A Century Reading the Sources for the Life of Francis of Assisi

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"Un secolo di 'lettura delle fonti' biografiche' di Francesco d'Assisi"

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The Franciscan Question Seventy Years Later

"When all is said and done, the Franciscan Question boils down to a search for the link between the various documents that take us back to the original documents, and those that are dependent on them." These are the words of Theophile Desbonnets in the introduction to his 1967 study, Recherches sur la Genealogie des biographies primitives de Saint François. He goes on to say that he would welcome any solution to the question, however partial, "provided it is objectively established" (emphasis ours). The Franciscan Question was first raised by Sabatier seventy years ago. It continues to be the focal point for

¹Archivum Franciscanum Historicum 60 (1967) 273-316.

²Since the beginning of this century the Franciscan Question has been the starting point for historical surveys that enable us to follow, step by step, the evolution of studies on Francis of Assisi and the problem of the sources: "Rassegna francescana," by Ildebrando della Giovanna, Giornale storico della letteratura italiana 37 [1901] 353-70; A.G. Little, Le fonti storiche su San Francesco d'Assisi (MF 9 [1902]] 120-43); A. Fierens, "La Question franciscaine," (Révue d'histoire écclesiastique 8 [1907] 57-80, in a broader study presenting ms. 2336 of the Bibliotèque Royale de Belgique, ibid. pp. 286-304, 498-513); Antonio Demenichelli, Le più antiche leggende di Francesco di Assisi e la critica francescana di questi ultimi decenni. Studio critico con appendice, Spalato 1908. But the first integral and complete work was that by Fidentius van den Borne, Die Franziskus-Forschung in ibrer Entwicklung dargestellt, Munich 1917 (Veriffentlichungen aus dem kirchenhistorischen Seminar Mönchen-IV Reihe-6). He began with Luke Wadding (d. 1657), and ended with the state of knowledge of the sources at the beginning of the twentieth century. Then he re-traced the major stages of research on Francis and the early Franciscan movement, focusing his attention on the new direction taken following the great upheaval begun by Sabatier (1893). Fifteen years later, Fredegando d'Anversa, De fontibus litterariis ad Vitam S. Francisci Assisiensis speciatim pertinentibus, provided a complete list of studies and editions of the Franciscan sources with critical apparatus. With the first volume of Collectanea Franciscana (1931) he began the series of complete listings that would make the journal a precious source of bibliography. In 1968 there was another work by Fidentius van den Borne, "Neues Licht nach 50 Jahren Quellenforschung," in Wissenschaft und Weisheit 31 (1968) 208-23. From the same year we should also mention the critical summary by Théophile Desbonnets in the introduction to Saint François d'Assise. Documents écrits et premieres biographies, ed. Desbonnets; also Damien Vorreux, Paris 1968, La question franciscaine, pp. 8-16,

research and scientific reflection on the sources for the life of Francis of Assisi. This can be seen from a quick overview of the material published during these years.

In 1966 John R.H. Moorman republished his work, The Sources for the life of St. Francis of Assisi, which twenty years before had provoked the hostile reaction of Michael Bihl.³ In 1967, besides Desbonnets's study, two other books appeared, one by Sophronius Clasen, the other by Jacques Cambell. Their titles reflect two different—albeit closely linked—approaches to the Franciscan Question. Clasen's Legenda antiqua is an investigation of a series of Franziskusquellen, which are declared without hesitation to be post-Bonaventurian.⁴ Cambell's I fiori dei tre compagni is an attempt to extract from the post-Bonaventurian compilations—with a strong preference for the Legend of Peruqia—the florilegium that, according to the testimony of the famous letter of Greccio, was sent to the minister general Crescentius of Jesi by brothers Leo, Angelo and Rufino.⁵

Studies of the Franciscan Question, then, are marked by two distinct approaches. On the one hand there is an attempt to chronologically reorder the sources for the life of Francis. On the other there is an effort to reconstruct, or better reconstitute, the testimonies of the saint's companions. In

and the review by Edith Pásztor of Cambell's book in Studi Medievali 3rd series 9 (1968)) 252-64. The early 1970's saw critical surveys that were broad in scope, Guy Philippart, Les écrits des compagnons de S. François. Aperçu de la "question franciscaine" des oriqines a nos jours, in Analecta Bollandiana. Révue critique d'Haqioqraphie 90 (1972) 144-66; Paul Sabatier e la sua contrastata eredità in the volume by Stanislao da Campagnola, Le oriqini francescane come problema storioqrafico, Perugia 1974, pp. 167-231 (2nd ed. 1979, pp. 171-239). These two scholars recall how the term "Franciscan Question" was first used by Minocchi in 1902 (Philippart, p. 143; Stanislao da Campagnola, p. 187). It is significant that during those years the First Assembly of the International Society for Franciscan Studies (Assisi, October 18-20, 1973) was dedicated to La "questione francescana" dal Sabatier ad oqqi (Acts, Assisi 1974). There are also introductory excursus in the works by Clasen (Leqenda antiqua), Cambell (I fiori) and Brooke (Scripta Leonis), which I shall mention later.

³The first edition of Moorman's work was published at Manchester in 1940 (Publications of the University of Manchester 247. Historical series 79). The review by Bihl bore the eloquent title Contra duas novas hypotheses prolatas a John R.H. Moorman adversus "Vitam I S. Francisci auctore Thoma Celanensi, cui substituere vellet sic dictam Leqenda 3 Sociorum" in Archivum Francescanum Historicum 39 (1946) 3-37.

⁴S. Clasen, Leqenda antiqua S. Francisci. Untersuchunq uber die Franziskusquellen, Leqenda trium Sociorum, Speculum Perfectionis, Actus B. Francisci et Sociorum eius und verwandtes Schrifttum, Leiden 1967 (Studies and Franciscan documents edited by the Friars Minor of Austria, Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands, 5th printing). We know that the title Leqenda antiqua was given by Ferdinand M. Delorme to the Compilation of Perugia, of which we shall speak later.

⁵I fiori dei tre compaqni. Testi francescani latini ordinati con introduzione e note da Fr. Jacques Cambell, O.F.M. The facing Italian translation is by Nello Vian, Milan 1967.

both cases we find a stubbornness that borders on obsession. The various authors cling obstinately and jealously to the findings of their research—I would not dare call them results. Not only do their findings display a great variety, at times they are even opposed and nullify each other.

Eloquent examples of both approaches exist for the time period we are considering (the late 60's and early 70's). In two works published in 1972, Clasen and Lorenzo Di Fonzo, basing themselves on a rigorous analytic comparison between the *Anonymous of Peruqia* and the *Leqend of the Three Companions*, reached exactly opposite conclusions regarding the dependence of one source on the other.⁶

Two years later, Desbonnets sided with Clasen on the date of the *Leqend of the Three Companions* (1246). However he agreed with Di Fonzo in recognizing the text found in the Sarnano codex as an early recension of the *Leqend*.⁷

By accepting Clasen's position on the inseparability of the *Leqend* from the *Dedicatory Letter* by Leo, Rufino, and Angelo to Crescentius of Jesi, Desbonnets was rejecting Cambell's work, which was followed three years later by that of Rosalind Brooke.⁸

The intention of these two authors was to produce a critical edition of the florilegium that the letter of Greccio was meant to accompany. The very title of their two works leaves no room for doubt. Their method is clear, beginning with the frontispiece of Brooke's work, which indicates that these are edited texts and inserted as such into the prestigious Oxford collection. Actually the two works represent two different attempts at reconstruction, both of which regard the *Leqend of Perugia* as the basic text of the florilegium.

