poverty differed from Francis'.<sup>54</sup> Like John Parenti, Pope Gregory IX continued to align himself with the moderate Ministers, priests, and educated members of the order. Elias' commitment to Francis and his humble architectural desires for the order must have been seriously challenged. It was not without some truth, if not prophecy, when Elias stated in his letter that Francis' death caused, "a particular danger for me whom he left in the midst of darkness, oppressed and harried on all sides by countless anxieties."<sup>55</sup>

*b. Elias and the Ecclesia Specialis*

What then was the specific role that Elias played in the construction of the basilica? Could he be called the architect? In the earliest textual sources concerning the basilica, Elias is named as the sole recipient of the first donation of land in 1228. He seems to have resided almost continuously in Assisi during the first ten years of construction and to have been in charge of the translation ceremony of the saint's remains in 1230. He seems also to have overseen all the financing and procurement of the materials necessary to ensure the basilica's rapid erection. He commissioned a large painted crucifix for the basilica in 1236, and a bell for its bell tower in 1239. Even after his deposition as Minister General, Elias retained the title "dominus et custos ecclesie Sancti Francisci." It is possible that he resided at the basilica once more around 1244.<sup>56</sup>

Although Elias seems to have been entirely in charge of construction—no other name is

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<sup>53</sup>I Cel 123-26; *BF*, I, 66, no. G9, 54 (72); Nessi, *La Basilica*, 42, n. 74.

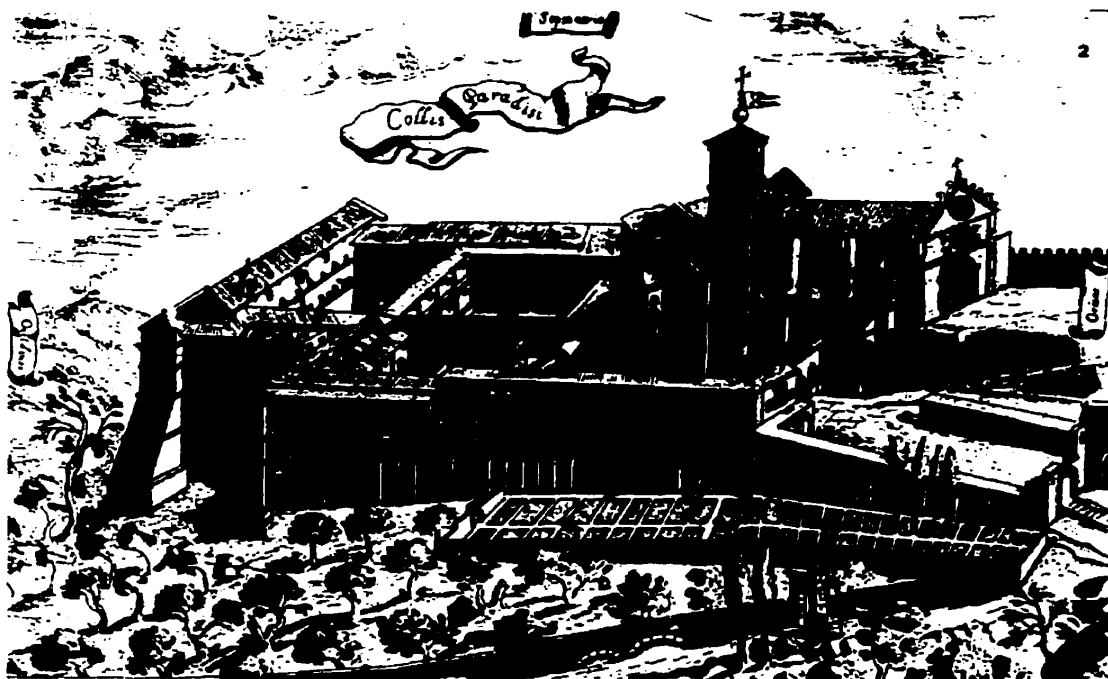
<sup>54</sup>On Hugolino, see chapter 5 (c).

<sup>55</sup>LE, *Omnibus*, 1956-57.

<sup>56</sup>Nessi, *La Basilica*, 59-60; Pietramellara, *Il Sacro Convento*, 20.



101. *Collis inferni*: the site upon which the Basilica of S. Francesco in Assisi would soon rise. The castle of La Rocca is at the top of the highest hill. (Engraving by Francesco Providoni, from F.M. Angeli, *Collis Paradisi Amoenitas*. Assisi, 1704.)



102. *Collis Paradisi*: the renamed site of the Basilica of S. Francesco in Assisi, depicted here in its 16th c. form. (Engraving by Francesco Providoni, from F.M. Angeli, *Collis Paradisi Amoenitas*. Assisi, 1704.)

mentioned so consistently in the sources—what his actual duties were remains rather obscure. For instance, Bernard of Bessa, in the late thirteenth century, tells us that Elias "constitui faciebat;" the *Speculum Vitae* records, "Incipit aedificare mirae magnitudinis ecclesiam iuxta Assisium," and "Helia suspensum illum aedificium," and Arnaldo of Serrant, in the early fourteenth century wrote that Elias "constructam" the basilica.<sup>57</sup> In the late eighteenth century, Jacopo Tedesco and Brother Phillip of Campello (b. 1257), the administrator of the church of Santa Chiara, were both proposed as possible architects of the basilica. Since then, scholars have generally dismissed Jacopo as "purely imaginary," and Phillip as only being connected with the basilica after Elias' demise in 1239, and only then as its procurator, or financial administrator.<sup>58</sup> Yet another hypothesis concerns the signature marks of the Comacini masters which appear on a 1426 wall in the monastery complex attached to the basilica of S. Francesco (fig. 103).<sup>59</sup> The mason guild or craft-association of Comacini was one of the earliest and most successful construction associations in Europe. Its existence is first recorded in the seventh century.<sup>60</sup> Somewhat similar symbols of the Comacini (compass, square, eight-pointed star, trowel and mallet) have been found on a 1028 section of the Assisi cathedral of S. Rufino, on a circa 1200 portion of the La Rocca castle towering over the city, and on a tomb for the son of a master mason in the lower church of the basilica itself, which dates to 1300. On this evidence it has been generally supposed that the Comacini were somehow involved in the basilica of S. Francesco, although not to the extent of being permitted to leave their symbolic calling-card carved into the church itself.<sup>61</sup> The consensus to date, therefore, attributes to Elias not only the political and financial administration of the project including the negotiating of agreements with the Comacini guild, for which he would certainly have been suited given his experience administering the Franciscan order, but also the responsibility for the program, siting, general dimensions and iconographic agenda for the works, at least until his deposition in 1239.

However, it is unlikely that Elias had access to the mason guilds' famous secrets

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<sup>57</sup>Bernard of Bessa, in *AF* iii, 695; *Fragment du Speculum Vitae concenent Élie* (from *Speculum Vitae*, ed. 1509), in Lempp, *Frère Élie*, 163-65; and 24 Gen 212, as cited in Nessi, *La Basilica*, 60-61.

<sup>58</sup>Nessi, *La Basilica*, 65; Elvio Lunghi, *The Basilica of Saint Francis of Assisi* (Scala/Riverside, 1996), 20.

<sup>59</sup>Nessi, *La Basilica*, 73.

<sup>60</sup>P. Villari, *Le Invasione barbariche in Italia* (Milan, 1901), 309ff; G. Pepe, *Il Medio Evo Barbarico d'Italia* (Turin, 1963), 250ff.

<sup>61</sup>Pietramellara, *Il Sacro Convento*, 44-45; Nessi, *La Basilica*, 73.; Paschal Magro, *The Tomb of Saint Francis* (Assisi: Casa Editrice Francescana, 1981), 10.



concerning stone-cutting and the proportional determination of columns and vaults such that the structure would hold firm.<sup>62</sup> Given his long-standing relationship with the Umbrian lay brethren of the order, who supported him politically long after his excommunication, it would be a reasonable guess that Elias worked very well alongside and in consultation with both the labour force first pledged from Assisi as well as the mason guild, whether it was the Comacini or some other association. It would be rash, however, to call Elias an *architectus* in the Vitruvian sense used by Leone Battista Alberti, for instance, in the early Renaissance.<sup>63</sup> The professional designer, as distinguished from guild masons and carpenters, did not exist in the early thirteenth century. The reality is rather more complex: a master mason directing labourers without lending a hand was first noted only in 1099; conversely, around the same time, church patrons and nobility who actually had proven expertise in construction were cited as the sole builders of some projects.<sup>64</sup> The use of scaled working drawings as a contract between a master designer and a guild, such that the designer need not be on site and could direct the works by "remote-control," only began in Europe in 1340.<sup>65</sup> According to Franklin Toker, architecture was essentially without drawing on paper or parchment before 1220, such that any *magister operis* would have to be on site on a daily basis, as Elias seems to have been, giving instructions orally, while the guild masons worked out their details *in situ*, piece by piece, without any sense of the whole beyond that of one structural bay or module at a

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<sup>62</sup>Paul Frankl, "The Secret of the Medieval Masons," *Art Bulletin* (March, 1945), 46-66; François Bucher, "Medieval Architectural Design Methods, 800-1560," *Gesta* XI: 2 (1973): 37; François Bucher, *The Lodge Books and Sketch Books of Medieval Architects* (New York, 1979), vol. 1; Lon Shelby, *Gothic Design Techniques* (Carbondale & Edwardsville), 51ff; John Harvey, *The Mediaeval Architect* (London, 1978), 103ff; and Joseph Rykwert, "On the Oral Transmission of Architectural Theory," *AA Files* 6 (1980), 15-27.

<sup>63</sup>Leone Battista Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, trans. Joseph Rykwert, et al (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1988), Prologue, 3. Nicolas Pevsner, "The Term 'Architect' in the Middle Ages," *Speculum*, 17 (1942), 549-62. The term was first applied to Elias in the early sixteenth century by Mariano of Florence (d. 1523), and continued to be applied up until the present; *Compendium chronicarum fratrum Minorum*, in *AFH* 2 (1907-09): 102; Wadding, *Annales*, I, a. 1235 n. 17; see also Nessi, *La Basilica*, 61.

<sup>64</sup>*Relatio Translationis Corporis Sancti Geminiani* (ca. 1200), reprinted in G. Bertoni, *Atlante Storico-Paleografico del Duomo di Modena* (Modena, 1909), 86ff. Pevsner believes that terms such as *construxit*, *fecit*, *aedificator* and *fabricator* were used interchangeably before the fifteenth century to describe the action of patrons: "The Term 'Architect'," 553. With respect to Elias, the *Notae Sancti Salvatoris Scafnusensis* (11th c.) implies clearly that a cleric could be conversant with the mason's craft. And Bishop Benno of Osnabrück was not only considered an architect but an original and inspired designer; Ilse Hindenberg, *Benno II, Bischof von Osnabrück als Architekt* (Strassberg, 1921). See also Rykwert, "Oral Transmission," 27, n. 88.

<sup>65</sup>Franklin Toker, "Gothic Architecture by Remote Control: An Illustrated Building Contract of 1340," *Art Bulletin* 67 (March, 1985), 67-94.

time.<sup>66</sup> Such was the case for the renovations that Francis undertook at S. Damiano and at the Portiuncula. Indeed, it is not unreasonable to suppose that if Elias joined the Friars Minor when they numbered only around two dozen, and thus when Francis was renovating S. Damiano for a second time to house Clare's new order, Elias, the novice, would probably have been expected to pitch in. The proposition seems tempting not only on account of Elias' subsequent friendship with Clare, but because this project was a three-storey crypt-bearing church and monastery, as the basilica would be twenty years later (figs. 31-34). In any case, Elias' commitment to raising buildings seems to have lasted throughout his life, from the 1217 foundation of a Franciscan settlement in Syria, to the church of S. Francesco in Cortona (attributed to him circa 1253) and the fortresses he constructed in his later life for Emperor Frederick II in Sicily.<sup>67</sup>

This brings us to the actual construction of the basilica. The first evidence we have for an initial program for the church seems to be the March 29, 1228 deed which states that property was granted to Br. Elias on behalf of Pope Gregory IX for a "locum oratorium vel ecclesiam pro beatissimo corpore sancti Francisci."<sup>68</sup> This donation verifies not only that Francis was already considered a saint worthy of such generous recognition even before his canonization, but also that the initial construction was for a crypt-bearing church which could either be a private oratory for the brothers, or a special shrine church for the laity, but not both. A month later, Gregory IX specifies that the church was to be an *ecclesia specialis* in honour of Francis.<sup>69</sup> If there had been any doubt about what was to be built, the issue was now settled in favour of a shrine church. Gregory's intentions for this special church may be gleaned from the canonization ceremony of July 16, 1228, the day before he laid the first stone at the foundation rites for the basilica. Here, Celano tells us, in the presence of numerous bishops, cardinals, abbots, counts, princes, King John of Jerusalem and a great crowd of people, the pope appeared in vestments of gold inset with jewels, showing forth the "image of super-celestial beauty."<sup>70</sup> In his eulogy and sermon he referred to Francis in terms of Ecclesiasticus 50.6-7:

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<sup>66</sup>Toker, "Gothic Architecture," 70; Bucher, "Medieval Architectural Design," 49.

<sup>67</sup>G. Golubovich, *Biblioteca bio-bibliografica della Terra Santa e dell'Oriente Francese* (Quaracchi, 1906-), II, 312-15; Lempp, *Frère Élie*, 179-87.

<sup>68</sup>Archive of the Sacro Convento, Instrumenta, II, n. 2; Pietramellara, *Il Sacro Convento*, 65.

<sup>69</sup>*BF*, I, 40, no. G9, 21; *Bull.*, I/7 (Assisi: Biblioteca comm., Archive of the Sacro Convento).

<sup>70</sup>1 Cel 125.

