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Dominican Involvement in the Crusader States

James-Francis Friedenthal

Although the Dominican Order was not in existence when the Crusades began, during the thirteenth century the Dominicans developed a strong presence in the Holy Land and found themselves laying the new network of Church administration, as they took over many of the newly created Latin sees, and establishing links with the Greek and Oriental Churches they encountered. Great travellers and great critics, they bequeathed to the Church a closer understanding of what kind of religion Islam really was, what the Eastern churches were really like, and insights into the whole nature of the Crusades just as the Crusader States were finally collapsing. Their findings and opinions may be found in such works as: Burchard's "*Descriptio Terrae Sanctae*"¹; the "*Itinerarium*" of Riccoldo de Monte Croce², and the "*Opus Tripartitum*" of Humbert of Romans.

In 1221 St. Dominic died at Bologna, having seen his Order approved by the Holy See and established in Provence, Paris, Spain, Italy, Poland, Hungary and England. One of the ambitions of his life remained unfulfilled, however: he had always wanted to go to the East to convert the Saracens. Innocent III encouraged him instead to devote his attention to the Albigensian heretics in the South of France and to similar sects in Lombardy. It was left to his spiritual descendants to fulfill his dream of evangelising the East.

The first approach of the Dominicans to the Holy Land came in 1226 when Alice of Champagne, widow of King Hugh I of Cyprus, founded the monastery of St. Dominic at Nicosia in Cyprus, later to become the burial place of the Kings of Cyprus and Jerusalem after the loss of the mainland. Cyprus had been taken by Richard I on the Third Crusade in 1191 to serve as a victualling station and staging-post on the sea route of crusaders coming from Northern and Western Europe. The following year, 1227, Étienne de Lusignan, a younger son of the royal house, invited the Dominicans to the Levant and gave them property and endowments: the new province of *Terra Sancta* came into existence. In 1228 the Chapter General of the Dominicans lists *Terra Sancta* as one of the eight provinces of the Order, and in 1230 the Chapter General in Paris was inundated with Dominicans volunteering for a transfer to the

new province, asking “to be sent to the land consecrated by the Saviour’s blood.”³

The headquarters of the new province was at Acre where there was a flourishing priory until the fall of the city in 1291. It has vanished without trace but was, according to a letter of Riccoldo de Monte Cruce, situated close to the seafront. On a map by Merino Sanuto Torselli in his “*Liber Secretorum Fidelium Crucis*” c. 1310, a church with a tower marked ‘*Fratres Praedicatorum*’ is shown at the crossing of the two streets. Along with many of the churches of Acre, a special indulgence could be obtained there. In an almanac entitled “*Pelrinages et Pardouns de Acre*” c. 1280, the reader is informed “*as Freres preschours III aunz XL jours*”. The second Master General of the Order, Jordan of Saxony, came out to Acre to make his visitation, only to drown in the bay as the ship on which he was returning to Europe went down. His body was recovered and buried in the priory church, where his tomb became a place of miracles so that even years after the fall of Acre the Moslems revered it as the grave of a holy man and would allow no-one to molest it.

At first the Dominicans were not given much scope for work in the rather restricted Kingdom of Jerusalem; by this time Jerusalem and all of Southern Palestine were in Saracen hands, and the Crusaders held Acre and the Galilee. Opportunities came further north in the neighbouring crusader state, the Principality of Antioch, where the Patriarch Albert of Antioch became a great patron of the new mendicant orders, using Dominicans and Franciscans more and more to replace his secular clergy in the outposts of his scattered dioceses and appointing them to his suffragan sees, so that by the end of the thirteenth century the majority of the surviving Latin bishoprics in Antioch were held by Dominicans and Franciscans.⁴ We hear of Peter of St. Hilarion OP being Bishop of Latakiah c. 1260, and of Pope Urban IV in 1263 asking the Patriarch Opizo to give William of Fréjus OP a titular see, as he is sending him out as a missionary and episcopal rank would be of benefit to him.⁵

The Dominican profile in the Kingdom of Jerusalem was raised by Thomas Agni OP of Lentino, former prior of Naples, who went out to Acre in 1260 as legate *a latere* from Pope Alexander IV to mediate between the Italian communities there. To give him some rank for the task, he was appointed Bishop of Bethlehem, by then *in partibus infidelium* but even so a significant move, as it made him the first mendicant to hold episcopal office in the kingdom. Soon after his arrival, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, James Pantaléon, left for Rome, leaving him as the chief authority in Acre to face the danger of a Mongol invasion. Thomas rose to the occasion; he stilled all the internal squabbles and

threatened with excommunication all Latin Christians submitting to the Mongols or aiding them in any way, meanwhile sending an urgent plea for military help to Charles of Anjou, brother of Louis IX. By the time the menace of invasion subsided, Thomas had become the dominant force in the kingdom, which he remained until James Pantaleon, by now Pope Urban IV, recalled him in 1263. However, in 1272 he was back in the Holy Land, having been appointed Patriarch of Jerusalem with full legatine powers by Urban IV's successor, Clement IV. Several Dominican appointments were made at this point: a Dominican called Gaillard became Bishop of Bethlehem; another Dominican, Godfrey, became Bishop of Hebron; and the Dominican Bishop of Sidon, John of St. Maxentius, was translated to the Archbishopric of Tyre. Gaillard had been Clement IV's penitentiary and before that lector in the priories of Narbonne and Agen; he was typical of the talented intellectuals who now figured on the bench of bishops. This was the highwater mark of Dominican influence: Thomas Agni had full legatine powers not only for Jerusalem, but also for Northern Syria, Cilicia and Cyprus; after King Hugh left the mainland in 1276 saying it was ungovernable and retired to Cyprus, Thomas was in sole charge of the Kingdom of Jerusalem. On his death in 1277 Pope Nicholas III tried in vain to secure another Dominican for the Patriarchate, even offering it to the then Master General, John of Vercelli, who refused.⁶

Thomas of Agni had pursued a new policy with church appointments, trying wherever possible to give posts to natives of the Holy Land; hence he appointed a native-born Dominican, Bonacursus de Gloria to succeed the Dominican John of St. Maxentius as Archbishop of Tyre, and made many other lesser appointments. Thanks partly to this series of Dominican episcopal appointments, the bench of bishops in Jerusalem in the thirteenth century had a much wider range of talent than a century before. The church in the Holy Land was no longer a backwater.