After seventy years of impassioned discussion, efforts to establish priorities and interdependence among the sources for the life of Francis seemed not only to have stalled, but to have entered a blind alley. The only two fixed points were the starting points. The first was the absolute chronological priority of Thomas of Celano's *First Life* (1229). Already in 1906 Nino Tamas-

⁶S. Clasen, Die Dreigefährtenlegende des heiligen Franziskus, Werl-West. 1972; L. Di Fonzo, L'Anonimo Perugino tra le fonti francescane del sec. XII. Rapporti letterari e testo critico, Rome 1972.

⁷Theophile Desbonnets, *Leqenda Trium Sociorum*. Edition critique, in *Archivum Francescanum Historicum*, 67 (1974) 38-144, especially 86-87.

⁸Scripta Leonis, Rufini et Angeli Sociorum S. Francisci. The Writings of Leo, Rufino and Angelo, Companions of St. Francis, Oxford 1970. (Oxford Medieval Texts).

⁹For a convenient presentation of the criteria that guided the two editors, together with evidence for the positive aspects and undeniable merits of this work, see Adriano Gattucci, "Dalla Leqenda antiqua S. Francisci alla Compilatio Assisiensis storia di un testo più prezioso che fortunato, in Studi Medievali 20 (1979) 789-870.

sia had observed that the Franciscan legend "in its multifaceted totality" is linked to this work and derives from it in countless ways. ¹⁰ The second point was the more or less direct (but late) joining of the oral or written testimonies of Francis's companions in some of the stories found in the later collections. The chronological-biographical structure of these testimonies may be more or less clear, as in the *Leqend of the Three Companions* and the *Anonymous of Peruqia*. Or they may be joined in various ways, even (at least apparently) casually, as in the *Specula* and the *Leqend of Peruqia* (Assisi Compilation). ¹¹

Except for these two very general findings, everything was still up for discussion. Indeed, in the years that followed the entire question was fated to be brought up again and again. Questions of the chronology, priority and interdependence of the "unofficial" biographies (primarily the Leqend of the Three Companions and the Anonymous of Peruqia) remained and continue to remain open. There are also problems regarding the material from the companions that has been joined together in later compilations. How and in what shape has this taken place? Scholars have continued to search these compilations for passages and pericopes that reproduce the direct testimonies of Francis's companions. This means above all the Leonine tradition—one that goes back to Brother Leo, who is regarded as the saint's chosen companion and confidant, who preserved his living and authentic memory in the face of many attempts to falsify it.

In this twofold direction being taken by scholars, the recent works of Raoul Manselli and Edith Pásztor deserve special mention. We will need to discuss them later on.

Clearly the Franciscan Question is not closed. Indeed, one has the impression that despite the guise of apparently innovative approaches, the Franciscan Question in its traditional formulation is considered as anything but solved.

¹⁰N. Tamassia, S. Francesco d'Assisi e la sua leqqenda, Padua and Verona 1906, p. IX. Tamassia's observation applies not only to the Leqenda ad usum chori by Julian of Spires (1203) and to his Vita S. Francisci (1232-39), and to the Leqenda versificata S. Francisci by Henry of Avranches (1232-34?), so obviously exemplified in the narrative of Celano's First Life, but also to all the later Leqendae and compilations that claim some relationship to the tradition of the saint's companions. Tamassia calls Celano's Second Life (1247) "The true Speculum perfectionis" (the title of chaps. IV-V, 103-76). It may be superfluous to note that Celano's organization of the material according to the virtues (which ought to characterize the Friar Minor to whom Francis is given as an example) is followed later by Bonaventure in his Leqenda major (1263), and of course by the Specula.

¹¹For a comprehensive and analytic table of the sources for the life of Francis of Assisi, see Stanislao da Campagnola, Francesco d'Assisi nei suoi scritti e nelle sue biografie dei secoli XIII-XIV, Assisi 1977, and more briefly idem., Le prime "biografie" del santo, in Francesco d'Assisi. Storia e arte, Milan 1982, 36-48.

We must now turn our attention to methodology. It is precisely the different approaches to the sources for the life of Francis that give flesh and bones to material that does not obey the canons of ordinary chronological development. This is because methodology seems to depend more on an individual scholar's human and critical sensitivity—and still more on the mentality of that scholar's environment and culture—than on a set of neatly ordered results. An individual's sensitivity and environment are obstacles to neatly ordered results. They produce resistance, which is often associated with a distinct and sometimes unconscious ideology. It follows, then, that lasting results can be measured only after we allow enough time to distance ourselves from the "pendulum effect" that results from psychological conditioning and different patterns of behavior.

If we must deal here with methods of approach to the sources for the life of Francis, we must also look at studies of the Franciscan Question as examples of method. To oversimplify a bit, we can say that such studies have taken place almost entirely on a philological-literary level. Practically the only tools used to establish family groups, dependence, and interdependence, have been the study of variants and groups of variants, stylistic analysis, and textual comparison.

It was no accident that Samuel Cavallin entitled one of his articles "La Question Franciscaine comme probleme philologique." In it he tried, through analysis of verbal similarities (and dissimilarities) and style, to establish the relationships between Celano's two *Lives* and the *Legend of the Three Companions*.

This method is still in vogue, as we see in Maurice Causse's recent article, "Paul Sabatier et la question franciscaine." He begins with a quasi-programatic statement: "The Franciscan Question...is broadly resolved, we can say, in the etymological sense; resolved, because it no longer has any reason to exist." Then he lays down the terms of the question of the relationship between the Speculum and the Scripta (with explicit reference to Brooke's edition). He opts for the "seniority" of The Mirror of Perfection, First Redaction with respect to the Scripta Leonis and Second Celano. His conclusions are the result of comparisons and, in the author's own words, are based "on a method and on a text. The method is that of variant groups" (italics ours). 14 To put it

¹² Published in Eranos 52 (1954) 239-70.

¹³Published in the Révue d'Histoire et de Philosophie religieuse 67 (1987) 113-34.

¹⁴Pp. 124-25. He uses for reference the edition of the Speculum perfectionis prepared by Sabatier and published the year of his death (1928) by the British Society of Franciscan Studies.

plainly, his method is that already used by Desbonnets in his Recherches sur la Généaloqie des Biographies, to which Causse explicitly refers.