He shone in his days as the morning star in the midst of a cloud, and as the moon at the full. And as the sun when it shines, so did he shine in the temple of God.<sup>71</sup>

If the crypt-church, like a reliquary, was destined to represent the celestial abode of the saint, Gregory seems to have been proposing an iconography for Francis based on the image of an intense point of light shining in the darkness. In this, he was preceded by Elias in the letter announcing Francis' death:

without him darkness envelopes us. . . . He was a light, sent by the true Light, to shine on those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. . . . This he did in as far as the true Sun, the Orient from on high—that is, Christ—illuminated his heart and inflamed his will . . . . Now that he has died he is lovely to behold, he shines with a wonderful brilliance.<sup>72</sup>

And Elias, in turn, may have been referring to Francis' depiction of the Portiuncula as a "candle before the throne of God."<sup>73</sup>

If Francis' corpse radiated with holiness—demonstrated in the numerous miracles witnessed around his temporary tomb—then Elias, according to recent archaeological evidence, sought to plunge the saint's luminous remains deep into the bedrock at the upper eastern end of the basilica's steeply sloping site.<sup>74</sup> Here, a retaining wall seems to define an early transept without an apse which would eventually attach to the two side walls of an aisleless nave (fig. 104, no. 1). Thus, the orientation would have been traditional, that is, entrance to the west, and the altar, with crypt below, to the east. Like S. Giorgio at that time, and almost every hermitage of the order, the basilica would rest, in relative insecurity, outside the walls of its city. Furthermore, with this early alignment, the basilica turned its back on the city of Assisi and opened its doors onto the road which twists down to the valley below, leading towards the Portiuncula (figs. 101, and frontispiece). The pilgrimage route, therefore, would have had no need to pass through the city, but would be continuous from the Portiuncula, the Bethlehem of the order, to the new Holy Sepulchre of Francis, situated,

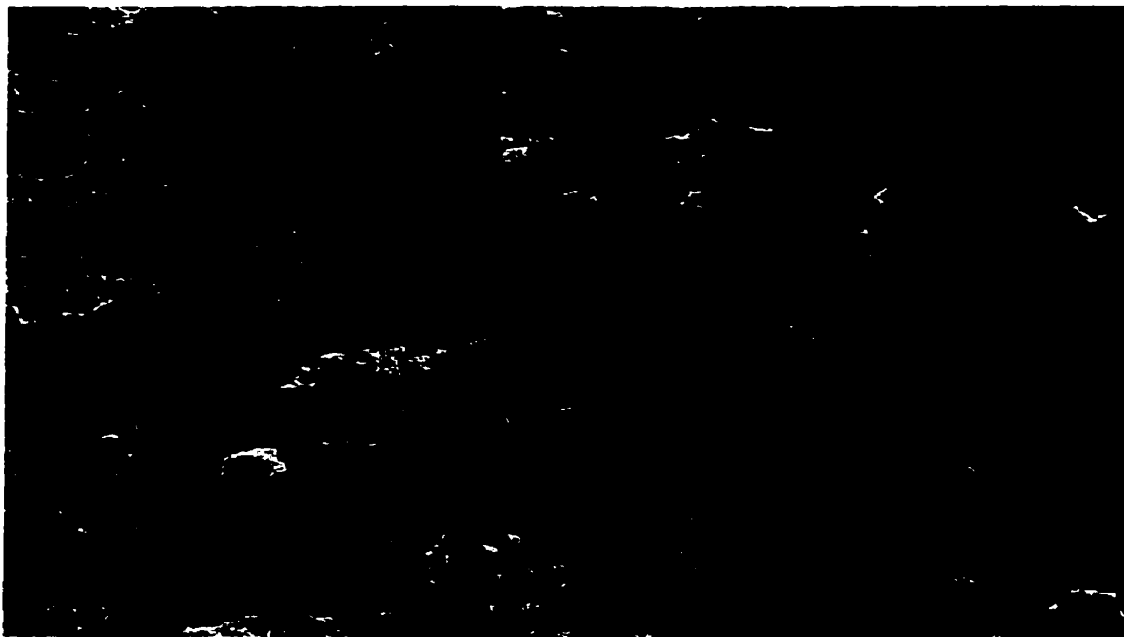
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<sup>71</sup>1 Cel 125.

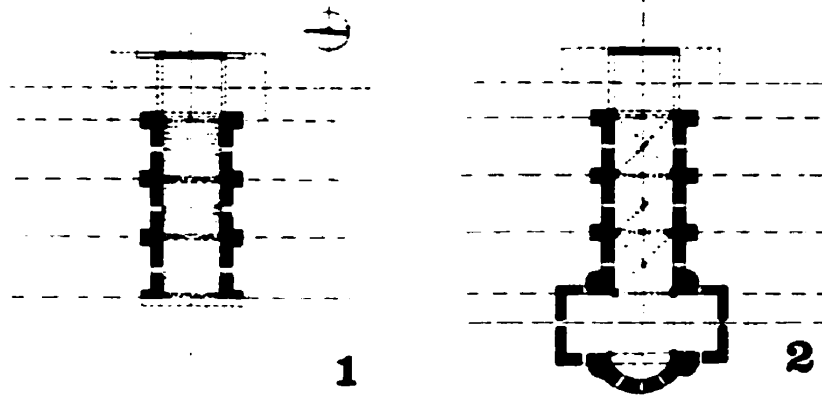
<sup>72</sup>LE, 1956-60; cf. Lk 1.78.

<sup>73</sup>SL 10.

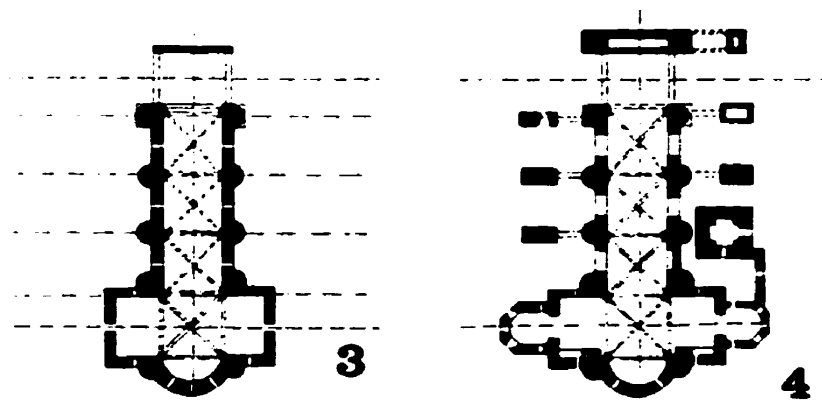
<sup>74</sup>Giuseppe Rocchi, *La Basilica di San Francesco ad Assisi: interpretazione e rilievo* (Sansoni Editore, 1982), 11-45.



103. Comacini symbols on a ca. 1496 wall within the convent portion (the Sacro Convento) of the Basilica of S. Francesco, Assisi. (Photo by author.)



104. Chronology of the plan of the Lower Church of S. Francesco in Assisi: 1. ca. 1227-28; 2. ca. 1229-30; 3. ca. 1232; and 4. ca. 1239. (After Rocchi, *La Basilica di S. Francesco*, 44-45.)



appropriately enough, outside its own Jerusalem.

Indeed, a clear relationship to the Portiuncula, and one of the basilica's most distinctive characteristics, seems to have been planned at the outset, that is, a simple aisleless plan with flat unarticulated walls supporting a stone vault (figs. 105, 106). In this, the basilica would borrow less from local Romanesque cathedrals or monastery chapels than from the tiny Benedictine rural chapels that the friars repaired or copied, for example, at Narni, Fonte Columbo, La Verna or Greccio, in imitation of Francis at the Portiuncula.<sup>75</sup> For these hermitage oratories, vaulting was a relatively simple matter that did not require interior columns or exterior buttressing. But, given the 12-meter width of the bays planned for this *ecclesia specialis*, both in the thickness of its walls and in the use of pier buttresses, it had to depart from the Portiuncula model in order to be vaulted safely. The crypt in this early plan seems to have been built at the east end crossing, underneath the place where the altar would have been located. The chief evidence for this is that the floor of the lower church, to this day, has a conspicuous incline from east to west. Thus, the original crypt may have been conceived along the lines of that proposed by Marino Bigaroni for S. Damiano: from the nave, stairs would both rise up to the altar and choir, and lead down to the crypt below (fig. 34).<sup>76</sup>

However, the most outstanding feature of this early construction is that the plan, without apse or aisles, depicts the simplest of T or *tau*-shapes (fig. 104, no. 1). This is not to say that various T-plan churches had not been executed before, but, although scholars have suggested sources from which the plan may have migrated, very few of these seem to be without interior columns or wall articulation, and none is without an apse (fig. 107).<sup>77</sup> The very starkness of this primitive scheme suggests that it was a literal application of Francis' beloved *tau* upon the site. By doing so, Elias would have selected the form in which the newly stigmatized Francis, on La Verna, both signed and understood himself, as well as the shape of the habit which he designed for his order and was buried in; the form implies the entire penitential

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<sup>75</sup>Maria Beatrice Mistretta, *Francesco Architetto Di Dio* (Roma, 1983), 168; W. Krönig, "Hallenkirchen in Mittelitalien," in *Kunstgeschichtliches Jahrbuch der Bibliotheca Hertziana*, 2 (1938): 1-142; R. Pardi, *Ricerche di architettura religiosa medioevale umbra* (Perugia, 1972), 191ff.

<sup>76</sup>Rocchi, *La Basilica*, 35-45; and Bigaroni, "San Damiano Assisi," 45-97.

<sup>77</sup>Silvestro Nessi provides a thorough listing to date of all possible constructions that may have influenced the lower church; see *La Basilica*, 97-111; Mistretta, *Francesco Architetto*, 168-69; and Schenkluhn, *San Francesco in Assisi*, 126-30.

history and symbolism of the *tau*.<sup>78</sup>

Where this symbol once stood upright as a crucifix, it was now laid horizontal in plan to indicate the death of the *alter-Christus* in his Holy Sepulchre. But the *tau* holds the promise of resurrection through its use as a curative sign throughout its long history in popular medicine.<sup>79</sup> The brothers of the Antonite order, who Francis imitated early on in habit and work, adopted the *tau* to heal the physical and moral ailments of the sick and leprous. Thomas of Celano reports that Francis once effected a cure for a sick man with a *tau*-shaped stick, just as he cured Br. Leo of his spiritual doubts through his *tau*-signed *chartula*.<sup>80</sup>

As a death and resurrection configuration, Elias' use of the *tau* also indicates a role for Francis in the second coming of Christ. In the letter announcing Francis' death, Elias designated Francis as "he who went about as Aaron," that is, as one who was charged with marking the doorjambes with a lambs-blood *tau* sparing the Hebrews from death.<sup>81</sup> In the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, where Francis may have been in attendance, Pope Innocent III collapsed Aaron and Moses (who bore the *tau*-shaped staff) onto the figure of the *tau*-writing Angel of the Sixth Seal from the Book of Revelation.<sup>82</sup> This type of millenarian speculation was already being fostered by Francis' contemporary, Joachim of Fiore.<sup>83</sup> It held that the apocalyptic Angel of the Sixth Seal, empowered to write a sign, or *tau*, on the

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<sup>78</sup>Indeed, Br. Leo, after he died, bequeathed the *tau chartula* to the basilica.

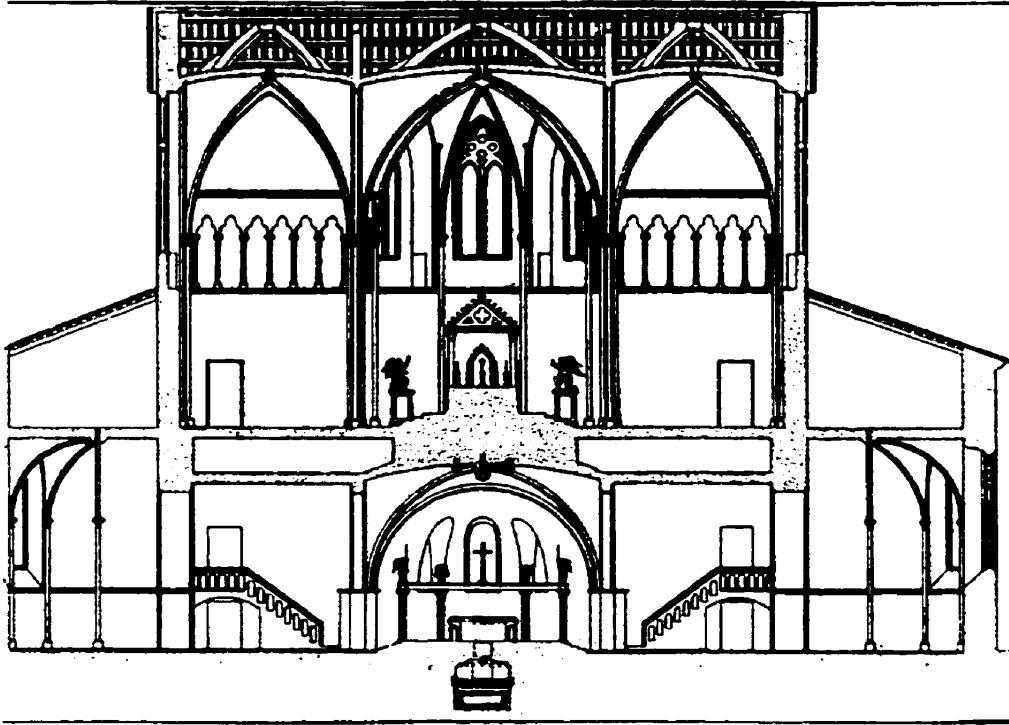
<sup>79</sup>For instance in 546 St. Gall Bishop of Clermont organized a solemn procession for which a miraculous *tau* appeared on the village homes and cured the ensuing epidemic. Recorded by Gregory of Tours; cited in Vorreaux, *Tau*, 17. The *tau*-shaped staff and serpent was not only the prophylactic device of Moses, but was the insignia for the temples of the Greek and Roman healing god Asclepius. See C. A. Meier, *Ancient Incubation and Modern Psychotherapy* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967), 10, 81.

<sup>80</sup>3 Cel 159; LM, Miracles, 10.6; 2 Cel 49; LM 11.9. The *chartula*, according to Attilio Bartoli-Langeli, was a talisman against temptations, "an object to be associated with what is called superstition of writing, a magical, marginal, non-institutional use of Scripture. It is a blessing-exorcism, a breaking of a spell, a kind of phylactery or amulet." See his "Le radici culturali della 'popolarità' francescana," in *Il Francescanesimo e il teatro medievale* (Castelfiorentino, 1984), 41-58. See also, Flint, *The Rise of Magic*, 254ff., concerning the use of the cross for medieval healing miracles. Note also that the crucifix which asked Francis to heal God's house took place in a chapel dedicated to St. Damian, an early Christian physician-saint.

<sup>81</sup>LE, 1960; Ezk 9.4; Num 21.8-9.

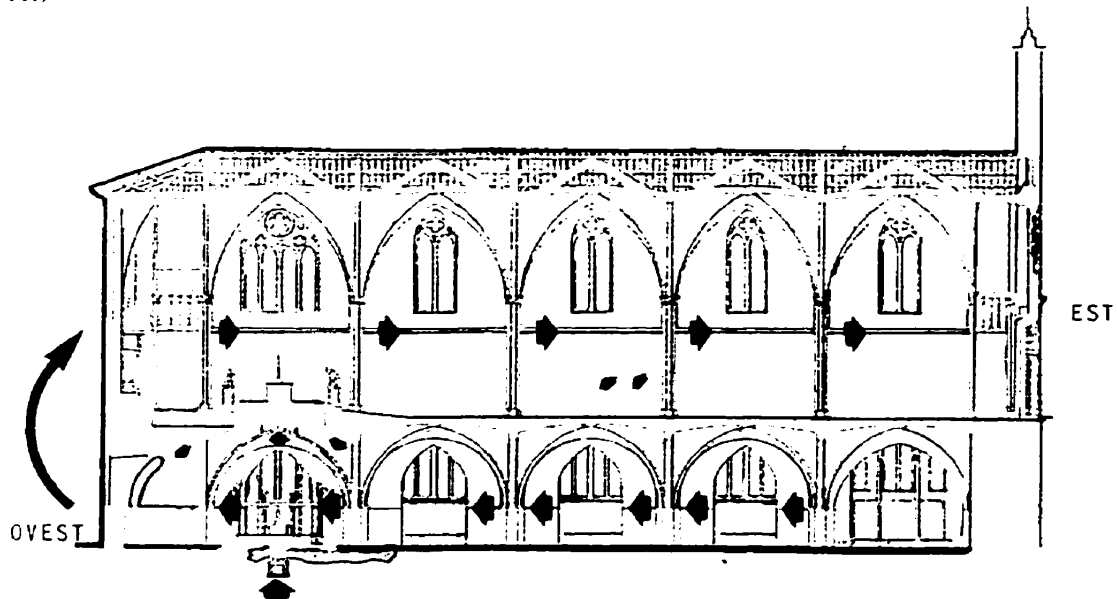
<sup>82</sup>PL 217, 673ff. as cited in Fleming, *Bonaventure to Bellini*, 114-15. The biblical reference is to Rev 7.2-3. The proof for Francis' attendance at the council may be found in 24 Gen 3. See Schmucki, "Passion of Christ," 17, nn. 53, 54, for the debate concerning Francis' presence at the Council.

<sup>83</sup>Majorie Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages: A Study in Joachimism* (Oxford, 1969), 28-36; Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961), 99-122; and Lambert, *Heresy*, 189-214.