There seems to be an element of novelty in Causse's analysis when he compares expressions that indicate a chronological distance from the events narrated. Specifically, he finds evidence for a difference between the two sources in their greater or lesser emphasis on the miracle-working ability and holiness of Francis. But as far content is concerned, his observations were already put forward by Sabatier with respect to the *Speculum*. As to method, we are still in the context of philological and literary comparisons. Thus we end up with positions very similar to those held more than eighty years ago by Sabatier with respect to the *Speculum*, although with the necessary nuances and qualifications. ¹⁵

Should the method of philological-literary criticism as applied to the sources for the life of Francis be called sterile? I would not say so. The sheer amount of data would be enough to prove me wrong. Thanks to this method and the patient research that underlies it, along with the intuitions that from time to time have upheld its use, we have today at our disposal critical editions of a good number of the sources. Though always subject to improvement, they are still of great value. In addition, we possess a huge stack of codices that

¹⁵ Sabatier had already noticed the scarcity of miraculous elements and of the marvelous in general in the Speculum (Sabatier, Le Speculum perfectionis seu S. Francisci Assisiensis Leqenda antiquissima auctore fratre Leone, Paris 1898 [Documents for the religious and literary history of the Middle Ages 1], p. XXXVII). The Résumé of Causse's essay explicitly accepts Sabatier's thesis: "The present study gives four categories of new arguments in favor of his [Sabatier's]] thesis." One is tempted to speak of putting new patches on an old garment. I do not wish to be misunderstood nor to create misunderstandings regarding Causse's conclusions. He rightly emphasizes his modification of Sabatier's position concerning the Speculum. This is evident from the interesting note in his Etude critique (Manchester 1931), published as vol. II of his critical edition of the Speculum (Manchester 1928). He speaks of the composite history of the source, which is made up of "a series of simple and humble rotuli to which one could continually add new pages" (p. XVII of Sabatier; p. 124 of Causse). As far as Sabatier's intuitions are concerned, it is certainly unnecessary to stress their fruitfulness here. Later we shall have occasion to show how "modern" some of his approaches were.

¹⁶The names associated with the critical editions are too well known to Franciscan scholars to be listed here with details about each edition. But we are speaking of scholars who are associated with the philological discussions of the Franciscan Question. These include Sabatier, whose interpretations constituted, as it were, the tinder for an already quasi-secular debate; the Bollandist Francesco Van Ortroy, responsible for the entry Franciscus Assisiensis in the Bibliotheca haqioqraphica latina, 1, Brussels 1898-99 (1901), pp. 463-71; Leonard Lemmens, editor of the Speculum minus; Ferdinand Delorme, discoverer and partial editor of the Legendae Perusina; Giuseppe Abate and Michael Bihl, to whom we owe the edition of the Legendae S. Francisci Assisiensis in vol. 10 of Analecta Franciscana; Andrew George Little. Others have already been mentioned in the preceding pages. For the sake of completeness, we cannot forget Marino Bigaroni, who (despite his limitations that were too harshly criticized by Gattucci, Dalla "Legenda

testify not only to the happy fate of one or the other source in a particular region, but also to the patient zeal of those who gathered the oral and written traditions about Francis. There is more. We are in a position to know which material has been joined together in the individual collections and how it has been combined and organized.¹⁷

Perhaps the most "precarious" results have been those obtained when the method was used to establish dates, genealogies, and actual dependence. But we can discern clear trajectories even amid the chaos left by frequently conflicting hypotheses, as long as we prescind from the particular details and partial findings of individual studies. Most importantly, philological analysis has laid the solid foundation for other readings of the sources for the life of Francis. The history of such readings is already nearly a hundred years old, even though their application has been somewhat fragmentary and partial, and regarded with suspicion by many parties.

Toward Identification of the Sitz im Leben

In an appendix to his 1885 work, Die Anfánqe des Minoritenordens und der Bussbruderschaft (pp. 175-84), Karl Múller justified his non-use of Celano's Second Life in his historical reconstruction. His reason is significant for our discussion: Celano had twisted his account to fit the particular demands of the leadership of the order, who had commissioned the Leqend, in connection with the specific historical circumstances of the Franciscan community. Múller regarded Celano's work as a Parteischrift. He himself would attempt a reading of the biographical sources very different from what was then customary. Each source would be interpreted in light of its exact historical context. At the time this was just a rough method, applied to a single biographical source, developed through brief allusions, and supported by meager examples. But his few pages represented a first limited attempt to read the sources for the life of Francis using what could be called a historical-critical method. These pages would not be the last.

antiqua") gave us at last the complete text of the Leqenda Peruqina, to which he gave a new title Compilatio Assisiensis, published at Assisi in 1975.

¹⁷It suffices to recall briefly the great number of invaluable tables provided by Clasen in his *Leqenda antiqua* (with commentary on pp. 195-209). The concordances of manuscript contents, found in an appendix, are a priceless text within a text. Clasen's mighty work is a witness to the enormous wealth of material collected and organized through the patient work of scholars and philologists.

Sabatier broadened the discussion to include all the biographies of Celano—in fact all the official biographies. He bitterly emphasized the severe restrictions that had been placed by the authorities (the church, the order, or both together) on the biographers, not without their connivance. But too much has already been written about Sabatier's positions and the reactions they unleashed. It would be more profitable to point out his most crippling illusion. It was not that he wished to portray the writings of Brother Leo as an alternative source, but that he imagined that these writings could give an authentic picture, one that would be true to reality and free of distortions. This illusion still seems to hold. But more of that later.

In the context of this discussion we should stress particularly the method that guided—or supported, which amounts to the same thing—Sabatier's dismantling of the official biographies. There is a key statement in the introduction to his *Vie de saint François d'Assise*: "Objective history is a utopia." The landscape of history is constantly changing, depending on the observation point, the observer, and the observer's state of mind. Sabatier is eager to explain this awareness, while not repudiating what he considers to be the historian's primary task: to understand. But such a commitment to understanding requires a sympathetic approach: "The first duty of the historian is to forget his time and country in order to become the sympathetic and benevolent contemporary of that which he is recounting." He continues by noting how difficult it is "to become one in mind" with the thirteenth century.

So much for the subject of historical writing. Already we have something significant in the area of method! Now we come to the reading of the biographical sources. This requires another citation: "The same reality, told by two equally truthful contemporaries, can take on two very different shades of meaning." Here he states plainly the principle of the subjectivity of sources. Noteworthy is his emphasis on the compatibility between subjectivity and truthfulness: there can be subjectivity without falsification. Thus it is important to uncover the roots of this subjectivity. They are to be found in the person, especially in the person's sense of belonging to a particular group or environment. The milieu: "We can understand without difficulty how documents that originated from such diverse environments [the three groups of

¹⁸The Introduction was printed almost unchanged in all the editions until the "definitive" edition of 1931, in which the Étude critique des sources was not reproduced. The phrase cited is from p. XXXI (XXVI in the 1894 edition, which I will cite hereafter).

¹⁹p. XVII.

²⁰p. XLV.

Franciscans of whom he had spoken earlier] bear the mark of their origin.... In order to determine the value of these testimonies it is necessary first of all to seek their origin."²¹ This opened the way to an analysis of the sources in light of their historical context, indeed the lived experience from which they had sprung. Sabatier's thought instinctively races ahead to the most elaborate and refined concepts, which Herman Gunkel would sum up a few years later with the phrase Sitz im Leben. But Sabatier was not thinking of the problem of literary forms and their history. His intention was to point out the correct method of reading as opposed to those that had been used previously. He did this quite explicitly in a passage that is worth repeating at length:

These ideas are so simple that we scarcely need to excuse ourselves for expressing them. However, they have never served as a guide for those who studied the life of St. Francis. Most scholars such as Wadding and Papini juxtaposed the accounts of the different biographers, trimming away here and there those things that were excessively contradictory. But they did this haphazardly, without rule or method, guided by passing impressions. The lengthy work by the Bollandist scholar Suysken is vitiated by a similar flaw. A slave to his principle that the oldest documents are always the best, he laid his foundation on the solid rock of Thomas of Celano's First Life, and he used it as his standard for judging all the other legends. When we relate the documents to the troubled circumstances of their birth, some of them lose a bit of their authority. Others that had been neglected as contradictory to the quasi-official testimonies suddenly gain a hearing. And all of them gain a new life that makes them doubly interesting. This change in viewpoint with regard to the sources, this criticism that I would be inclined to describe as coherent and viable, results in a profound change in the biography of St. Francis. Through a phenomenon that might seem strange, we manage to sketch a portrait of him much closer to the one found in the popular Italian imagination and less like the one created by the learned historians mentioned earlier.22

If scholars had heeded the the lesson of Sabatier's method instead of engaging in sterile controversies, they would finally have overcome the naive method of harmonization (sometimes clever, always exhausting), and the illusion that the oldest accounts—those closest to the events themselves—contain the factual truth. Yet in some quarters they remained undaunted and continued on the same path. It is perhaps paradoxical to rejuvenate the biographical sources and increase interest in them by reducing them all to the same level of "historical objectivity," but it is extremely fruitful.

²¹p. XLVIII.

²²Pp. XLVIII-XLIX.

I do not wish to review here the course of the lively debate (to say the least!) that swirled around the work of Sabatier. Nor do I wish to retrace the steps that led philologists, stimulated by this debate, to uncover a large number of sources for the life of Francis and discuss the problems of their authorship, date and origin. I merely emphasize that the battle cries over the content—explicit and implicit—of Sabatier's work stifled any discussion whatsoever of his method. Accusations of prejudice quickly supplanted discussion. But the views of Sabatier's opponents were certainly no less prejudiced! Then, just as now, certain positions would merit analysis in their Sitz im Leben. I mean that even today we should reflect on our existential motives for adopting controversial positions based on results, prescinding from a discussion of research methods. As for methods, I hope we can finally decide to begin a calm discussion, laying aside, if possible, the fear of being proven wrong or disappointment if we have been so proven. Both sentiments seem to characterize the experts in this field.

Returning to Sabatier, we do not mean to say that his work was free of all preconceptions. Not many years later, one preconception, of special interest here, was denounced by an individual who seemed to have grasped the methodological lesson of Sabatier and Múller and carried it to its ultimate conclusions.

Hagiography As a Literary Genre

In 1906 a historian of canon law, Nino Tamassia, published an interesting and provocative volume entitled San Francesco d'Assisi e la sua leggenda. This time the term "legend" was understood, not in the etymological sense used by the saint's first biographers, but in the modern sense of a product of invention. Apparently Tamassia was taking the side of Sabatier's opponents: "It seemed to me unnecessary to refute, one by one, the arguments adopted by Sabatier to defend the authenticity of the Legenda antiquissima, which he attributed to Brother Leo and which he regarded as original and authoritative. His entire work, designed to show how much of the legend of Francis is due to Thomas of Celano, is a step-by-step refutation of his own preconceptions, which were shared by not a few others." 23

Yet Tamassia's use of the term "legend" shows how different his views were from those of Sabatier's opponents. In fact the noted canonist had learned much from the methodology of the Frenchman: the account of Celano is to be placed in the genre of legend. But—and here Tamassia clearly distances

²³Nino Tamassia, S. Francesco d'Assisi e la sua leggenda, Padua and Verona 1906, p. X.

himself from Sabatier—all the sources for the life of Francis belong to that genre and in that sense are indebted to Celano. Francis the saint has obliterated Francis the man.

Thus the polemical review by the Capuchin Edouard d'Alençon hit the nail directly on the head with its sarcastic title: "Saint François a-t-il existé?" This was the violent reaction of a man watching the collapse of his own scientific foundation, not to mention ideological certainties. That very year he himself had produced a critical edition of Celano's biographies. With self-complacent sarcasm, D'Alençon's review underscored the exasperation resulting from a method whose only positive contribution (apparently) was its secure and highly erudite knowledge of the texts of medieval hagiography.

But this same knowledge had enabled Tamassia to discern, almost instinctively, the multiple currents from which Celano, with rare ability, had composed his portrait. Tamassia did not consciously apply a carefully prearranged method. Rather he attempted to unravel a text by searching for literary echoes whose pitch and intensity would lead him in each case to the models. To construct a saint, it is necessary to mold him to the requirements of hagiographic tradition. The canonized image of Francis needed great models and a hand capable and wise enough to use them to remold a human experience that had been extraordinarily varied. Such diversity could and, to some extent, did seem dangerously close to religious deviance, hence the need to reclaim him for the orthodox side. If this, in short, was Tamassia's thesis, it contained more than enough material to stir up the reactions of a Capuchin at the turn of the century.

Yet in addition to his thesis (most of which was clearly explained) and some harsh words for the hagiographer, ²⁶ he accurately identified the genre of Celano's biographical work as hagiography. This was proven from the agents that had influenced it: the hagiographer's own mentality, sustained by careful reading; the demands of the commissioning authorities (first of all Gregory IX, then the leaders of the order); and the expectations of the recipients. Tamassia recognized the particular associations conferred on the Second Life by its structure, which shaped it into "a manual of monastic perfection, a Specu-

²⁴Published in Études franciscaines 15 (1906) 481-95.

²⁵S. Francisci Assisiensis Vita et Miracula, additis opusculis liturgicis auctore Fr. Thoma de Celano. This new edition, which is faithful to the manuscripts, was reviewed by Fr. Edouard d'Alençon, O.F.M.Cap., Rome 1906.

²⁶It suffices to mention his judgment of Celano's Second Life: "Perhaps the masterpiece of a thirteenth-century monastic forger" (p. 109).

lum perfectionis according to the Franciscan ideal."²⁷ It is a genre within a genre and must be identified as such, because as such it had been commissioned (by the chapter of 1244) and consciously conceived, or at least docilely accepted, by the author.