105. Section through the transept looking toward the sanctuary of the Basilica of S. Francesco. 15th c. Above is the Upper Church; in the middle, the Lower Church, and below, the crypt of St. Francis. (Drawing by G.B. Mariani. Assisi: Biblioteca di Sacro Convento, 1830.)

106. Longitudinal section of the Basilica of S. Francesco, Assisi showing the pilgrimage route beginning at the Lower Church entrance (bottom, right), proceeding along nave, descending to the crypt, then ascending to the Upper Church sanctuary and proceeding along nave and outside the main facade (top, right). (After Magro, *Il Simbolismo Teologico dell'Orientazione della Chiesa*, fig. 11.)



foreheads of the blessed, would arise in the coming end times (then considered to be year 1260, i.e., 42 generations after Christ, who Himself came 42 generations after King David). Innocent understood this illuminating angel as prefiguring himself. Innocent believed himself to be charged with preparing for the end times by cleansing the temple of Rome, and promoting penance through voluntary poverty.<sup>84</sup> Innocent may have been associating himself with the poverty and penitential mission of the Franciscan order, whom he approved six years earlier and was gaining wide acclaim. In his adoption of the apocalyptic *tau* as habit and signature, Francis may have also understood himself as the Angel of the Sixth Seal. By announcing in his letter that in the end times Francis "will come back," Elias certainly thought so.<sup>85</sup>

Moreover, millenarian speculation of the day may have prompted the original basilica plan to be designed without any consideration for a forecourt, since the site would have steeply dropped off from the entrance. This would be in agreement with one of the more important apocalyptic passages among millenarians: Rev 11.1-3, where a temple was to be measured out but the forecourt was to be abandoned since it would be "given over to the nations, and they will trample over the holy city for forty-two months." The passage also refers to two sackclothed prophet-witnesses, long considered to be Elias and Enoch, who would herald the end times of the 42nd generation. By choosing the name Elias upon entering the young order, he aligned himself with Francis, whom he considered an Enoch, that is, one who "has not died."<sup>86</sup> Enoch was the distinguished elder of the Scriptural Elias and the only figure mentioned in the Old Testament considered to be taken directly into heaven by God.<sup>87</sup>

From the death announcement to the basilica, Elias' metaphors were carefully selected and thoughtfully interwoven into the context with a brevity and simplicity worthy of his friend Francis. By utilizing an unarticulated *tau* in plan, Elias builds the church of Aaron, the Angel of the Sixth Seal, Moses and Enoch through which the imminent end times would be initiated, and in which the people of God would purify themselves penitentially. At this point, what seems to have been the only programmatic concession to his papal and lay sponsors was the

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<sup>84</sup>PL 217, 675.

<sup>85</sup>LE, 1960.

<sup>86</sup>LE, 1959. On Elias' name, see Salimbene, *Cronica*, 96.

<sup>87</sup>Gen 5.24. On this theme see Ernesto Buonaiuti, "Gicchino da Fiore ed Elia da Cortona," *Ricerche religiose* 7 (1931): 53-59; and Cusato, "The Eschatology of Elias," 264ff.



initial size of the church plan, approximately five times that of the Portiuncula. Its expanse would be able to easily receive the pilgrims already flocking to Assisi to visit Francis' tomb. It was to be a Holy Sepulchre large enough for everyone to seal themselves in with the *alter-Christus*, to remember their sins and wait upon a miraculous healing or an angel-initiated resurrection at the end of time.<sup>88</sup>

At a very early point in construction a decision seems to have been made to reverse the entire plan, that is, to abandon the completion of the eastern transept and construct it instead at the western end of the nave, complete with an apse (fig. 104, no. 2).<sup>89</sup> Although the change may have been prompted by any number of difficulties encountered during construction, expansion toward the west seems to have been facilitated by a large donation of an adjoining wooded plot on July 31, 1229.<sup>90</sup> By reversing the plan, room was made for a monastery or friary to grow behind the apse down the slope, rather than in front of the entrance. Secondly, the church would now face the western gate of Assisi; between them a new road, the Strada di San Francesco, would be constructed in 1231.<sup>91</sup> The pilgrimage route now had to include the city of Assisi in order to transverse the steep incline from the east side (fig. 108). Henceforth the *comune* would make a significant claim, in both devotional and economic terms, upon its saint.

As a result of this reversal, the crypt was now placed at the western end, between the apse and the nave, directly beneath the altar. Unfortunately, the crypt was sealed up in the fifteenth century because of the threat of war and the possibility of theft of the relics, and excavations in the early nineteenth century completely destroyed its interior space. What can be reconstructed from thirteenth-century images, however, is that the crypt was wide enough to accommodate quite a few pilgrims including those who wished to incubate with the remains.<sup>92</sup>

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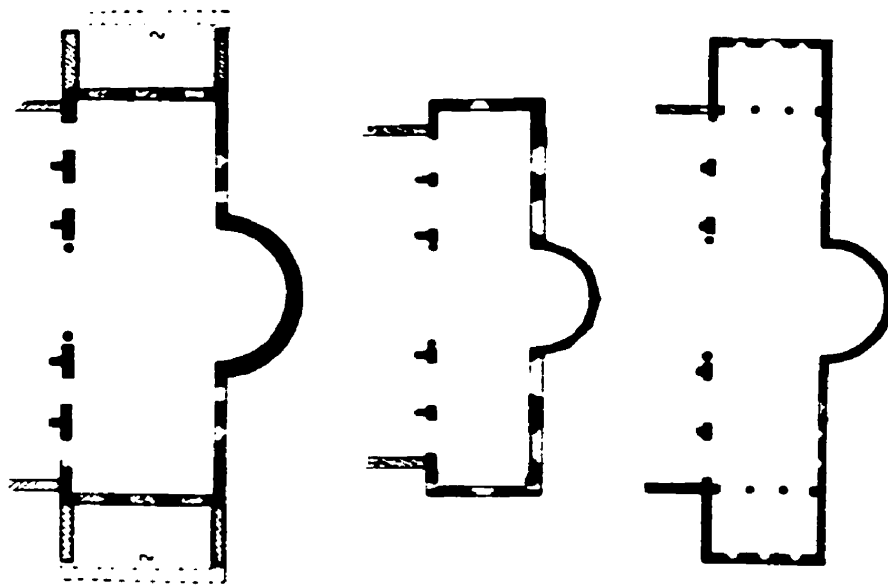
<sup>88</sup>Lk 24.1-10.

<sup>89</sup>Rocchi, *La Basilica*, 35-45. Evidence for this may also be noted in the thickness of the nave walls (2 meters) vs. the transept walls (1.1-1.3 meters). See Antonio Cadei, "The Architecture of the Basilica," in *The Basilica of S. Francesco in Assisi* (Perugia, 1993), 53-54.

<sup>90</sup>Archive of the Sacro Convento, Instrumenta, II, n. 4; Pietramellara, *Il Sacro Convento*, 65.

<sup>91</sup>Fortini, *Nova Vita*, III, 310; Nessi, *La Basilica*, 30, 385. The walls of the city were extended to include S. Giorgio and S. Francesco in the fourteenth century.

<sup>92</sup>The crypt of St. Clare remained in tact after excavations, and may be seen as a model for the crypt of Francis. See Magro, *The Tomb of Saint Francis*, 23; and F. Casolini, *Il protomonastero di S. Chiara* (Milano, 1950), 216. Evidence for incubation at Francis' tomb is in I Cel 129, 132-33. Concerning incubation and healing, see chapter 4, notes 55 and 56.



107. T-planned churches in Rome: S. Paulo (outside the walls); S. Giovanni in Laterano; Old St. Peter's. (After Bandmann, *Medieval Architecture and Meaning*, fig. 21.)



108. View of Assisi with the Basilica on the left, the Portiuncula site, now enclosed within a Basilica of its own, bottom, centre, and S. Damiano at the bottom, far right. The new "Strada di San Francesco" stretches from the old wall (half way between the main piazza in the city centre and the basilica), to the Basilica. Note, as well, the new clearly delineated pilgrimage route from the Portiuncula to the Basilica. (Engraving by Giacomo Lauro, 1599. From Mistretta, *Francesco, Architetto*, 58.)

At least four other early companions were also buried in the crypt. One image seems to capture the iconography of its light: the dark tomb is depicted with three oil lamps suspended above it; and at the level of the church, the altar is covered with a baldachin and more lamps (fig. 109).

It is not certain whether the vaulting of the lower church was conceived and completed before plans for an upper church were discussed, since, according to archaeological evidence, the piers and buttressing for the upper church were begun later and were not quite aligned with those of the lower.<sup>93</sup> As well, the transept walls and vaults of the lower church were not conceived to take the weight of the apse and transept of the upper church, and had to be strengthened later.<sup>94</sup> As it stands, however, it is noteworthy that, besides the semi-circular transverse arches, the diagonal ribs of the groin vaults for each bay describe the form of a gently pointed arch in section, a feature of S. Damiano, the Portiuncula and its copies (figs. 105, 106). In each bay of the nave, a small rectangular single light window was punched through; in the apse, three more, and one each in the transept arms.<sup>95</sup> The entire interior was decidedly dark, and, with the relatively low vaulting of the nave and transept, heavy and crypt-like throughout (fig. 110).

The piers of the lower church have, to this day, neither capitals nor bases. In fact, the entire edifice at the time of the translation was entirely bereft of decoration. Only in 1236, at the earliest, did the altar receive its sculptural reliefs (fig. 110).<sup>96</sup> Before the translation Gregory IX had already donated sacred gifts to the new church, including precious ornaments, vestments and vessels for the mass along with a cross adorned with jewels for the altar which contained a purported relic of the true cross.<sup>97</sup> As well, John of Brienne, King of Constantinople, who was a member of the Franciscan Third Order, donated a panel covered in gold leaf, two altar dossals made of silk on the occasion of the transfer of the body, and probably the immense altar stone which graces the altar today, sent, according to

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<sup>93</sup>No textual evidence exists that an upper church was conceived before 1230, see Cadei, "The Architecture of the Basilica," 54. That it would have been entirely self-contained and with a roof at the time of translation may be the case since Gregory IX and other chroniclers already were calling it an "ecclesiam," or "ecclesiam novam". See Nessi, *La Basilica*, 43.

<sup>94</sup>Cadei, "The Architecture of the Basilica," 54.

<sup>95</sup>All of these windows, except those of the apse, were destroyed in subsequent renovations. Those of the transept were soon renovated to become the doorways for the stairs to the upper church.

<sup>96</sup>Nessi, *La Basilica*, 115-34.

<sup>97</sup>3 Soc 72.

Bonaventure, especially from Constantinople.<sup>98</sup> The gold leaf panel would have been among the very first painted altar-pieces which the Franciscans were to introduce to Europe. Painted like eastern iconostases, they typically carried a pediment on top and were aligned vertically so that they could be easily seen when carried in procession or displayed on the altar or rood-screen during feast days (fig. 111). These images would typically portray Francis standing in the centre displaying his stigmata, and around him would be depictions of his miracles. By sponsoring these panels, the Franciscans fed the European desire for Byzantium. Eastern Christian images were considered more authentic than western images and worthy of the same veneration ceded to relics.<sup>99</sup> We can also suppose that a rather large pulpitem, or marble rood-screen, was in place for the transfer, since it is mentioned in a report of the Christmas mass that same year (fig. 112).<sup>100</sup> In all of these donations, Elias would have been following Francis' own unwavering desire to see altars appropriately adorned for the eucharist. The dark, heavy tomb or cave experience of this church resonates with Holy Land sepulchres cut out of bare rock—the tombs and caves Francis and Elias haunted in imitation of Christ and the Egyptian hermits—if not the most sacred of all cave-churches, the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem (fig. 113).<sup>101</sup>

The progress on the church on May 25, 1230, the day of the transfer of Francis' body to the crypt, included the weighty, unadorned, unarticulated *tau*-plan, with an altar above its crypt, illuminated on its feast days almost entirely by candle-light and oil lamp, shimmering with jewelled ornaments and cloths, representing "the morning star in the midst of a cloud . . . the moon at the full," as a light "shining on those who sit in darkness." It was probably with some sense of accomplishment that Elias, in fact, chose for his signet ring and seal of

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<sup>98</sup>LM 7.3; Nessi, *La Basilica*, 130; Lunghi, *The Basilica*, 8.

<sup>99</sup>Hans Belting has convincingly demonstrated how the production of icons in the West dates from the time in late antiquity when Rome was a Byzantine province. With the conquering of Constantinople in 1204, a flood of icons spilled into Italy through Venice. Thus, St. Francis' cult was the first to be promoted almost exclusively by image and icon rather than by relics—no doubt in part because of Elias' scrupulous burial of the body. Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 26, 308, 312, 348; Anne Derbes, *Picturing the Passion*, 27; and J. Villehardouin, *Conquest of Constantinople in Chronicles of the Crusaders*, trans., M. Shaw (Penguin, 1963), 76.

<sup>100</sup>Here, Br. Ginepro was set to keep an eye on the new antependium made of gold from on top of this pulpitem; recounted in Lunghi, *The Basilica*, 16. The marble of the pulpitem was later used in the parapet for a chapel in the right transept.

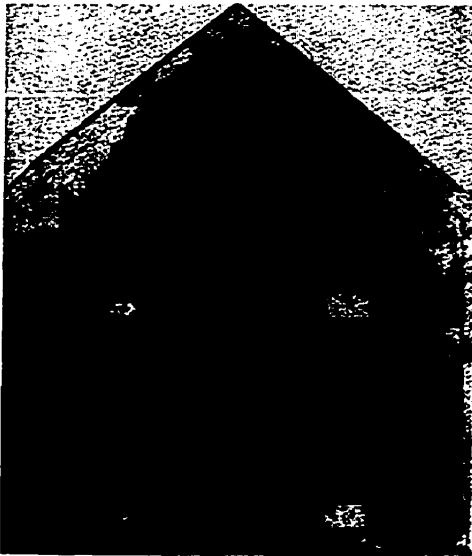
<sup>101</sup>Schenkluhn, *San Francesco in Assisi*, 163-72. One could also include in the list that Francis and Elias would know of the tomb of St. Peter in Rome, and perhaps, the ancient Etruscan tombs found in the area—in both instances the resting places of peoples considered to be from the East. See M. Gaggiotti, et al, *Guide archeologiche Laterza: Umbria Marche* (Bari, 1980), 117-19.



109. Miniature showing pilgrims incubating at the tomb of St. Francis in the crypt of the Basilica (cf. fig. 68). (Assisi: Biblioteca del Sacro Convento, Corale, c. 1270.)



110. View of Lower Church, looking toward the sanctuary from the transept. (Photo by author.)



111. Feast-day image of St. Francis with scenes from his life, mid-13th c. (Church of S. Francesco. Pisa.)

112. Giotto, *Nativity play at Greccio*. The scene seems to be set, however, in a larger and later Franciscan church than at Greccio, possibly in the Lower Basilica. Behind the performance is the marble pulpitum through which women are observing the rite. Above the pulpitum is a pulpit for preaching and the back of a painted crucifix suspended for viewing from the nave. (Frescos of the early 14th c., Upper Church of S. Francesco. Assisi.)



his office an image showing a cross-section through the crypt and altar, with the altar in the centre of a mandorla, lit by lamp-light, before which two friars kneel in contemplation (fig. 114; cf. fig. 109).

c. *Quo elongati and the Relaxation of Poverty*

A month before the transfer of Francis' body, a period of rapid change was initiated throughout the Franciscan order which would transform them, within twenty years, from rural hermitage renters to *de facto* owners of urban parish and monastery complexes all over Europe and the Levant. On April 22, 1230, Pope Gregory IX sent a letter to the brothers "staying at the church of S. Francesco" which confirmed, for a second time, that the basilica was under the jurisdiction of the Holy See.<sup>102</sup> Some scholars have understood Gregory's need to repeatedly establish his authority to be due to complaints that arose against the architecture of the basilica. But no dissension regarding the architecture can be dated to any sources before the fourteenth century.<sup>103</sup> In the letter, Gregory declared that the basilica was now the "caput et mater" of the order. In doing so, he seems to have annulled, in one stroke, the Portiuncula's claim to the title, designated by Francis himself.<sup>104</sup> Gregory surely knew of the significance of the Portiuncula through his long association with Francis, if not from Gregory's visits there on a number of occasions. By making the basilica the *caput et mater*, he effectively shifted the architectural exemplar for the order to his own *ecclesia specialis*. Over the next decade the pope arranged to add to the basilica a papal residence and chapel.<sup>105</sup> His control of the project must have been accepted by the reigning Minister General, John Parenti, who probably had less contact with Francis and his architectural desires than even Gregory did.<sup>106</sup>

<sup>102</sup>*Bull.*, I/11 (Assisi: Biblioteca comm., Archive of the Sacro Convento); cf. Wadding, *Annales Minorum*, II, 232; *BF*, I, 60, n. 49.

<sup>103</sup>Brooke, 149; and Cusato, "Elias and Clare," 109.

<sup>104</sup>SL 8; MP 55.

<sup>105</sup>Pietramellara, *Sacro Convento*, 47; Schenkluhn, *San Francesco in Assisi*, 190-203.

<sup>106</sup>Parenti was a doctor of law and a Roman citizen, who, upon joining the order was sent immediately to Spain as its Provincial Minister. While there, the province grew rapidly since, rather than relying on the Franciscan example of life, he sought, against the Rule of the order, to secure the favour of princes and bishops through letters of recommendation from Pope Honorius III. As Minister

The pope was absent for the transfer of Francis' remains because of political negotiations for peace with Emperor Frederick II. He thus missed witnessing some rather unedifying behaviour. The transfer was scheduled for May 25 but it seems that Elias arranged for the civil authorities secretly to transfer the body on May 22.<sup>107</sup> Perhaps this was a necessary precaution; given the ever increasing value of Francis' remains after his canonization and with each reported miracle, a real danger existed of mutilation or theft of the body during the translation. Even during the last two years of his life, the faithful were reported to be snipping and tearing relics off Francis' clothes while he preached. (In 1232 the citizens of Padua literally fought over the corpse of St. Anthony, and in 1236, the breasts of St. Elisabeth were cut off by the faithful during her translation.)<sup>108</sup> *Furta sacra*, the holy theft of relics, as Patrick Geary has shown, was perhaps the only crime condoned, if not encouraged throughout the Middle Ages. Cities would rejoice when they secured new relics, not, according to the rationalization used to justify the theft, because they were stolen, but because they were rescued from the neglect of the original owners; the thieves, went the line of thought, were merely carrying out the secret desires of the saint.<sup>109</sup> Elias' decision to hide and secure the coffin with an investment of three days labour was not unusual. The resting-place of St. Rufinus in the cathedral of Assisi was known to only one custodian, whose duty was to guard it safely and pass on the secrets of its whereabouts to his successor before his death.<sup>110</sup> Indeed, Elias would be vindicated for his diligence in 1442 when the Perugians sacked Assisi and tried, unsuccessfully, to steal Francis' body.<sup>111</sup>

On the official day of translation the crowds pressed into the city and cardinals were sent to represent the pope. The ceremony seems to have unfolded as planned, but as the procession with the coffin approached the basilica, it was whisked inside behind locked doors,

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General (1227-32), he was the first leader of the order to encourage theological studies and book-owning throughout the order, appointing learned men to key positions throughout Europe. Under Parenti, the Franciscans became, like the Dominicans of the time, a student order, an efficient democratic administration exempt from episcopal dependence, and the recipients of numerous papal privileges. See Brooke, 123-24.

<sup>107</sup>Eccleston, 65; *BF*, I, 66, no. G9, 54 (72); and Brooke, 137-43.

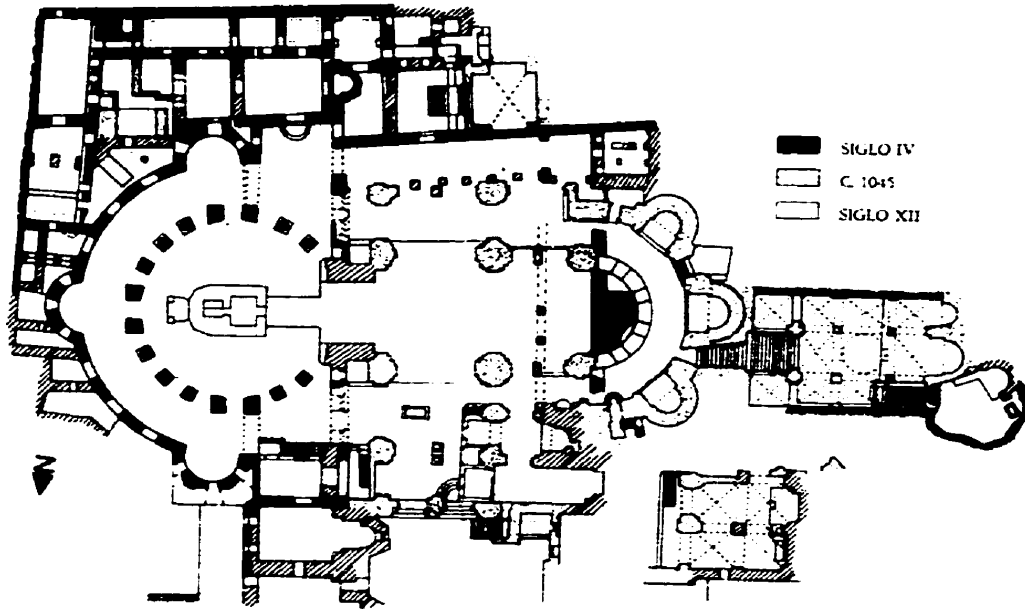
<sup>108</sup>2 Cel 98; Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 3-30; Brooke, 142. Note that it seems that Francis did not get away entirely undivided: St. Clare asked for a fingernail, and after the translation, Celano seems to have given Jordan of Giano some relics to take back to Germany; Salimbene, *Cronica*, 575.

<sup>109</sup>Geary, *Furta Sacra*, 133-39.

<sup>110</sup>Cf. Fortini, *Nova Vita*, 66.

<sup>111</sup>Attal, *Frate Elia*, 125-26, n. 35; Fortini, *Assisi nel Medio Evo*, 451-76. For an earlier episode cf. Fortini, *Assisi nel Medio Evo*, 277-81.





113. Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem, plan (b. 340). (From Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*, fig. 27.)



114. Signet ring and seal of office for Br. Elias as minister general (1232-39). In the mandorla shape, two friars kneel in prayer on either side of the altar with monstrance (in front of the pediment) of the Lower Church. Below seems to be the crypt (cf. fig. 118). The words around the perimeter are *(A)mministrationis Sancti Franc(isci)*. (Photo from Nessi, *La Basilica*, fig. 19.)

without permitting anyone to venerate the miraculous body—no doubt, because it was already buried!<sup>112</sup> A violent riot erupted throughout the city. Pope Gregory was forced to issue a bull two weeks later blaming the *podestà* and the people of Assisi for usurping the ceremony, but reserving the brunt of his anger for the friars living at the basilica construction site. He threatened the *comune* with an interdict if they did not make immediate satisfaction. As for the friars, Gregory repealed their privileges, placed the basilica under episcopal instead of papal jurisdiction, asked all the brothers living at the basilica to leave, and forbade future General Chapters being held there.<sup>113</sup> The pope was essentially holding one of Europe's most precious relics hostage until the Franciscans understood his authority and desires.

There were, however, a few intervening events. The day after the false translation, the friars held a Chapter meeting. Elias seemed to have invited all the brothers who were at the translation to participate in the meeting. John Parenti, who was actually in charge of the Chapter, decided to bar friars who held no authoritative position within the order, most of whom were the uneducated Umbrian lay brothers. Parenti's aim was to settle ongoing business with the Provincial Ministers and Custodians only. An angry demonstration broke out at the Chapter which saw the lay brothers fetch Elias from his cell (he too was apparently excluded) and carry him to the door of the chapter-house. After a violent entry, the lay brothers demanded that Elias replace John Parenti as Minister General. The ensuing uproar was calmed by Parenti divesting himself of his habit, but not, in the end, of his office. Thomas of Eccleston places responsibility for the event with the lay brothers, but since Elias had allowed himself to be swept away with their enthusiasm, he publicly acknowledged his culpability in the affair by undertaking penance; for the next two years, he retired to his cave at Cortona and did not shave his head or beard.<sup>114</sup>

It is difficult not to imagine that a specific political agenda was achieved in these events by an alliance of John Parenti, Gregory IX, the Provincial Ministers and the Custodians, against Elias, the original companions of Francis, the Umbrian lay brothers and the commune of Assisi. After all, John Parenti was ultimately in charge of the transfer; should he not have taken the blame for the early burial? With Francis dead and Elias and his supporters sidelined, the way was clear for the Chapter meeting to question the Rule of the order. It was

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<sup>112</sup>Attal, *Frate Elia*, 100; Fortini, *Assisi nel Medio Evo*, 111-15; and Brooke, 139.

<sup>113</sup>*BF*, I, 66-67, no. G9, 54 (72).

<sup>114</sup>Eccleston, 65-66; cf. *Speculum Vitae*, 165; *AF* iii, 212.

decided in the meeting to send a deputation of friars to the pope to clarify certain points in the Rule and to question the binding authority of the Testament.<sup>115</sup> The result was the September 28, 1230 papal bull *Quo elongati*—a document which seemed to "contradict every word and action of Francis' whole life 'in religion.'" <sup>116</sup> Scarcely four years after Francis' death, *Quo elongati* revoked the binding authority on the friars of both the Gospel and Francis' Testament. Gregory and Parenti now committed the friars to the Rule without appeal to either the example of Francis in the Testament or the example of Christ in the Gospels.<sup>117</sup> The legal language of the Rule was to be the sole arbiter of poverty. The effect was that the image of poverty which had been elevated by metaphor and example, was now an image-less set of strictures. Rather than inspire ideals, it presented the minimum practices necessary for each rule. Reduced to legal language, loopholes were easily created. For instance, *Quo elongati* invented the position of an external *nuntius* who would both collect and spend money that the friars, up to this point, had been forbidden to touch. The *nuntius* was to provide clothing, medicine and all "imminent necessities" for the brothers.<sup>118</sup> The bull also specified the difference between property which was *mobilia* and *immobilia*, such that *immobilia*, that is buildings, still had to be owned by the donor, but for *mobilia*—utensils, furniture, altar vestments, painted images, books and the like—*Quo elongati* was less clear, though there is some suggestion that the Cardinal Protector of the order might qualify as the owner.

*Quo elongati* officially permitted the friars to use (but not own) lay churches built exclusively for their administration. Unless the donor insisted, ownership of these churches was to be with the papacy, thereby freeing the friars of the demands of local owners and making them renters in name only.<sup>119</sup> Almost immediately, hermitages were abandoned for

<sup>115</sup>Eccleston, 66; 24 Gen 213; *BF*, I, 68-70, no G9, 56 (IV); cf. Brooke, 291-93.

<sup>116</sup>Brooke, 250. Cf. Malcolm Lambert: "1230 represented the chance for the order to return as a body to a way of living of Francis and the companions; then, *Quo elongati* blocked the way, and ever afterwards the weight of precedent and legislation was too great for it to be possible." Lambert, 83. *Quo Elongati* is printed in Herbert Grundmann, "Die Bulle 'Quo Elongati' Pabst Gregors IX," *AFH* 54 (1961): 20-25. Cf. Nimmo, *Reform and Division*, 57-64.

<sup>117</sup>The technical grounds for voiding the Testament, however, were canonically sound, in that a past Minister General had no legal power to bind his successors. *BF*, *Epitome*, 229; Lambert, 82. There was obviously protest to the loss of the Testament since its "no gloss" rule was invoked up to the 1240's. Ubertino da Casale reports that some Ministers of the order had copies of the Testament burnt; one Minister even did so over the head of a friar who was particularly devoted to the text. *Declaratio*, ed. Ehrle, *AKLG* III, 168.

<sup>118</sup>See F. Ehrle, "Die Spirituellen, ihr Verhältniss zum Franciscanerorden und zu den Fraticellen," Section I, *AKLG* III, 583-4; and Lambert, 84.

<sup>119</sup>Cajetan Esser, *Das Testament*, 150.

more comfortable sites in the cities and near universities. The friars also began to take over existing churches and to build their own.<sup>120</sup> Particularly noteworthy is that the Portiuncula, once the model and *exemplum* of the order, even had its mud and stick *claustrum* rebuilt in stone at this time—not four years after its builder's death (fig. 73).<sup>121</sup> The bull *Quo elongati* laid the most important groundwork for the ongoing moderation of poverty within the order by the Ministers General who secured papal decrees such as *Exiit qui seminat* of 1279 and *Exultantes in domino* of 1283, to further elaborate and clarify the Rule.<sup>122</sup>

The sweeping changes enacted throughout Parenti's term in office were such that, Elias' supporters now threatened departure from the order unless he was elected. The matter was referred to Pope Gregory, who, considering Elias' penance for past mistakes to be sufficient, seems to have deposed Parenti and directly appointed Elias Minister General.<sup>123</sup> Elias' second generalate (1232-39) was distinguished by a great increase in missionary activity, especially to the East. It was also marked by rapid material acquisition throughout the order, due, no doubt, to the irrevocable legislation and practices set by Parenti and *Quo elongati*.<sup>124</sup> The focus for Elias, however, was still upon the basilica which now received patronage from princes and bishops, Baldwin II and the Latin emperors of Constantinople, King Wenceslas of Bohemia and the emperor Frederick II of Italy.<sup>125</sup> Indeed, Elias' friendship was highly valued by those in power across Europe. He was being asked to arbitrate political disputes between Italian communes and between Pope Gregory IX and Frederick II. Thomas of Eccleston could write, "Who in the whole of Christendom had a greater or a fairer fame than Elias?"<sup>126</sup> How, we may ask, did Elias come to be so disliked that he was both deposed from

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<sup>120</sup>This may be gleaned from the list of convent foundations in Moorman, *Franciscan Houses*. During Parenti's tenure, churches were taken over by the friars, for instance, in Spoleto, Città di Castello, Florence, Bassano, Pisa and Rome, and churches were built by the friars themselves in Venice, Pavia and Erfurt. See *BF* I, 34-50, 206, 293. The hostility to these privileges from local prelates was enormous, prompting the bulls *Nimis iniqua* and *Nimis prava* in 1231. Noteworthy in this regard is the permission Elias granted friars in Valenciennes to move to the palace of Countess Joanna in 1225-26. In this somewhat odd case, because the friars originally refused to move to such a sumptuous place, the Countess had to appeal to Pope Honorius III who finally sent a directive forcing Elias to write the letter. Jacobus de Guisia, "Annales Hanoniae," *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores*, XXX, part I, 282-97. See Brooke, 117.

<sup>121</sup>Moorman, *Franciscan Houses*, 34.

<sup>122</sup>Nimmo, *Reform and Division*, 56; Brooke, 133.

<sup>123</sup>Cf. *Chron. anonym.*, *AF*, i, 289; Lempp, *Frère Élie*, 92-5.