To sum up, the reading of Celano's writings is guided by paying critical attention to the particular aims of the hagiographer in each case. In more modern terms we could speak of a "hagiographic message." The account is shaped to fit this message by its use of literary models that reflect ancient traditions. We might add that the models themselves are shaped by the requirements of the message, which resonated to the extent that it met the needs of a particular group at a particular moment in history. This fact seems to have escaped Tamassia's careful and painstaking analysis, which is certainly oversimplified here. No doubt it is important to realize that Thomas of Celano has his hand in the sack that is part of his baggage—his knowledge of hagiographic literature. But we must not reduce him to a mere plagiarist, albeit a very capable and in some ways brilliant one. To do so would be to diminish the portrait which he has painted with traditional materials and which demonstrates his remarkable creative ability, or at least his flexibility in the face of new demands.

We get the impression that Tamassia interrupted his journey in midstream. By stopping at the *pars destruens*, he created a negative impression that provoked Edouard d'Alençon's harsh reaction. Could we have expected anything more? One possible way had been indicated. The stones left over from his demolition could have been used to rebuild Celano's structure from within, piece by piece. It is a pity that we had to be left gazing with anger and sadness at the ruins.²⁸

The New Method of Formgeschichte

Tamassia's proposals remained, for the time being, without sequel. Franciscan scholars were occupied with research and the editing of new sources, a task that would occupy most of their ime during the first forty years of this

²⁷Tamassia 106.

²⁸More calm and constructive is the criticism of Tamassia's work in the abovementioned study by Fierens, *La question franciscaine*, pp. 72-76, in which is also found an complete list of the many reviews. Fierens also emphasizes especially the nature of medieval hagiography as a literary genre. He refers to studies that analyze it as such and gives additional information that proves the aprioristic use of hagiographic cliches in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

century and would produce tangible results even in more recent times.²⁹ Their precious labor has reached maturity inasmuch as it has given us a complete catalog of the writings that can be regarded as sources for the life of Francis of Assisi. Of course this catalog can be improved, but it has opened new horizons for philological research based on the new editions of the texts.

But the exegesis of these texts remained hidebound by the conventional approaches, despite the signals that were coming from biblical exegesis, which was in full flower. Here a profound and in some ways revolutionary change in methodology was taking place.

Karl-Ludwig Schmidt, a few years after the publication of his Der Rahmen der Geschichte Jesu (Berlin 1919), proposed the use of Formgeschichte on the sources for the life of Francis and gave some clear, though brief, examples. He began with parallels between the Francis Quest/Jesus Quest and the Francis Tradition/Jesus Tradition. Such an association was far from new in Franciscan studies. As Schmidt emphasized, its remote historical roots lay in the late fifteenth-century Book of Conformities. But the Francis Tradition—to use that example—has earlier antecedents and can be traced back to the first formulation of the Francis legend. 31

Schmidt even speaks of a "synoptic question." He is referring to one of the basic elements of the Francis Quest, which to him seemed caught in a vicious circle of contradictory hypotheses. What struck him most was the great confusion. The endless back-and-forth between hypothesis and refutation could only lead to an attitude of skepticism. How to escape from the vicious circle of a Quellenfrage that seemed anchored to the principle that the oldest source is the most reliable?

Guided by Tamassia's still debatable theses, Schmidt pointed to the study of a medieval legend's compositional structure as a way out. In other words, application of a rigorous method of literary criticism, style criticism and form criticism, with special attention to "the actual environment in which groups of

²⁹These editions are from the 1970s: the *Anonymous of Peruqia* in the abovementioned work by Lorenzo Di Fonzo; the *Leqenda Trium Sociorum* edited by Théophile Desbonnets (see n. 7); the *Leqenda Perusina* or *Compilatio Assisiensis* (see n. 16).

³⁰K.L. Schmidt, "Die Stellung der Evangelien in der allgemeinen Literaturgeschichte," in Eucharisterion. Studien zur Religion und Litertur des Alten un Neuen Testament. Festschrift für Hermann Gunkel, Göttingen 1924, pp. 50-134 (especially pp. 106-11).

³¹See Stanislao da Campagnola, L'anqelo del sesto siqillo e "l'alter Christus." Genesi e sviluppo di due temi francescani nei secoli XIII-XIV, Rome 1971 (Studies and Researches. Franciscan Institute of Spirituality. Pontifical University Antonianum).

sayings and collections of stories were composed."³² He goes on: "One always just discusses the sources for the story of Francis, instead of first evaluating these sources as an expression of the Franciscan movement." There is the history of the traditions, or better, of the context in which the individual traditions—the *loqia* and stories about Francis—were formed, transformed and developed. This means we must abandon the traditional kind of research on "the sources for the story of St. Francis" (this is the title of Goetz's work). We must consider them and study them as expressions of the development of Franciscan devotion.

This was certainly asking too much. Perhaps it still is. Schmidt himself, in a study that ranges from Greek biography to Goethe and Buber, made a few general observations on the specific purpose and characteristics of the first

biographies of St. Francis.33

Schmidt's suggestions could scarcely arouse controversy, given their dry theoretical formulation. This was no great calamity, seeing that by now the atmosphere surrounding early Franciscan studies had been poisoned by controversies that were frequently bitter. Unfortunately Schmidt received no response at all, save for Ernesto Bonaiuti's positive reaction. With a few brilliant exceptions, 34 in the first decades of this century the only ones free to move in the area of exegetical renewal were those who had been freed from rigid ideological and religious categories.

We would need to wait until the 1960s before we could see a definite change in the style of exegesis in studies of St. Francis. These are the years of the careful and in many ways ingenious studies by Sophronius Clasen on the Legends of St. Francis. A few titles will suffice to indicate the change in interpretation. First of all Vom Franziskus der Legende zum Franziskus der Geschichte. Then Franziskus Engel des sechsten Siegel: Sein Leben nach den

³²p. 109.

³³Schmidt's observations tend to show that the composite structure of the first Franciscan Legendae (1 and 2 Celano, Legenda Trium Sociorum, Bonaventure's Legenda major, Speculum perfectionis) is characterized by a series of episodes that ignore precise chronological order, and that the individual episodes often lack a precise setting. All this is closely related to the purpose of the literary genre, which is to edify, and to the shaping of a tradition that the authors-compilers could not and did not intend to modify.

³⁴Remaining in the field of hagiography, among Catholics we can recall the studies of Hippolyte Delehaye on Les Légendes haqioqraphiques (Brussels 1905) and on Les origines du culte des Martyrs (Brussels 1912) and Harttman Grisar. In this regard see the information given by Fierens, La question franciscaine, p. 75.

³⁵ Wissenschaft und Weisheit 29 (1966) pp. 15-29.

Schriften des heilegen Bonaventura.³⁶ This work emphasizes the process of transformation wrought by Bonaventure, where the word nach recalls the word secundum in the titles of the gospels. Finally there is Die franziskanische Biographie als literarische Gattung.³⁷ Perhaps even more noteworthy is the title of Chapter III of the abovementioned Legenda antiqua: Der Sitz der "Legenda antiqua S. Francisci" im Leben. This expression takes us directly back to the method of Formgeschichte.