<sup>124</sup>New churches were built by the friars during his tenure, for instance, at Venice, Padua, Vincenza, Bologna and Gubbio. See Moorman, *Franciscan Houses*.

<sup>125</sup>Brooke, 147.

<sup>126</sup>Eccleston, 29.

office in 1239 and ex-communicated? Was the reason the rapid rise of the basilica?

We have no knowledge of the progress on the basilica during Elias' two-year exile, but, from archaeological and other evidence we can assume that construction continued. By 1236 the main structure of the upper church was probably completed, thus indicating that, in the interim, this second church—an entirely new addition to the project—was both decided upon, planned and rapidly built. It was conceived as a papal chapel, complete with a marble throne in the apse and a marble pulpit in the centre of the nave.<sup>127</sup> The upper church continued the simple single-nave *tau* plan and the symbolic narrative of the lower church (figs. 115-117).<sup>128</sup> By a set of narrow circular staircases in the semi-circular buttresses of the transepts, the pilgrims were to ascend from the crypt of the lower church to the choir of the upper church, whose soaring ceiling, expanses of glass in the apse and marble papal furniture all spoke of the entrance into the celestial abode of Francis and Christ.

By 1239, a bell inscribed with the names of the Pope, Emperor and Elias was completed and probably put in place in the rather large Romanesque belfry. The facade also displayed a Romanesque simplicity with a Gothic rose window and double portal, the latter being repeated on the lower church (fig. 98).<sup>129</sup> Since this type of entrance was unique for this time and place, some authors have seen it as Elias' tribute to the double portal of the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem—especially in the case of the lower church where a left-hand turn, as in the Holy Sepulchre, has to be made to arrive inside the nave and crypt (cf. fig. 113).<sup>130</sup> Sculptural decoration began to appear on the exterior such as eagles, the symbol of Gregory IX's family, and a bust of Frederick II.<sup>131</sup> Pictorial decoration was also initiated by Elias with the commissioning of a large cross from Giunta Pisano, who, unlike any other early contributors to the church, was of such stature that he was permitted to sign his own work. Although the cross is now lost, we know from Pisano's other works of the time, that, unlike the Byzantine S. Damiano cross (which spoke to Francis) displaying a rather stiff *Christus Triumphans*, the new cross, perhaps the first of its kind in the West, was a *Christus patiens*

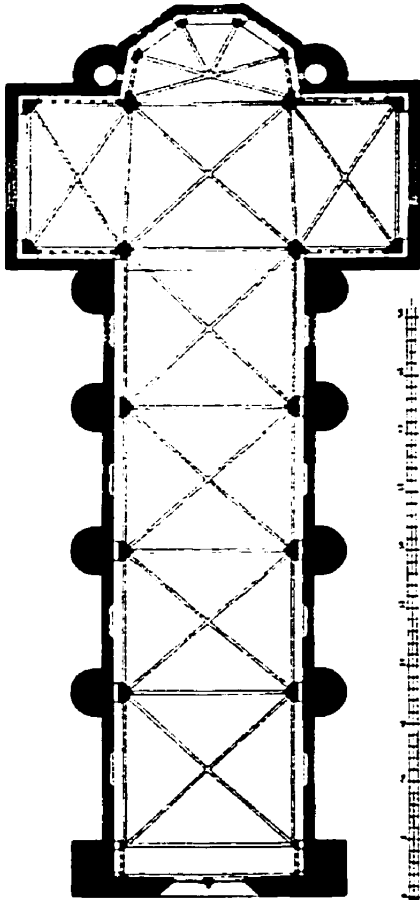
<sup>127</sup>Lunghi, *The Basilica*, 12; Mistretta, *Francesco, Architetto di Dio*, 173.

<sup>128</sup>The first stained glass windows in Italy were probably created and installed during Elias' tenure for the upper church, but its famous fresco cycle began in the latter part of the thirteenth century. Lunghi, *The Basilica*, 23-25; Nessi, *La Basilica*, 115ff.

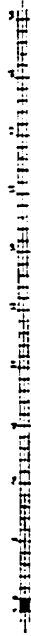
<sup>129</sup>Nessi, *La Basilica*, 398.

<sup>130</sup>For instance in Schenkluhn, *San Francesco in Assisi*, 163-72.

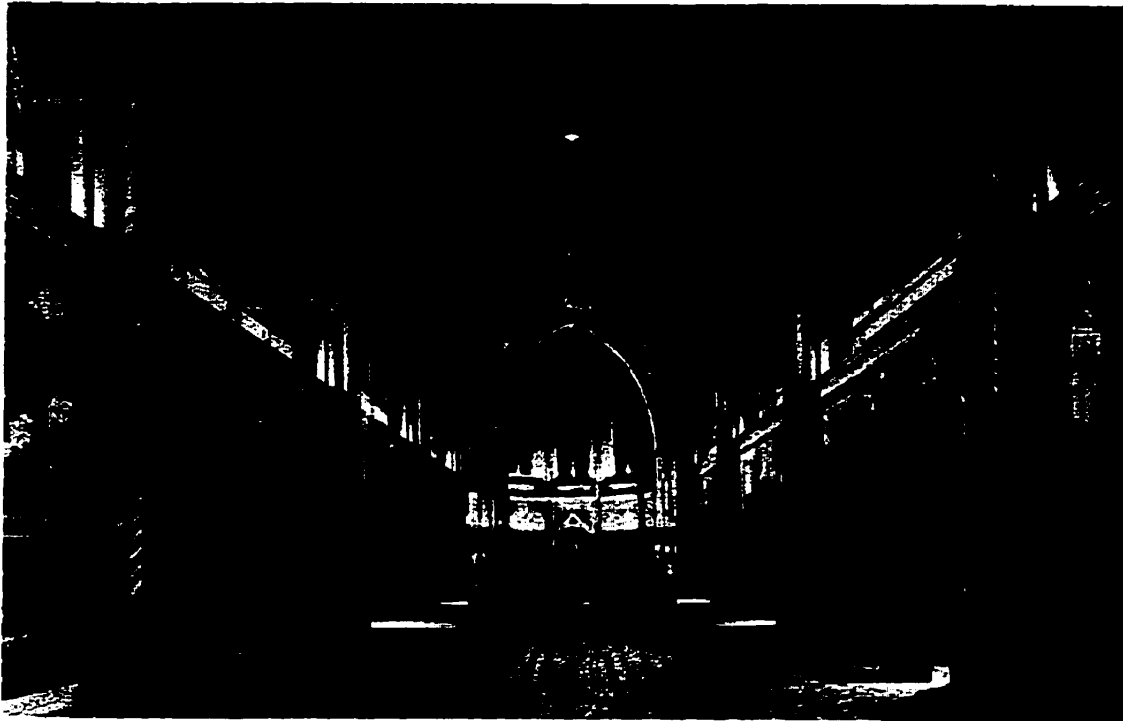
<sup>131</sup>Lunghi, *The Basilica*, 12.



115. Plan, Upper Church of S. Francesco, Assisi (b. 1231). The hollow cores in the buttresses of the apse are the circular stairways leading up to the Upper Church from the Lower. (From Biebrach, *Die Holzgedeckten Franziskaner*, fig. 2.)



116. View of the Upper Church of S. Francesco, Assisi, looking toward the apse, showing later Gothic piers and detailing as well as the fresco cycle by Giotto and/or the Giotto school on the walls. (Photo courtesy of S. Francesco, Assisi.)



which attempted to depict realistically the pain of the crucifixion (fig. 118, cf. fig. 11).<sup>132</sup> Elias, however, had himself painted at the foot of the cross as its donor, indicating a sea change in his own self-understanding.<sup>133</sup>

After he was elected, Elias began to send visitors to each province of the order to extract their share towards the cost of the church.<sup>134</sup> By taxing the provinces Elias was breaking the Rule of the order, and certainly deserved the opposition he received. But the move also opened the possibility of other Franciscan settlements raising funds for new building projects.<sup>135</sup> This matter would probably have been forgivable on the grounds that Francis believed that altars should be properly adorned and the construction of churches completed. Additional complaints, however, were levelled at Elias' personal conduct and style of leadership. Elias developed a taste for luxury and comfort, employing a private cook, servants, a many-coloured livery, taking his meals alone, and not even rising for distinguished guests. Elias travelled very little, preferring to stay in front of a warm fire in Assisi, but when forced to do so he journeyed exclusively on horseback. When these charges were raised before the Pope at the time of Elias' deposition, he pleaded that these comforts were needed because of poor health. In fact, before he was elected, he had warned his brothers of his weaknesses, but now, Elias pleaded, they cried "Shame!"<sup>136</sup> The issue, it seems, was a matter of degree. Francis, even in his illness, travelled widely, rode a donkey, and had others cook for him only because he was blind. But even if we were to grant Elias his poor health, it was

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<sup>132</sup>Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 358-62; Cf. Derbes, *Picturing the Passion*, 21, n. 54, 55; E. Sandberg-Vavalà, *La croce dipinta italiana e l'iconografia della Passione* (Verona, 1929; Reprint, Rome, 1980), 681-91; Edward Garrison, *Italian Romanesque Panel Painting* (Florence, 1949), no. 543.

<sup>133</sup>Sandberg-Vavalà questions the attribution to Elias, proposing Francis instead. *La croce dipinta*, 123-24. Some master masons of the French Gothic cathedrals had their names inscribed onto labyrinths depicted on the nave floor. Abbot Suger, the administrator of St. Denis, had himself illustrated at the base of a stained glass window.

<sup>134</sup>In 1232, the *podestà* of Assisi imposed a tax on all homes for the construction of the church. It too was unpopular. Two complaints appear in the sources during this time, one against the "sumptuous monastery" complex by Br. Giles, and another by Leo who, it is told, smashed an alms-box that Elias placed outside the basilica. Both stories, according to Burkitt and Brooke, are of "more than doubtful authenticity," due to their late dates and numerous interior errors such as chronology. Bartholomew of Pisa, *AF*, iv, 209; translated in *Omnibus*, 1843. See Brooke, 150.

<sup>135</sup>From 1234 onwards, large legacies were being left from pious benefactors such as at the friary in Dalmatia. And in 1254, when the friars at Venice protested about having to receive a considerably large legacy left to them from the doge, the pope intervened and compelled them to accept it, "any statute or commandment of your order notwithstanding." See D. Fabianich, *Storia dei Frati Minori in Dalmazia e Bossina* (Zara, 1863): i, 22; and *BF*, i, 755; ii, 47-48, respectively.

<sup>136</sup>Eccleston, 67; see Brooke, 151-53.

his political alliances and leadership decisions which seem, in the end, to have brought him down. Elias tended to appoint, as Francis had, lay brothers, those who were not ordained or educated as priests, with dubious qualifications to important positions in the order.<sup>137</sup> As a layman himself, Elias, like Francis, saw no division between literate and illiterate. This policy, even when it was Francis', was never received with open arms; fear was expressed that this equality was too much like the democratic heretical movements of the time.<sup>138</sup> Elias also seems to have reversed the habit of seeking papal privileges which was practiced by his predecessor—here again, Elias was simply following Francis' wishes and the Rule of the order.<sup>139</sup> During the seven years of his office, however, Elias never held a General Chapter, but enacted his wishes through Provincial Visitors who had *carte blanche* to undermine the local Ministers' authority.<sup>140</sup> Elias, therefore, tended to act like a secular master rather than a humble religious leader in service to his brothers. Whether or not all these charges can be substantiated, at the end of the day he seems to have angered so many of his brethren that twelve years after his deposition Elias still feared their vengeance.<sup>141</sup>

The deposition proceedings revealed who his opponents were: the Paris professors or masters of the order including Alexander of Hales, John of La Rochelle, Haymo of Faversham and their Provincial Ministers, Custodians and student supporters. They began to meet clandestinely in 1236 and eventually gathered enough evidence to lay accusation on Elias before the pope three years later.<sup>142</sup> Elias, in the interim, knew there was dissension but, acting ill-advisedly, made no concessions and decided to use intimidation, rather, to assert his authority. Gregory IX, who appointed Elias, was certainly unwilling to heed the protestors' demands. But, as the accusations were brought forth during the proceedings, Elias and his supporters lost their self-control, interrupted the session, and charged that the entire lot was fabricated. The pope, both surprised and disappointed, stepped in and asked Elias to resign. After he refused, Gregory declared him deposed.<sup>143</sup>

In Brooke's opinion, "Elias was deposed not so much because he failed to follow St.

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<sup>137</sup>Salimbene, *Cronica*, 142, 231; Jordan, 61.

<sup>138</sup>Brooke, 161.

<sup>139</sup>Note Elias only acquired two privileges, both of which were insignificant for the order, *BF I*, 167, 184-85, nos. G9, 174, 190 (171, 186).

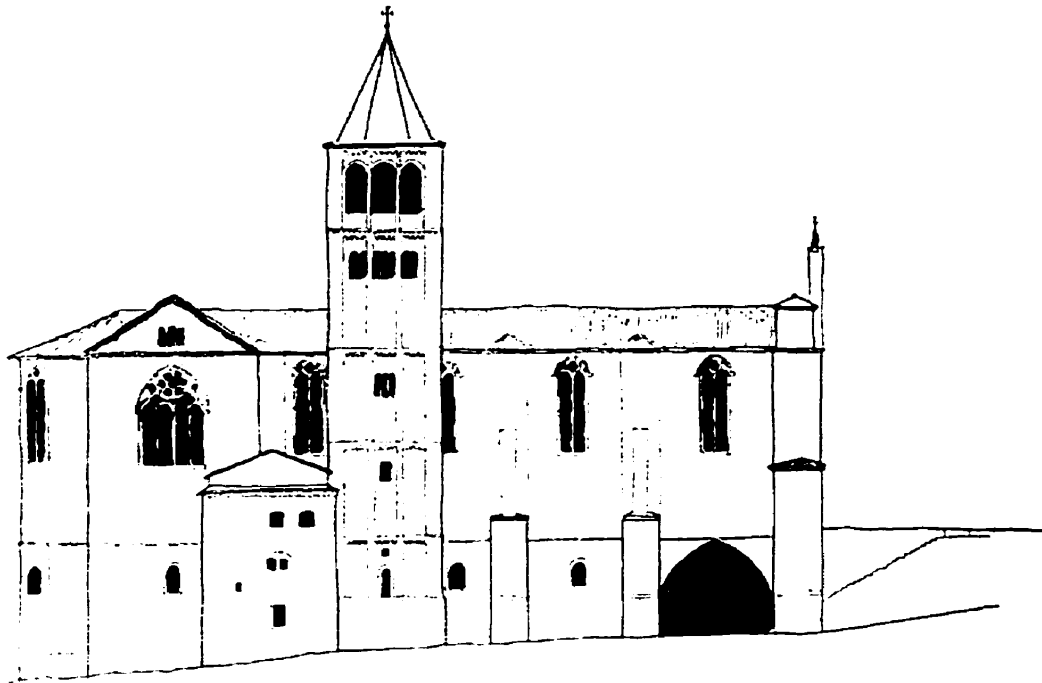
<sup>140</sup>Salimbene, *Cronica*, 142, 231. Salimbene admits growing tired of listing Elias' defects, "It would take far too long if I tried to relate all the horrid abuses I have see," 144.

<sup>141</sup>Salimbene, *Cronica*, 236.

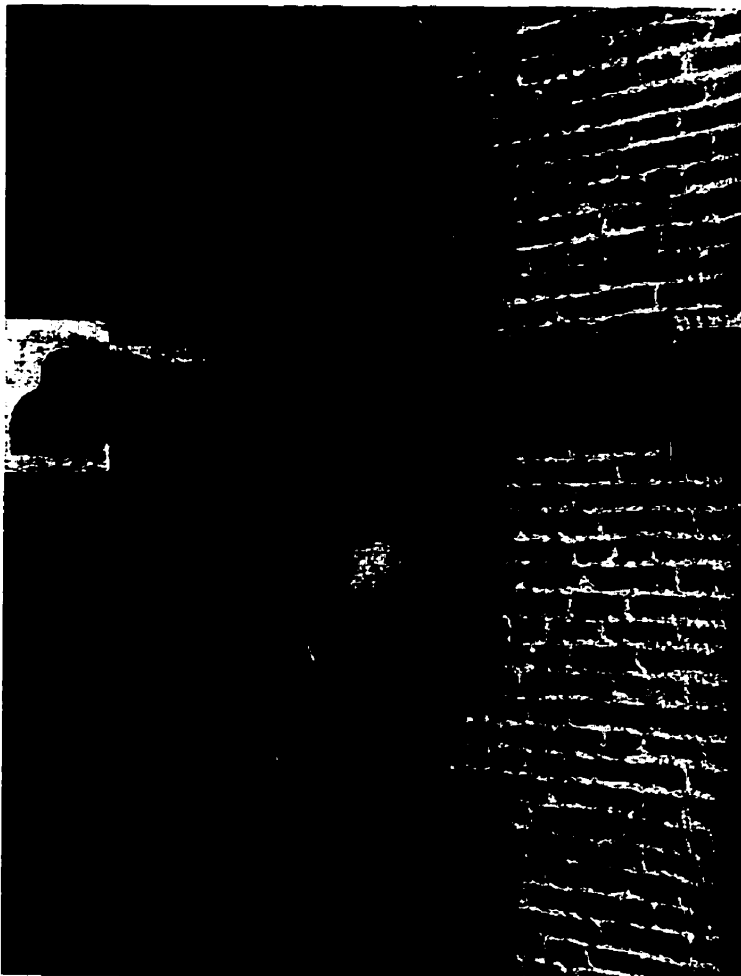
<sup>142</sup>Jordan, 61, 67.

<sup>143</sup>Jordan, 63-64; Eccleston, 38-39, 67.





117. A possible elevation of the southern facade of the Basilica of S. Francesco in Assisi during the time of Br. Elias (ca. 1239). (After Nessi, *La Basilica*, fig. 1.)



118. Painted crucifix on wood by Giunta Pisano of a *Christus patiens*, formerly at Pisa, S. Raniero, ca. 1250. This seems to be a slightly later version of the cross Pisano painted for the Basilica S. Francesco in Assisi, ca. 1236. (Pisa, Museo Nazionale.)

Francis as because he failed to adopt the 'enlightened' opinions of the Ministers."<sup>144</sup> Indeed, the next three Ministers General, Albert of Pisa, Haymo of Faversham, and Crescentius of Jesi, picked up exactly where John Parenti had left off.<sup>145</sup> Elias, for his part, retreated once more to Cortona. While there, he visited the local Poor Clare monastery without permission from Albert of Pisa, and, after refusing to make amends, he joined the court of the recently excommunicated Frederick II.<sup>146</sup> By association, Elias brought upon himself an automatic excommunication.<sup>147</sup> After campaigning with the emperor and overseeing construction of his fortresses in Sicily, Elias eventually returned to Cortona where he died, penitent and absolved, on April 22, 1253.

Forever under the auspices of great leaders, Elias emerges as their most proficient architectural interpreter. Within the aura of Francis, Elias seems to have moved from the letter he wrote upon Francis' death to the plan and iconography of the original basilica with consistency if not with the poetic touch of Francis himself. Under the sponsorship and appointment of Gregory IX, however, Elias seemed to adopt Gregory's desire and urgency to see his own papal basilica rise before he passed away. Similarly, under the patronage of Frederick II after his deposition, Elias entered fully into the emperor's distinguished court to oversee his military structures while on campaign, if not dabble in the alchemical experiments the emperor was sponsoring under Michel Scot.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>144</sup>Brooke, 166.

<sup>145</sup>For instance, eight faculties to rebuild or enlarge Franciscan premises were granted during Parenti's five years of office, under Elias, two during his seven years, but in the next four years under Albert and Haymo there were nine, and during the three years (1244-47) under Crescentius, over one hundred! Moorman, *History of the Franciscan Order*, 119, n. 3; Landini, *Clericalization*, 77-128.

<sup>146</sup>Eccleston, 68-69. After his excommunication, the emperor twice threatened Assisi with his army; both times Clare was deemed responsible for his retreat. His aggression eventually drove the pope into exile in Lyon from 1243-53. Note that Francis, Clare and Frederick were all baptized at the same church in Assisi between 1181 and 1194.

<sup>147</sup>On April 7, 1239 Gregory IX announced that excommunication would fall on anyone swearing obedience to Frederick II; *Monumenta Germaniae Historica Epistolae* 1: 640-41. Albert of Pisa, however, tried to effect a reconciliation, and Elias entrusted Albert with a letter of explanation to Gregory IX, begging to be excused. Albert, unfortunately, died before it was delivered—the letter was found on his body, but was either lost or destroyed before it could be sent on. Jordan, 70; Salimbene, *Cronica*, 240; Eccleston, 69-70.

<sup>148</sup>Elias' choice to serve under Frederick II rather than Gregory IX may have had to do with his eschatological conviction that the emperor was the prophesied "good leader" who was to initiate the end times by uniting the world. On this, and Elias relation to Frederick in general, see Michael Cusato, "The Eschatology of Elias of Cortona," in idem, *That Others May Know and Love*, 255-83.

Salimbene in 1283-84, makes the earliest charge of alchemy against Elias; *Cronica*, 233-34. At least ten different alchemical treatises bear the name of Br. Elias whose authenticity remains to be verified, and there are three copies of another treatise from Michel Scot to Elias which seems to be

It is on the basis of this pattern of life that I propose that the architecture of the basilica, at least up to 1230, demonstrates the migration of content, meaning, narrative and symbols from Francis, through the interpretive architectural skill of Elias, into the fabric of the basilica. The determination of Francis to lead by example and poetry, left, in the enigmatic nature of metaphor itself, room for response and interaction as a type of reciprocal ethics. Near his death, Francis spoke to his brothers at the Portiuncula, "I have done what was mine to do, may Christ teach you what you are to do."<sup>149</sup> For Elias, the *alter-Christus* himself had laid the foundation. The rest was for him to build. Even though the decision to erect an upper church coincides with Elias' brief exile and *Quo elongati*, the symbolic pattern upon which this new chapel was to be built and decorated, responded in turn to the narrative of the lower church. If the Portiuncula was the annunciation and birth of Jesus (Francis' vision), and the lower church of the basilica the Holy Sepulchre, where the crucified body of Jesus would lie (Elias' vision), the upper church was to become a type of glowing resurrection space, heavenly Jerusalem or beatific vision, that is, the vision of Pope Gregory IX.

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of a more verifiable authenticity. One treatise, which I have not consulted, links, surprisingly enough, his alchemy to the basilica, the, "Speculum . . . artis alchimie . . . fratris Helyae O. Min. S. Francisci, qui ex dicta arte componi fecit seu fabricare ecclesiam S. Francisci in Assisi," (MS. Florence, Bibl. Naz., conv. soppr. 567), fol. 1-29; as cited in Lempp, *Frère Élie*, 121-22. See Lynn Thorndike, *History of Magic and Experiential Science*, II (London, 1923), 308; and M. Mazzone, *Sonetti alchemici-eremitici di Frate Elia e Cecco d'Ascoli* (San Gimignano, 1930).

<sup>149</sup>2 Cel 214.

## Conclusion

### The Contribution of St. Francis to the Architecture of his Century

The form of the basilica seems to have been directly copied in the next two major shrine churches within the Franciscan family: that of S. Antonio in Padua (b. 1234) and the church of S. Chiara in Assisi (b. 1253).<sup>1</sup> Both, in their original forms, had single-nave T-plans (four bays in the nave, three in the transept), with an apse of five radiating sections, flat walls, stone vaulting, and a crypt below (figs. 119, 120). The plans and sections of all three are so similar that they could easily be registered upon each other, except that St. Clare's church is slightly smaller than the other two. Where once the Portiuncula, as the mother church, was repeated throughout the early Franciscan hermitages, the basilica of S. Francesco, as the new mother church, served as the prototype for churches whose program resembled its own. As the burial places of the next two important saints within the Franciscan family of that century, these churches, in form and size, now shared in the glory and graces of their exemplar. They also testify to the recognizable originality of Elias' design. Their own forms would not have been mistaken for their reference to a new type of church built for a new type of saint.

Other churches in the order tended to be less exact copies, but copies nevertheless. For instance, some, such as those at Pescia, Pistoia, Pisa, Siena and Florence, adopted the single-nave T-plan, but with a wooden roof and rectangular apse and rectangular chapels in the choir (fig. 121). Unlike the basilica, however, these mid- to late-thirteenth-century churches were not designed as burial churches for major saints, but memorials to Francis, all of which were named S. Francesco after the church in Assisi. Since they were neither crypt-bearing nor under papal sponsorship, they participated in the basilica to the degree that their own sites, specifications and donor contributions permitted them.

At first glance, little difference may be detected between these churches and those being

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<sup>1</sup>Louise Bourdua, "Friars, patrons and workshops at the Basilica del Santo, Padua," *Studies in Church History* 28 (1992): 131-141; Mistretta, *Francesco, Architetto di Dio*, 184-85.

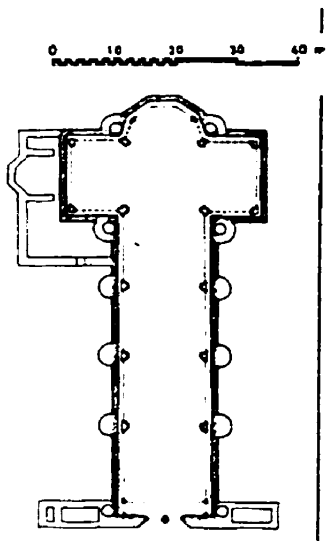
built for the Dominicans, often during the same period on the other side of these same cities (fig. 122).<sup>2</sup> Even though the Franciscan *loci* throughout the century outnumber Dominican settlements two to one, historians have tended to lump the architecture of two orders together on the basis of the apparent similarity of their churches and a shared commitment to poverty (hence the name *mendicant* architecture). Indeed, the Franciscans were rapidly becoming an order of students, clerics and scholars as the Dominicans, from the outset, were founded to be. To differentiate between the churches of the two orders often a number of complex factors has to be taken into account—from the site, funding, patronage and local building practices to issues concerning local competition between the orders, the cathedral and civic buildings.<sup>3</sup> A full scholarly exploration would also have to be undertaken on the early architectural approach of St. Dominic and the Dominicans with respect to their history and spirituality—a task which lies outside of the scope of this study. At least three observations, however, deserve our consideration.

First, around 1232-35, the Dominicans developed a prescriptive legislation exclusively dedicated to architecture which defined their ideal of "moderate and humble" constructions. These restrictions involved limiting the height of their churches to 30 *pedes* (approximately 11 meters), prohibiting stone vaulting in the nave, and ensuring these rules by means of three

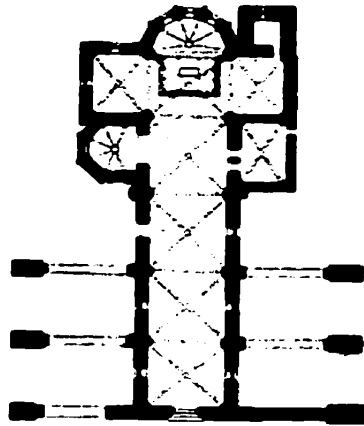
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<sup>2</sup>For general surveys of these churches see, Kurt Biebrach, *Die Holzgedeckten Franziskaner- und Dominikaner-Kirchen in Umbrien und Toskana* (Berlin, 1908); Krautheimer, *Die Kirchen der Bettelorden*, 12; Frankl, *Gothic Architecture*, 121; Richard Wilder Emery, *The Friars in Medieval France: A Catalogue of French Mendicant Convents, 1200-1550* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1962); Wolfgang Krönig, "Caratteri dell'architettura degli Ordini mendicanti in Umbria" in *Atti del VI Convegno di Studi Umbri* (Perugia, 1971): 176-77; P. Heliot, "Sur les Églises gothiques des ordres mendiants en Italie Centrale," in *Bulletin Monumental*, 130 (1972); Luigi Pellegrini, "Gli insediamenti degli ordini mendicanti e la loro tipologia. Considerazioni metodologiche e piste di ricerca," in *Les Orderes Mendiants et la ville en Italie centrale (v.1220- v. 1350)*, 89 (1977): 563-566; Louis Grodecki, *Gothic Architecture* (Milan: Electa, 1978); Romanini, "L'Architettura degli ordini mendicanti," 8-10; *Francesco d'Assisi: Chiese e conventi* (Umbria, 1982); Schenkluhn, *Ordines studentes*; Romanini, "Il francescanesimo nell'arte," 181-95; White, *Art and Architecture in Italy*, 23; Trachtenberg, "Gothic/Italian 'Gothic'," 22-37.

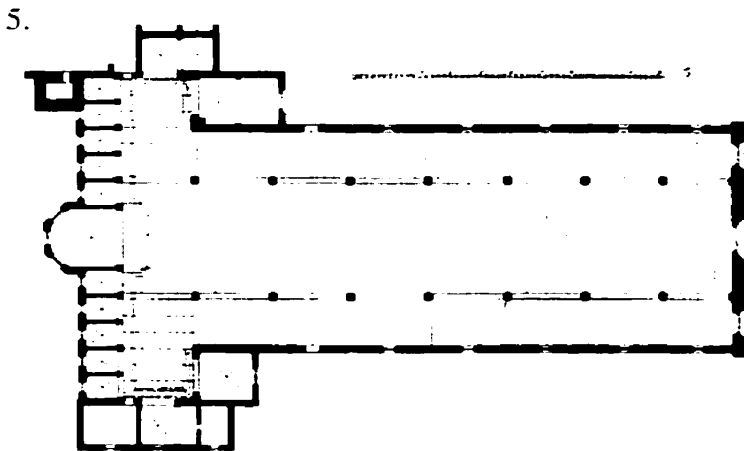
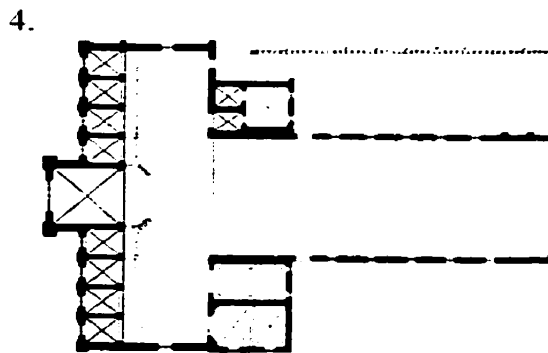
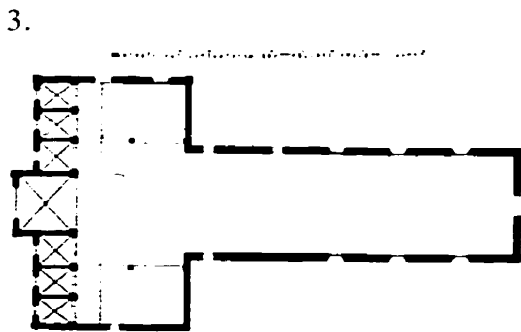
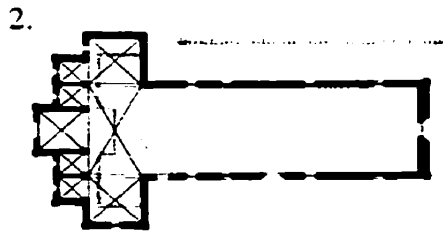
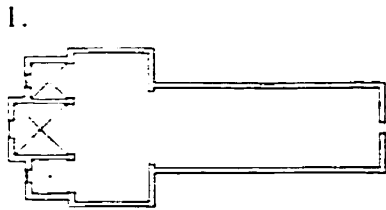
<sup>3</sup>An example of this approach can be seen in David Gillerman, "S.Fortunato in Todi: Why the Hall Church?" *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 48 (June, 1989): 158-71. One interesting difference, noted by Derbes, is that the painted narrative cycles and panels produced by the Franciscans after 1230 were conspicuously absent from Dominican churches until the fourteenth century. According to Derbes, the Dominicans had neither the theology or interest in these narrative innovations; Derbes, *Picturing the Passion*, 26; and H.W. Van Os, *Sieneese Altarpieces, 1215-146: Form, Content, Function*, vol. 1 (Groningen, 1984), 67.