Experts in this field scarcely need to be reminded of the influence and special qualities of Clasen's research. His meticulous philological rigor placed him among those scholars who had tried to resolve the Franciscan Question with the tried-and-true methods of literary-philological criticism. But in some respects Clasen attempted to move away from that tradition, or better, to situate it within the direction being taken by exegesis in other areas. "In the accounts from various periods that deal with Francis, the Sitz im Leben is of prime importance. Whoever does not take it into consideration will often miss subtle nuances by which accounts of the same material from various periods are distinguished from each other—accounts that appear outwardly the same."

Differences, including differences of nuance, count more than similarities. To discern and understand them, it is essential to pay attention to the Sitz im Leben of the individual pericopes (not just of the works themselves) that originate in different periods. The author had already written on the same page: "We must pay attention not only to the circumstances in which they [the pericopes] originate, but also the circumstances in which one and the same account will circulate anew and revive the obvious interest its disseminator has found."

And so the research and analysis must be carried much further. It is necessary to identify not only the circumstances in which the pericope originated (again the Sitz im Leben!), but also those in which it was newly disseminated. In other words, we must reconstruct the history of the forms that the pericope (or account) assumes in each case and the context that warrants its numerous transformations. This proposal is clearly grounded in the method of Formgeschichte, and it comes from a scholar of the Franciscan sources whose

³⁶Published in the series "Franziskanische Quellenschriften" 7, Werl-West. 1962.

³⁷Wissenschaft und Weisbeit 31 (1968) 81-89. This is the second part of the Erwägungen zu einer neuen Antoniusbiographie (that of Toussaert), which provided Clasen with the starting point for a number of interesting methodological suggestions.

³⁸ Legenda antiqua, p. 314

authority and competence are beyond question. We must acknowledge Clasen's commitment to a consistent use of this method in the more than eighty pages of chapter III of his book, although within the limits of its application to the individual biographies taken as a whole. In any case, his book was not meant to be an analysis of the individual pericopes, nor even of specific relevant parts of the biographical account.

A Test Case: The Conversion Account

A few years before Clasen wrote these pages, François, de Beer published his book, La conversion de Saint François selon Thomas de Celano. Its subtitle revealed its method: Étude comparative des textes relatifs à la conversion en Vita I et Vita II.³⁹ While it is a comparative study, the author is quick to explain: "It would be rather a meditation on some ancient texts that were written with fervor." "Meditation" and "fervor" are hardly the terms of scientific research! Nevertheless, "the requirements of scientific discipline have, to the fullest extent possible, been scrupulously respected."

I have mentioned a pars destruens in the analysis of Tamassia and its results. For those awaiting a pars construens, it was provided by De Beer nearly sixty years later. Actually, Thomas of Celano's work had been the subject of serious accusations by Sabatier even before Tamassia, and then by Alexandre Masseron some twenty years after the publication of Tamassia's work.⁴¹

The opponents had been content to fire salvos in defense of the historical truth of Francis's first biographer, clinging to his account as to a life preserver. But the time had finally come to make a clear distinction between "account" and "message," using the now recognized fact that hagiography, Franciscan included, is always a literary genre. As such it must be situated in its particular historical context and, given its peculiar nature, within the lived spiritual experience of the author and his readers. The only possible way would be that of careful analysis. To this end it would be necessary to formulate a method and "attune" oneself to the source being analyzed. De Beer is especially sensitive to this point: "Before being an historical inquiry, these pages [of Celano] translate a spiritual request." He continues with a quotation from St.

³⁹Published by Editions Franciscaines, Paris 1963.

⁴⁰De Beer, Introduction, p. 9.

⁴¹Les sources de la vie de saint François, in Saint François, son oeuvre et son influence, Paris 1927, pp. 9-67.

Bonaventure: "Of what use is it to know many things yet experience nothing?" 42

But it was necessary to define the field of research and the method. De Beer limits himself to the topic of Francis's conversion. In Celano's two biographies it is a spiritual value powerful enough to give the account its compact unity, while stimulating multiple readings that depend on the narrator's existential context. De Beer's method is threefold. First there is convergence, which raises the question of the story's ambiguity. Then there is divergence, which emphasizes the different existential situation (the author uses the word esprit) in Celano's two works. Finally there is analogy, which points up the conflict between esprit and histoire. 43

Despite the risks associated with such a method, it definitely needed to be tried. Some parts of De Beer's analysis seem very polished, as is its vocabulary, which at times borders on the abstruse. Reactions? I do not think this work has received a sympathetic response in the world of Franciscan studies. But one response must be mentioned here, given the importance of the scholar and the methodological awareness of his contribution. Giovanni Miccoli discussed De Beer's book in *Studi Medievali* under the heading, *Note e discussioni*. 44

Miccoli's initial observation deserves emphasis. There is a void in the middle decades of this century (roughly from the 1930's to the early 1960's) in studies of the sources for the life of Francis of Assisi. The single exception for Miccoli is "Moorman's book from 1940, which has been mistakenly ignored." We have already noted this fact in connection with the reaction of Bihl, who as an editor continued the tradition of those whom Miccoli refers to as the great Franciscan scholars of the past.

But it was the 1960s that saw a rekindling of interest in the Franciscan Question and the subsequent appearance of works that, despite their often contradictory results, were certainly of great importance. Thus De Beer's book was hailed as "a welcome resumption of an old question in new terms." We have already seen what this newness meant. It meant to take a position along the methodological lines suggested by Múller and Sabatier, although in a different spirit. It meant to continue in a constructive way the analysis of

⁴²De Beer, 9.

⁴³De Beer 16.

⁴⁴Miccoli, 5 (1964) pp. 774-92.

Tamassia, and to accept—although unconsciously—the suggestions made by Schmidt. 45

Was De Beer's approach able to bypass a study and comparative analysis of the documents sent by the companions to Crescentius of Jesi—the material that was woven into the Second Life? Miccoli gives a negative answer and criticizes the lack of such prior study as a grave omission. ⁴⁶ At the end of the 1960s such an investigation did bear fruit in the writings of Cambell and Brooke. But their results, dissimilar in many respects, testified to the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of reconstructing the florilegium that the Greecio letter was meant to accompany. As for method, we cannot blame De Beer for having attempted a synchronic analysis of Celano, despite the limitations and risks inherent in such an analysis. At any rate, Miccoli does acknowledge its value.

It is De Beer's Criteria of truth—or rather their concrete application—that upsets Miccoli. It is to his credit that, unlike many others, he discusses the value of the method. The inconsistency between the account and the narrator's interpretation of it "no doubt can argue in favor of the authenticity of the former, provided that the inconsistency is real and not the result of an error in historical perspective on our part."

But it seems to me that to avoid such an error we must enter fully into the historical context that has conditioned and guided the interpretation. We must gain an exact understanding of the various mental categories and the psychological and spiritual dispositions that have led to a particular interpretation. De Beer shows an awareness of these principles. Just as he distinguishes clearly between the account and its interpretation-message, so he is aware of the pressure exerted by the Sitz im Leben on the interpretation and organization of the account of which it is a function. In the final analysis, it is this which interests him, rather than the criteria of truth. It is not surprising that the same methodology is also extended to Francis's Writings. According to Miccoli, these could be a term of comparison for "opening the way to conclusions that are less distressing" as far as the possibility of historical reconstruction is concerned.