119. Far left. Basilica of S. Antonio, Padua, original plan of ca. 1234-56. (Drawing after M. Salvatori. "Nacque 'francescana' la seconda basilica del Santo." in *Il Santo*, 17, nos. 1-2, Padova, 1977.)



120. Basilica of S. Chiara, Assisi, current plan. The original church plan must be imagined without the side chapels. (After Mistretta, *Francesco, Architetto di Dio*, 135.)



121. Plans of Franciscan churches: 1. S. Francesco, Pescia (b. 1240); 2. S. Francesco, Pistoia (b. 1248); 3. S. Francesco, Pisa (b. 1261); 4. S. Francesco, Siena (b. 1246); 5. S. Croce, Florence (b. 1294). (From Biebrach, *Die Holzgedeckten Franziskaner*.)

friar-visitors to each new construction.<sup>4</sup> Similar provisions only appear in Franciscan documents in 1260.<sup>5</sup> The relatively late adoption by the Franciscans of prescriptive guidelines may be attributed to the strength of Francis' legislation by metaphor and *exemplum*. Moving from their rural hermitages, based on the Portiuncula layout, to their urban convent churches may have assured a respect and trust among the Franciscans for the spirit of poverty in their subsequent buildings.

The second point to note is the use of wooden truss roofs in Dominican architecture. They first appeared in the original construction of their mother church in Bologna, begun in 1221 or 1223.<sup>6</sup> The wood truss roof may have become a signature element for Dominican architecture, serving to differentiate their order from the Franciscans. This type of roof first appears rather late in Franciscan architecture, at the church of San Francesco in Cortona, begun circa 1250 (figs. 123, 124). The church is noteworthy because its construction has generally been attributed to Br. Elias, who was buried there in 1253.<sup>7</sup> It is not clear, however, whether Elias was adopting the truss roof of Dominican practice, or whether its appearance refers to the simple dormitory at San Damiano, which Elias may have worked on in 1212. This dormitory sits above its church and is covered by a wood truss roof (cf. figs. 31, 32, 125). The second reference gains extra currency if one considers that the Cortona church adopted one other characteristic from the S. Damiano dormitory which was imitated in subsequent Franciscan architecture: the use of a stark rectangular plan bereft of interior columns or chapels (fig. 126). If it were not for the trussed roof, the Cortona plan might also refer to the Portiuncula's columnless rectangle, albeit in both cases at nearly three times the size. A rectangular plan was first employed by the Dominicans in Toulouse (1229-35), but in that case a row of interior columns divides the space. It was on Dominican churches such as this that Richard Krautheimer based his understanding of mendicant architecture as "barn-

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<sup>4</sup>*Constitutiones antiquae ordinis fratrum Praedicatorum*, ed. A.H. Thomas, in *Quidam constituties*, 309-10, Dist II, cap. 35, 366-67. The length of a *pes* in Italy was between 35 and 38 cm, according to Meersseman, "L'architecture dominicaine," 147, n. 27. See also Sundt, "*Mediocres domos et humiles*," 398.

<sup>5</sup>Brooke, 297, 261, nn. 4 and 5. These provisions may have been in use by 1242 at the earliest, but only in oral form.

<sup>6</sup>See G. Meersseman, "L'architecture dominicaine au XIIIe siècle: Législation et pratique," *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 16 (1946): 136-90, esp., 144-46, 155-56; and Richard Sundt, "The Jacobin Church of Toulouse and the Origin of Its Double-Nave Plan," *Art Bulletin* LXXI: 2 (1989): 183-207.

<sup>7</sup>Antonio Cadei, "La Chiesa di S. Francesco a Cortona" in *Storia della Città IX* (1978): 16-23, esp. 18.

churches"—buildings which ultimately received their forms from north and central Italian peasant barn or hay loft constructions (fig. 127).<sup>8</sup> The attribution, however, cannot entirely be transferred to the Franciscan church at Cortona or its copies in other towns (e.g., fig. 128). Cortona may be rectangular and bear a trussed roof but the dividing rows of columns which characterize Dominican and barn construction are absent. The only exact forerunner of the Cortona church seems to be the dormitory at S. Damiano. If the innovations at Cortona can be attributed to Elias, then once again we may be witnessing the persistence of Francis' vision as it was rendered in the S. Damiano dormitory and adapted by Elias at Cortona.

Finally, Franciscan and Dominican churches are conspicuous for being the first to introduce Gothic detailing into Italy. Northern practices were limited in Italy to decorative elements around portals, windows, altars and columns—but even in the rare cases when flying buttresses were employed, such as at S. Francesco and S. Chiara in Assisi, they were never structural but decorative (figs. 98, 105, 110, 116). Marvin Trachtenberg has noted that Gothic was the "prestige architecture of the rest of Europe, emblematic of *haut monde* modernity," which the Italians could not pass up, "if only for the sake of fashion."<sup>9</sup> While French Gothic stained glass and tracery may have been an imported fashion, as Francis once imported French cloth, it must also be understood for its meaning and interpretation within Italy. The French cathedral builders such as Abbot Suger at St. Denis, praised light for its mystical and anagogical quality:

The church shines with its middle part brightened.  
 For bright is that which is brightly coupled with bright,  
 And bright is the noble edifice which is pervaded by new light.<sup>10</sup>

Both the quality and, what was new, the quantity of light in French Gothic emerged from the confluence of new stained glass and stone tracery technology with a sudden burst of scholarship, translations and commentaries of Neoplatonic texts—from a fragment of Plato's *Timaeus* to Augustine and, especially, Pseudo-Dionysius. Dionysius, a writer who was

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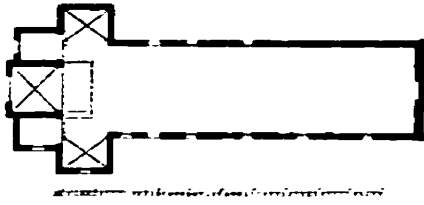
<sup>8</sup>Krautheimer, *Die Kirchen der Bettelorden*, 12.

<sup>9</sup>Trachtenberg, "Gothic/Italian Gothic," 33.

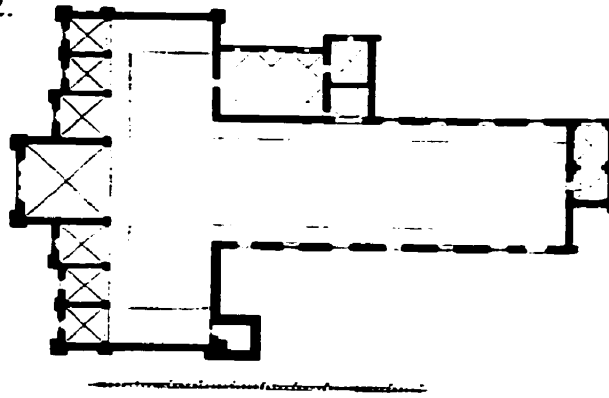
<sup>10</sup>*De administratione*, XXVIII; Erwin Panofsky, *Abbot Suger On the Abbey Church of St-Denis and its Art Treasures*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 49. See also Simson, *Gothic Cathedral*, 118-27.



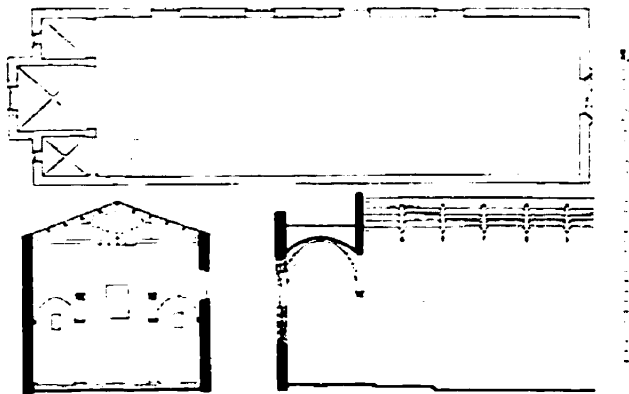
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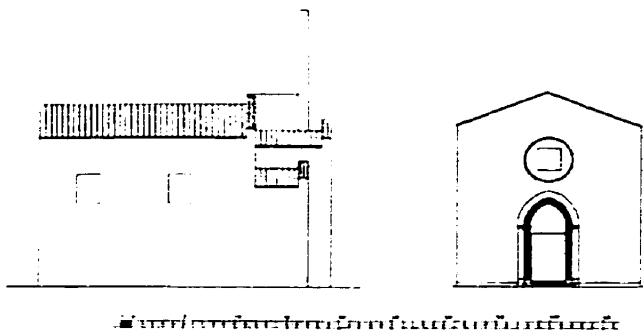
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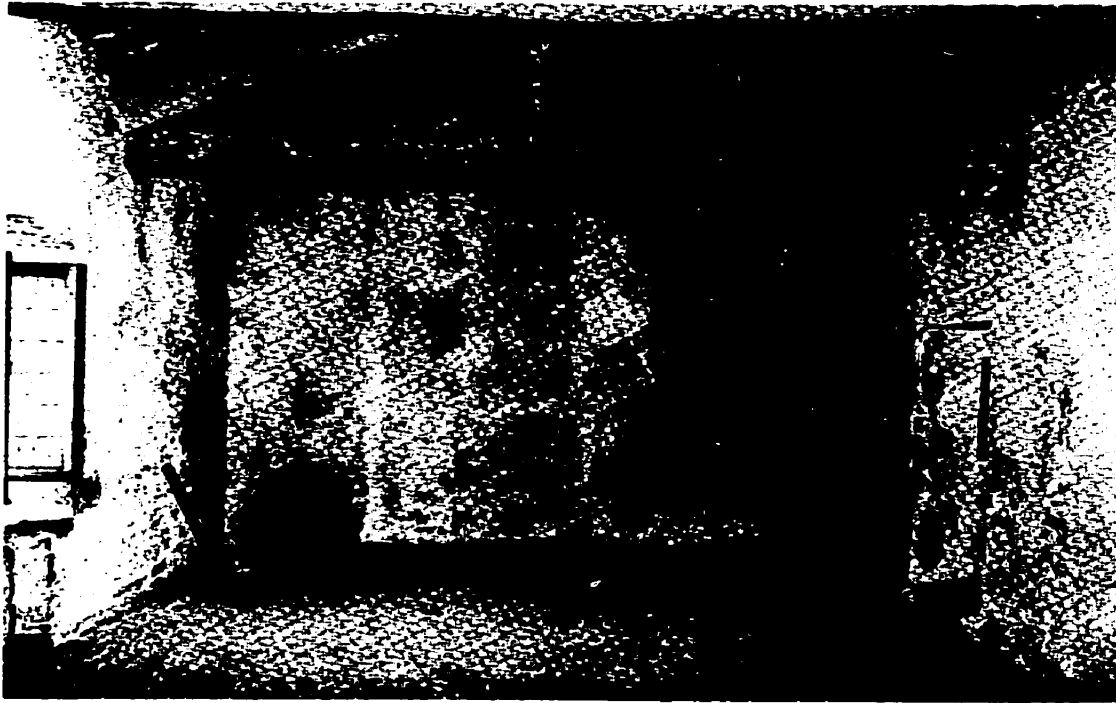
122. Plans of mid-13th c. Dominican churches: 1. S. Domenico, Pistoia; 2. S. Domenico, Siena. (From Biebrach, *Die Holzgedeckten Franziskaner*.)



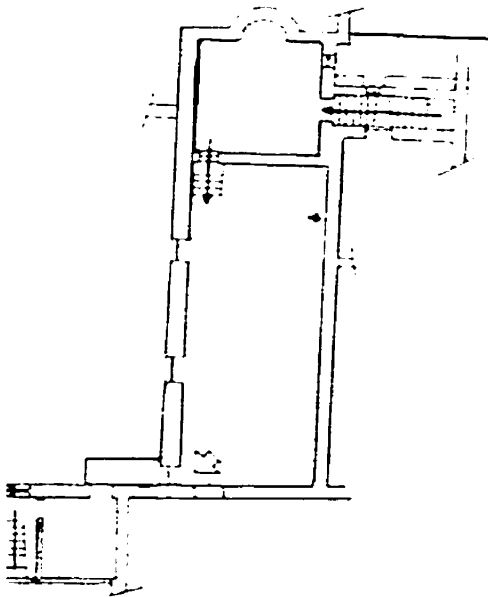
123. Plan and sections of S. Francesco, Cortona (b. 1250). Design attributed to Br. Elias. (From Biebrach, *Die Holzgedeckten Franziskaner*, figs 15-17.)



124. Elevations of S. Francesco, Cortona (b. 1250). Design attributed to Br. Elias. (From Biebrach, *Die Holzgedeckten Franziskaner*, figs 18-20.)

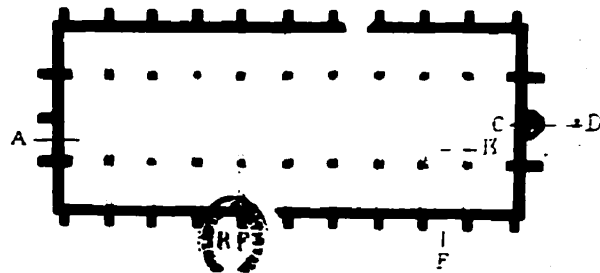


125. View of the dormitory of S. Damiano, above the church. Attributed to Francis and his followers, c. 1212. (Photo by author.)



126. Plan of S. Damiano, second floor dormitory above chapel (b), with small oratory (a). Attributed to Francis and his followers, c. 1212. (After Bruzelius, "Hearing is Believing," fig. 3.)

127. Plan of a barn at the Cistercian foundation at Maubisson, 12th c. (After Aubert, *L'architecture cistercienne en France*, fig. 56.)



considered "first-rank after the Apostles," and thought to be the patron saint of France, St. Denis, wrote of the cosmos as a veil illuminated by light, where light, as it appears to us, is the only earthly material which bears a pure unadulterated testimony to the heavenly divine light, thereby permitting that light to be understood by us.<sup>11</sup> Suger, himself intoxicated by this devotion to light, set out to build an architecture where the walls became translucent panels, such that their architectural frames would seem to dematerialize. He sought to built a type of heavenly Jerusalem, a shimmering paradise to reward the arduous journey of the visiting pilgrim, and to give glory to the remains of its patron saint and the kings of France (fig. 129).<sup>12</sup>

Even though Gothic cathedrals began to rise a century before Franciscan churches in Italy, the friars drew their architectural understanding of light from entirely different sources. Light, for them, emerged from the darkness of their sinful humanity—as the gold leaf of a Byzantine icon only glows when the candle is lit before it. Light, for the Franciscans, was active, participative. Their icons often held relics and were carried in procession, kissed, and incubated with. The icon emerged from the tomb, the crypt, the penitential cave, the womb of the Annunciation and the night of Bethlehem. Icons were seen, not by the light of the sun, but with the light of the soul, in the *speculum* of the memory, polished clean by the action of love, by the imitation of a poor and humble Christ. In the north, Gothic luminosity was an analogue for intellectual illumination—as passively received as the beatific vision itself.<sup>13</sup> In the south, light was the result of vigorous Christian action: charity for one's neighbour, and the taming of one's own flesh.