⁴⁵Schmidt's suggestions had gotten no response from Franciscan scholars. Clasen would refer to these suggestions several years later in his abovementioned study, *Die Haqioqraphie als literarische Art. Erwäqunqen zu einer neuen Antoniusbioqraphie*, p. 33.

⁴⁶Miccoli 776.

⁴⁷Miccoli 779.

With this observation as his point of departure, Miccoli launches a severe frontal attack on what he regards as De Beer's fundamental stance. 48 It is the latter's radical rejection of "all the various possibilities offered by an attentive and careful comparison" that prejudices the results of his work and halts it in its preliminary stages. Then, despite his annoyance at all the old and sterile positivistic attempts at harmonization, Miccoli sets out to compare certain representative episodes in the biography of Francis. His comparison shows the gradual development of the marvelous element in individual episodes and their transformation in the Franciscan legend into miraculous events. Thus he believes it is possible to detect a restricted nucleus of historical "facts," a concern that is evident on every page of his review. Interesting from the viewpoint of his comparative method is his attempt to identify in the biographies "the elements of the organic development of the cult of Francis." The hagiographic accounts are presented as a "witness to the vicissitudes of a cult, the development and requirements of popular piety, the power of the order."49 His agreement with the proposals made by Schmidt forty years earlier could not have been more explicit.

Miccoli's method was distinguished by its rejection of skepticism with regard to philological studies of the sources. Such an attitude, said Schmidt, resulted from the contradictory findings of such research. Miccoli also strove to discern an historical nucleus in the Franciscan sources, once he had arranged them hierarchically with the Writings of Francis (especially the Testament) at the top, followed by the testimonies of the companions. But which ones? And where to find them? His discussion seems to lead in a direction that was shown by the great Franciscan scholars to be a blind alley. The works of Cambell, Brooke, Clasen, Di Fonzo and Desbonnets, which would appear within a few years, would offer no sure way out, despite their careful and well-honed methodology.

A New Interpretive Image

A decade later, Stanislao da Campagnola pointed out several contradictory aspects of Miccoli's response to De Beer.⁵⁰ A few years earlier, he himself had studied the development and gradual shaping of the image of Francis as *alter*

⁴⁸ Miccoli 781-82.

⁴⁹Miccoli 790.

⁵⁰Le origini francescane, 2nd ed. (1979) pp. 268-71.

Christus in the hagiographic legend.⁵¹ His study begins with the religious hopes and tensions that saw the birth and growth of the Joachimite view of history. Next he considers how the experience of Francis and the early Franciscan Order fit into this context. Finally he shows how this experience was transformed by the vision that accompanied the development of the hagiography and cult of Francis. His study ends at the beginning of the fourteenth century. His method moves on two converging tracks: 1) the biographies understood as celebratory interpretations, and 2) the constant insertion of each interpretation into the historical and psychological context in which it is situated.

But it is precisely in the area of method that the author shows a certain weakness and ambiguity, especially when his rules of logic oblige him to reconstruct the experience of Francis and the first Franciscans. He is clearly reluctant to use the biographies as faithful accounts of the actual historical events, when they show evidence of containing interpretive elements. Thus the pieces of his mosaic come from a rather uncritical—or at any rate amorphous—juxtaposition of Francis's Writings (especially the Rules and Testament) and a great number of biographical sources.

Hesitation and weakness notwithstanding, this book shows how by the early 1970's it was finally accepted that we must extract from the biographies a message that has been shaped to fit contemporary expectations. These in turn must be deciphered and isolated if we are to understand the message. The work of Stanislao da Campagnola signaled the end of a tortuous journey, one which had seen a great deal of backtracking. The author's hesitations in method are one example of this and by no means the last.

New Readings

With the first meeting in 1973 of the International Society for Franciscan Studies, we return to the Franciscan Question. The topics of the papers indicated clearly their intention to consider it as a now distant historical problem: Sabatier, Goetz, the Umbrian historians, and Van Ortroy. Along with Edith Pásztor's paper on the Leonine writings, the concluding Round Table discussion (Moorman, Brooke and Clasen) provided the opportunity for a comparison of recent positions.

The discussion revealed that questions of method revolved around interpretation of the biographies, understood as part of a particular literary genre,

⁵¹ See his work cited in n. 31.

that of medieval hagiography. But the point of tension turned out to be the relationship between hagiographic interpretation and historical truth. Taking it as a given fact—though not without some opposition 52—that the Legends belong to the genre of medieval hagiography, the question was raised as to which method to use to discover the historical nucleus. Significantly, questions of a philological nature were largely avoided. 53 Instead another proposal was made—to subject the biographical sources to structural analysis. 54 It was merely a proposal, formulated in general terms, and the examples went beyond exclusively methodological categories. But it was an indication of the inadequacy of the old methods and a stimulus to conduct, or at least integrate, the research by using new approaches.

I could conclude here by referring to what I have written elsewhere for what follows. So But something should be added by way of supplement. During the past decade there have been no strictly philological contributions to the Franciscan Question. This does not mean that the problem of interdependence of the sources has been ignored. The abovementioned work by Causse is only the most recent attempt to arrange the sources in chronological order by analyzing them so as to discover their mutual dependence. But the latest research on the Franciscan Question seems mostly concerned with reconstructing the traditions of Francis's companions. This is the goal of several important studies: Raoul Manselli (We Who Were with Him) Sources

⁵² See for example, the remarks of Giovanni Odoardi, pp. 29, 32-33 of the Acts mentioned in n. 2.

⁵³Lorenzo Di Fonzo was practically the only one to bring them up in the discussion of the papers by Philippart and Pasztor and at the Round Table (Acts, pp. 40-41, 48-50, 233-34). But there were other comments that began with philological considerations, especially those by Moorman and Brooke at the Round Table (Acts, pp. 217-24).

⁵⁴See the remarks by Luigi Pellegrini, Gérome Poulenc and Guy Philippart at the Round Table (Acts, pp. 227-32, 237-41).

SS Considerazioni e proposte methodologiche per una analisi delle fonti francescane, in Laurentianum 18 (1977) pp. 292-313; Studi recenti sulle fonti francescane, in Quaderni Medievali 14 (1982) pp. 236-51.

⁵⁶To the best of my knowledge, the only work of this kind is the edition of the "Compilazione parigina" (Par. lat. 12707) by Marian Michalczyk, *Une compilation parisienne des sources primitives franciscaines*. Paris, Nationale, ms. lat. 12707, Grottaferrata (Rome) 1983 (taken from *Archivum FFrancescanum Historicum* 74 [1981] -76 [1983]).

⁵⁷R. Manselli, Nos qui cm eo fuimus. Contributo alla questione francescana, Library of the Capuchin Historical Institute 28 (Rome, 1980). Among Manselli's recent works on this subject, see also "Tradizione orale e redazione scritta a proposito di Francesco d'Assisi," in Miscellanea di studi in onorre di Vittore Branca, I. Dal Medioevo al Patrarca Florence, 1983). (Library of "Archivum Romanicum" founded by Giulio Bertoni. Series I: History, Literature, DPaleography 178) 17-27).