Franciscan architecture was not a lesser, unaccomplished or failed French Gothic, but a conscious choice, from church to church, to build upon a different understanding of spiritual

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<sup>11</sup>This understanding seems to have been promoted by Hugh of St. Victor, *PL*, 175, 946. See Simson, *Gothic Cathedral*, 53.

<sup>12</sup>Simson, *Gothic Cathedral*, 120-21.

<sup>13</sup>St. Augustine's *visio intellectualis* seems to correspond to the beatific vision: the eschatological goal of human existence, which finally subsumed all physical and intellectual perception in the God who gazes upon Himself. That is, the God who dwells deep in the soul of all beings finally sees and reflects upon Himself above all things, as if in a mirror. Conversely, the mirror that transfixes Narcissus' physical sight on his physical reflection, as depicted in the *Roman de la Rose* for instance, represents the ultimate act of turning away from God: the sin of pride. Augustine, *De genesi ad litteram*, ch. 12; See Carolly Erickson, *The Medieval Vision: Essays in History and Perception* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 37; and Le Goff, *Imagination*, 216. On Narcissus in the medieval era see John Fleming, *The Roman de la Rose: A Study in Allegory and Iconography* (Princeton: University Press, 1969), 93-97.

and theological experience. The relegation of French Gothic to the edges of their churches was due less to fashion (although this too cannot be discounted), than to the emergence in mendicant architecture of a type of Eastern, Islamic tracery or to the gold leaf background of an icon, as an emblem or glimpse of luminosity which was otherwise enshrouded or entombed by weighty, desert-flat stone walls and floors.<sup>14</sup>

The diverse individual elements of thirteenth-century Franciscan churches, such as the T-plan, the trussed roof, the unarticulated walls, the Gothic detailing and the quality of light, may lead one to conclude, as Marvin Trachtenberg has, that their design was both eclectic and non-narrative. I believe that the unity which holds those elements together is an overall design approach based on the simplicity, poverty and mobility of Christ and Mary, of the *tau* and Portiuncula, as interpreted in the life and architecture of Francis himself. In many ways, these churches seem to be variations at a larger scale on these two mnemonic foci. What was once a private devotion for the friars, now expanded to include the entire community of faith. Yet visitors were ushered into empty spaces in which there was little splendour to observe. They were cast into the desert and cave, the contemplative and dangerous wilderness, to bear their crosses in the space of memory *par excellence*.

Denied the primacy of vision, this architecture demanded of the visitor either self-reflection on one's being-unto-death, or during masses or feasts, vigorous bodily participation, such that the participants became *exempli* for each other. Franciscan churches were the *loci* of the hermit, leper, crusader, pilgrim, peasant and all those on the move in the early thirteenth century: a purgatorial space one passed through by the grace of prayer and penance alone. If French Gothic could be considered the beatific vision at the end of a pilgrimage, the Franciscan church was the pilgrimage itself—the church *in via*.

Abbot Suger continues to cast his shadow over medieval architectural history in the late twentieth century. After the scholarship of Erwin Panofsky, Otto von Simson, and Conrad Rudolph, authors and educators have often held up Suger as the only medieval figure whose writings describe an architectural vision in detail, complete with its theological and political

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<sup>14</sup>Perhaps the same argument could be made about the daring French Gothic structure which was designed *ad triangulum* in order to frame their walls of light vs. the Italian preference for the stability and "ars" resulting from *ad quadratum* design, as seen in the fascinating documents pertaining to the raising of the cathedral of Milan. See James Ackerman, "Ars sine scientia nihil est: Gothic Theory of Architecture at the Cathedral of Milan," *Art Bulletin* (June, 1949): 84-111; Bucher, "Medieval Architectural Design Methods," 37-51.



128. Lucca. Church of S. Francesco. A typical facade and plan of a mid- to late-13th c. Italian mendicant church. (From Salvatori, "Le prime sedi francescane," figs. 66, 67.)



129. Ambulatory of St. Denis, Paris, ca. 1032. (Photo from Crosby, *The Royal Abbey of Saint-Denis*, 56.)

symbolism, which was immediately reflected in the construction program under his administration.<sup>15</sup> His words and references were original and bold; his architecture, in turn, changed the face of Western construction. Such a synthesis of vision, according to architectural historians, would only next be seen three hundred years later in the writing and buildings of Leone Battista Alberti.<sup>16</sup> In the intervening time, no person seems to have emerged whose thinking and building could reach the lofty peaks of Suger or Alberti.

I contend, however, that Francis of Assisi would be such a figure. From S. Damiano and the Portiuncula to his death and Testament, Francis mapped a detailed architectural program for his followers whose references and symbolism were uniquely fused into a bold vision for his era. This vision found immediate manifestation in the works of architecture under his authority both during his lifetime and, in the reciprocal designs of his followers such as Br. Elias, long after his death. No aspect within the circumference traditionally ceded to architectural design slipped from Francis' vision: program, budget, client relations, siting, size, materials, ornamentation, light, maintenance, liturgical use, and furnishings were all indicated clearly by Francis if not by his dictated words, by his example. Francis believed the Portiuncula, his architectural prototype, was ordained and blessed by God. His unique fusion of architectural references and symbolism was transparent to the next century of imitators; his influence can be traced from the Levant to England. Upon Western architectural history, Francis bestowed a new paradigm

Unlike Suger, however, Francis did not tolerate alterations to, or glosses upon, his Portiuncula exemplar.<sup>17</sup> As both architect and client, Francis anticipates the power and authority of the Renaissance prince for whom visions of geometrically simplified ideal cities

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<sup>15</sup>Conrad Rudolph, *Artistic Change at St-Denis: Abbot Suger's Program and the Early Twelfth-Century Controversy Over Art* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990). See also Louis Grodecki, *Etudes sur les vitraux de Suger à Saint-Denis* (Paris : Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1995); Sumner McKnight Crosby, *The Royal Abbey of Saint-Denis: From its Beginnings to the Death of Suger, 475-1151*, edited and completed by Pamela Z. Blum (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); and, *Abbot Suger and Saint-Denis: A Symposium*, ed. Paula Lieber Gerson (New York : Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986).

<sup>16</sup>"Fond of the classics and the chroniclers, a statesman, a soldier and a jurisconsult, an expert in all that Leone Battista Alberti was to sum up under the heading of *La Cura della Famiglia*, and apparently not without interest in science, [Suger] was a proto-humanist rather than an early scholastic." Panofsky, *Abbot Suger*, 17.

<sup>17</sup>Suger's vision for St. Denis was to be unique given his special task to build a coronation chapel for the Kings of France. Comparing St. Denis to its immediate successors such as Chartres and Notre Dame de Paris demonstrates the wide interpretive girth each cathedral builder took. See Simson, *Gothic Cathedral*.

or vast, efficient utopias materialize under his command.<sup>18</sup> Renaissance designers continued the mendicant search for purity in reference to the past—but this time through classical rather than biblical sources. To that end, the French Gothic detailing that gradually accumulated on the doors, windows and altars of Italian mendicant churches were simply removed in the design of Renaissance buildings.<sup>19</sup>

In many ways Francis' leadership, political savvy and expertise in a number of artistic media from performance and poetry to clothing design and architecture foreshadow the Renaissance man. Unlike Suger, Francis envisioned not just a church but an entire monastery complex down to the clothing of its occupants. He promoted the wide use of private cells rather than monastic dormitories. Individual huts permitted an embodied, sensual immersion into the subject of a friar's contemplation and memory work without the distraction of onlookers. At the same time, the small mud and stick huts provided the subject, in themselves, for contemplation on Christian poverty. And yet the luxury of privacy in the friaries of the mid-thirteenth century soon became a necessity in the next century for silent disembodied reading, speculative thought, and, by the early Renaissance, storing personal libraries or collections of artifacts, scientific instruments and other curiosities. The full connection, however, between the mendicant and the Renaissance in architecture and their architects is a task beyond the scope of this paper.

Occurring at the dawn of Scholasticism and Western literacy, Francis' architectural vision may also provide a response to late-twentieth-century postmodern or deconstructionist architectural practice—in an age, one may say, that is becoming post-literate. With Roland Barthes, postmodernists describe Western culture as a civilization of the image, where images parody or reflect one another, devoid of any fixed reference of origin or meaning in a

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<sup>18</sup>See, for instance, the 1464 ideal plan of Sforzinda by Filarete. See Antonio di Piero Averlino, *Trattato di architettura di Antonio Filarete*, translated in A. Spencer, ed. *Filarete's Treatise on Architecture*, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965).

<sup>19</sup>The fresco cycles developed under Franciscan auspices, such as that by Giotto in the Upper Church of the Basilica of S. Francesco in Assisi, foreshadow Renaissance narrative, realism, colour and perspective in painting (figs. 1, 85, 86, 90, 95, 97, 112). I would not, however, endorse the assumption of Samuel Edgerton that Giotto or the school of Giotto employed *scenographia* as "a form of linear perspective," in the manner of Vincenzo Scamozzi. See *The Heritage of Giotto's Geometry: Art and Science in the Eve of the Scientific Revolution* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1991). Cf. Alberto Pérez-Gómez and Louise Pelletier in *Architectural Representation and the Perspective Hinge* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997), 94-96.

narcissistic hall of mirrors.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, language, according to Jacques Derrida and the deconstructionists, has become a closed, self-referential structure which negates the possibility of communication.<sup>21</sup> Thus, the imagination of the architect and the community he or she builds for, is simply cancelled, relegated to the role of a passive observer of, or a cynical participant in, the myth of scientific progress, its commodification as advertising, or the skin-deep formal games of cyber-driven technophilia.

If the real-time audio/visual communication of our age could be understood as producing a "secondary orality," then Francis' defense of oral creation in a context under the threat of literacy could be our starting point, on this side of literacy.<sup>22</sup> As both a builder and a designer who did not work with drawings or written specifications let alone cash transactions, Francis closed the theoretical and physical gap which has too often existed between the architect and builder. Building for Francis involved the renovation of buildings as much as it involved the renovation of character for those involved. Without the mediation of money, drawings or language, the penitential experience of building was communal, simple, direct and ethical in that the act of building was not a specialist activity with precious materials. Architecture was local, familiar, uncomplicated and refused to draw attention to itself. Its treasures only poured forth when its poverty was physically engaged through its maintenance, liturgy or meditation. Architecture was thus permitted an appropriate relationship to society: it was neither an idol adorned to divert attention and open purses, nor a utilitarian shed for the proletariat.<sup>23</sup> Franciscan building negotiated a narrative through constructed metaphor that invited interpretation and participation in the omnitemporality of its poetic structure.

The invitation to communal engagement through a relatively smaller scale and simple, locally-recognizable materials and elements, ensured that early Franciscan architecture did

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<sup>20</sup>For an overview of postmodern nihilism and artistic creation see, Richard Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining: From Husserl to Lyotard* (London: Harper Collins, 1991), 170-209; and, with respect to architecture, see Pérez-Gómez and Pelletier, *Architectural Representation and the Perspective Hinge*, 281-368.

<sup>21</sup>Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 164-268.

<sup>22</sup>Walter Ong has argued against the deconstructionists for an understanding of the late twentieth century as the dawn of a rapid electronic age where orality is recovered, albeit with the wisdom or taint of literacy. See *Orality and Literacy*, 3.

<sup>23</sup>Commenting on the cathedrals and royal monasteries of his day, St. Bernard noted that, "There is a certain art of laying out money so that it multiplies; one spends it so that it increases, and largesse produces plenty. For through the sight of extravagant but marvellous vanities, people are more moved to contribute offerings than to pray . . . Eyes feast on gold-mounted reliquaries and purses gape." *Apologia ad Guillelmum*, c. 12, *PL*, 182, 914-16.



not intimidate, exclude or confuse—a charge often levelled at corporate, postmodern and deconstruction architecture alike.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, Francis shrank the march of time, the serious work of life, to the size of a children's sandbox.<sup>25</sup> "Unless you become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."<sup>26</sup> By choosing, in the face of legislative bureaucracies or the *theoria* of the learned classes, to play, the embodied imagination is permitted to dream communal identities and enact possible worlds of justice and peace. In this way, fundamentalist belief (either religious, philosophical or political) may be appropriately weakened through interpretation and the chance encounter with the unknown other.<sup>27</sup> That is, as Francis strove, in his earliest meditations, to embrace the ugly, leprous or frightful rather than banish it, the unknown other became implicated from the start in his imagination and constructions.

Building for an order defined by its mobility, Francis makes the case, before a highly mobile age such as our own, for a poetics of architecture. For Francis, pilgrimage and estrangement did not exclude architectural representation, but invited the movement that metaphor confers upon prose. In the poem, *Bread and Wine*, Friedrich Hölderlin asks, "And what are poets for in a destitute time?" Martin Heidegger responds with Hölderlin: the poets are those who dare to sing the praises, and yet follow in the trace of the holy absence.<sup>28</sup> This is the poet in destitute times: exiled, ever searching, awaiting for the manifestation of the fugitive holiness, the undisclosed Being. And yet, when the poet becomes unshielded to the scientific ordering of the world, he or she quickly loses the trace of the holy—that is, both the poet's "implication" and body are subsequently lost to a displaced and disembodied *theoria*.<sup>29</sup> The poet is therefore called to have an even stronger will and courage than that of the abyss-maker, the modern self-willed technocrat. Thus, the annihilation threatened by the

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<sup>24</sup>On the recent history of the construction of the philosophy deconstruction, see Mark Wigley, *The Architecture of Deconstruction: Derrida's Haunt* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1993). On hospitality as an ethics, see Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. A. Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 72-77.

<sup>25</sup>On the recovery of childhood vision see David Michael Levin, *The Opening of Vision: Nihilism and the Post-modern Situation* (New York and London: Routledge, 1988), 269-76.

<sup>26</sup>Mt 18.3.

<sup>27</sup>By the act of weakening myth, I am referring to Gianni Vattimo's "weak ontology." See his *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Postmodern Culture*, trans. Jon Snyder (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 51-111. For the encounter with the "other" as the basis of ethics, see Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 187-252.

<sup>28</sup>"What are Poets For?" in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 91.

<sup>29</sup>See Levin, *The Body's Recollection of Being*, 30-224.

dark night discloses an opening in the poet's destiny as a willed, ethical action: the determination to sing, nevertheless, before the dangerous abyss.

For deconstructionists however, textual or architectural playfulness is always at the expense of communication. By weakening anthropocentrism, they justifiably invite us never to forget the horror that humans can bring upon each other. However, fearing that we may slip into the myth of progress, human dialogue and the possibility to imagine new utopias is also denied. Francis' example offers a way of de-centring the ego through voluntary suffering that does not annihilate the imagination or the possibility of communication. He does this by encouraging, through his architecture, the construction of inner worlds to foreshadow eschatological ones in heaven. Human progress towards these new worlds is thereby measured in ethical action aiming toward humility. The possibility of true joy, justice or peace in world time is not to be grasped at or constructed, but bestowed as a type of unexpected gift through dream, vision, coincidence or the chance encounter.

In the meantime, architecture houses the waiting. Through memory and mourning, a clearing is made for the reception of the gift. In the void of the barren desert, the imagination builds and ethics dwells.



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