Pasztor, 58 Giuseppe Nanni, 59 and Maurice Causse. 60

In keeping with our discussion here, it seems to me that we should emphasize Manselli's call for an examination of the Franciscan Question using new methods. Only such new approaches can enable us to find a way out of our blind alley. This is the gist of Manselli's long introduction, with its suggestion of Formqeschichte as a possible way out. Concretely speaking, how did he apply this method to his analysis of the pericopes in question? What are the possible weak points in his application? Possible alternatives? I do not want to repeat what I have already written. I would merely say that our disagreement over how exactly to apply the method could have stimulated a fruitful discussion, had it not been cut short by Manselli's sudden death. Despite our differences of opinion, our human and professional relationships went beyond mere politeness to a level of deep cordiality. I have also written elsewhere concerning Pásztor.

With regard to Nanni, it suffices here to recall that his two articles dealing with Manselli's book are little more than an impassioned defense of Thomas of Celano, whom he tries to rehabilitate as a witness equal in value to the companions "We who were with him." His study of the Leqend of the Three Companions attempts in its own way to resolve the old questions about the authenticity and date of the Leqend, its relation to Celano's Lives, the strands of oral tradition and the joining of this tradition in the written sources. His method is historical-critical, at least as far as its propositions are concerned. It

⁵⁸See especially "Frate Leone testimone di S. Francesco," in *Collectanea Francescana* 50 (1980) 36-84.

⁵⁹See his remarks on Manselli's book: Qualche domanda al Prof. Manselli in relazione alla sua opera "Nos cum eo fuimus" in Frate Francesco 48 (1981) pp. 168-78; Fra Tommaso da Celano e le pericopi "Nos qui cum eo fuimus" in Studi Franciscani 80 (1983) pp. 59-125, and his study Rilettura della leqqenda dei tre compaqni, in SF 79 (1982) pp. 65-114.

⁶⁰See n. 13.

⁶¹In addition to the abovementioned survey in Quaderni Medievali (especially pp. 242-46), see chapter 1 of Insediamenti francescani nell'Italia del Duecento, Rome 1984 (Franciscan Institute of Spirituality. Studies and Researches. New Series), pp. 17-55.

⁶²I wish to mention here a note in a posthumous publication by Raoul Manselli, *Tommaso da Celano nella ricerca storiografica*, in *Tommaso da Celano e la sua opera di biografo di San Francesco. Atti del Convequo di studio Celano* 29-30 novembre 1982, Celano 1985, pp. 11-28 (n. 2, p. 12). His understandably sharp tone in the face of my critical observations seems to me an indication of the human and professional relationship I mentioned—a relationship based on sincere esteem. There is no other way to explain the fact that, among the critics of his thesis, Manselli chose to cite only the present writer.

⁶³See pp. 246-47 of her article in Studi Medievali.

programmatic assertions made by Alfonso Pompei in his work, Approccio storico-critico alle fonti francescane. 64 In fact we should mention that from the viewpoint of methodology Nanni's work is even more focused and consistent.

I have found one distinctive approach to the sources for the life of Francis of Assisi and the Franciscan sources in general. This method tries to analyze the development of a theme from one biography to another. Its procedure for making concrete applications is quite unique. First of all, it identifies and chooses the terms that will be our guide as we track down the loci where the theme is treated. Next it isolates the different pericopes that limit and define the theme. Then it examines the contexts in which these various pericopes are found and analyzes their overall structures. Next it analyzes the content of the pericopes and their contexts in order to isolate, by means of a synchronic and diachronic reading, their Sitz im Leben. Finally it defines the exact meaning of the terms in the locus analyzed, then examines the special importance that the theme assumes there.

The author's formulation and application of this method were geared toward identification of the original historical nuclei. Subsequent interpretation has exerted pressure on these nuclei, transforming them through the familiar mechanisms of pre-understanding and retro-projection. It is essential to identify these mechanisms, whether they be gradual shifts in interpretation or the historical context in which these were at work. In the present example, the original nucleus to be retrieved was that of the "settled" forms assumed by the early Franciscans. 65

With the variations imposed by a different set of objectives, Roberto Paciocco has used this method to analyze the theme of miracles and canonized sanctity in the First Life.66 The theme is important for studies of the biogra-

⁶⁴Part of the series "Pubblicazioni dell'Istituto Apostolico. Pontifical University Antonianum" 2,

⁶⁵See the first two chapters of my *Insediamenti francescani*, entitled: Le prime modalità ed esperienze insediative attraverso il "filtro" delle Fonti francescane; L'eremo: una specifica esperienza insediativa nel primo francescanesimo, pp. 17-81. It is especially in the first chapter that I had more serious questions about the method used by Manselli in his analysis of the pericopes "Nos qui cum eo fuimus." It certainly would have been interesting and mutually enlightening to continue the discussion. As for my conclusions, there was no lack of dissenting voices. I refer especially to the review in Collectanea Franciscana 55 (1985) pp. 381-83 by Octavian Schmucki. He dismisses my results after mentioning in a brief and general way the type of analysis I used to reach the contested conclusions. Schmucki's dissent was not unexpected, but it should have been solidly based on a careful analysis of my methods, their validity, and my correct and rigorous use of them. 66 Collectanea Franciscana 54 (1984) pp. 261-84. [English translation in Greyfriars Review 5 (1991)

pp. 251-74.]

phies of Francis as well as for the Franciscan Question (which is not, however, Paciocco's concern). We recall how the more or less gross intrusion of the miraculous has been used as a criterion to fix the chronology of the sources. But Paciocco is undertaking a genuine historical investigation of the miraculous element—an investigation that is extended and strictly limited) to an exploration of the theme in contemporary sources. ⁶⁷ Regarding methodology, Paciocco tells us that his original plan was to analyze the narrative structures. He uses the expression "structural analysis" a bit later on, saying that the difficulties of applying it to a text such as that of Celano forced him to abandon his original proposal.

The present writer has attempted a structural analysis of the first part of the prologue of the Legenda Maior, taking due care to adapt the method to the exigencies and movements of the text. There is no need to say any more here. The work's introduction points out the need for caution and the need to show, case by case, different structural patterns, according to the different structural elements that characterize the varied movements of the text.

We have traveled a long and winding path as we tried to follow some of the principles that have guided the reading of the sources for the life of Francis of Assisi, beginning at the end of the last century. Other examples of methodology could and perhaps should have been brought up, but a discussion is also judged fruitful by the doors it leaves open.

⁶⁷Paciocco did subsequent and more detailed research, the results of which were published in *Nuova Rivista Storica* 70 (1986) pp. 597-610.

⁶⁸Luigi Pellegrini, Il ruolo "profetico" di Francesco d'Assisi. Analisi sincronica del prologo della Leqenda major, in Laurentianum 26 (1985) pp. 361-95.