Perhaps the most attractive figure among the Dominican appointments to high office was the last Patriarch of Jerusalem, Nicholas of Hanapes OP 1288–91, who was appointed by Nicholas IV, to whom he had been penitentiary, with more extensive privileges than any of his predecessors. He had the right to nominate clergy to all the vacant benefices in the East, including all those which had until then devolved upon the Holy See, so that virtually every clerical appointment in Outremer was in his gift. The Pope had also given him a fleet of galleys for the defence of Acre, to be under his personal command, and it fell to his lot to try to organise the last defence of the city against the Saracens in 1291. As the city fell and the Saracens swarmed into the streets, the

Patriarch Nicholas was hurried by his staff down to the seafront, where frightened crowds were desperately trying to get out to the ships in every kind of craft. Nicholas was evidently a kindhearted man and after he had been helped into his waiting barge, would not let the crew push off but kept yielding to the pleas of the people on the quay and letting more and more jump on. Finally the barge set out, hopelessly overladen, only to capsize before it could reach the galleys. The Patriarch perished in this last act of generosity.⁸

While he was being hustled to the quayside, the Dominicans in the priory of Acre had decided against escape. They gathered at the tomb of Jordan of Saxony and when the Saracens broke into the church, began to sing the '*Veni Creator*', which they continued to chant as they were hacked to death. Of the thirty Dominicans in the priory, only one escaped to tell the tale: Fra Matteo, who took fright and ran down to the harbour, managing to get on a boat for Italy, where he lived to old age in the priory of San Marco in Florence.⁹ The Saracens pillaged the priory of Acre, and in 1292 Riccoldo de Monte Croce recoiled in horror in Baghdad at seeing amid a pile of breviaries and plate a bloodstained white habit, which he brought as a precious relic of the end of the province of Terra Sancta. He wrote a hymn of praise to his dead brethren:

"Gaudete quia pro fide occisi estis! Et eo quidem poteratis fugere, poteratis de civitate exire, quia juxta mare erat noster conventus. Sed voluistis in civitate remanere, ut essetis aliis ad fidei firmamentum".¹⁰

As well as establishing a province in Outremer and contributing men of learning and administrative ability to the crusader Church, the Dominican Order provided a very useful resource for embassies both political and ecumenical. Being an Order particularly devoted to study, from the first the Dominicans had been keen to acquire languages, especially the Biblical languages, the better to know their texts and the better to sharpen their arguments. They had been in the forefront of the study of Hebrew and as soon as they reached the Holy Land they began in a similar way to learn Arabic and to try to understand Islam, with the missionary aim of debate and conversion in view. This knowledge of the languages of the Orient was to put them in great demand, and as often as not, in great danger, as ambassadors. Innocent IV sent Ascelin of Lombardy OP to Tabriz in 1247 with messages to the Mongol general Baichu,¹¹ and in 1254 had the rather quixotic idea of sending some Dominicans to the Sultan of Iconium to explain Catholicism to him.¹² Ascelin got nowhere with the general; he reported to the Pope that

Baichu was "offensive and difficult".¹³ Louis IX used Dominicans a great deal for his diplomatic missions in the Middle East. In 1249 he sent two Arabic-speaking Dominicans, Andrew of Longjumeau and his brother, from Cyprus on a three-year mission to the Great Khan in Mongolia. Louis seems to have placed rather too much faith in a vaguely worded letter from two Nestorian clergy who reported the Khan's commissioner in Mosul as saying he had a sort of fellow-feeling for the Christians. The Dominicans set out, with a portable altar, several relics, and gifts of a more secular nature for the Khan, but when they reached Karakorum he was dead. His widow, bewildered by their arrival, sent them away unheard.¹⁴ Louis IX's main diplomatic ambition was to secure the friendship of the Mongols; it was the balance of power he sought, of the Franks and the Mongols making common cause against the Saracens. Later, in 1274, the Dominican William of Tripoli wrote "*De Statu Saracenorum*", a report for Gregory X in which he put forward the opinion that there was little hope for another crusade conducted from Europe; the Mongols were the only ones who could destroy Islam and therefore the Mongols should be the target of conversion.¹⁵ In 1253 rumour reached Acre that the Mongol prince Sartaq had converted. Louis found two more Dominicans, William of Rubruck and Bartholemew of Cremona, and sent them to find Sartaq and urge him to come to the aid of the crusaders. They found Sartaq in Syria, but he sent them on to Karakorum, where the Khan's widow this time welcomed them. They were eventually sent home with the message that aid would be sent to the Christians in the Holy Land if first their rulers would come in person and pay homage. Their journey back, recorded in Rubruck's '*Itinerarium*', was a pleasant one, for they had been given the status of envoys of the Great Khan, and so received great respect wherever they went.¹⁶ Louis IX always kept by him on his campaigns in Outremer the Dominican Yves le Breton, who is mentioned in Joinville as "*frère Yves li Bretons, de l'ordre des Freres Preschours qui savoit le sarrazinai*". He finally became provincial of *Terra Sancta*.¹⁷

The Dominicans were possibly the only people at the time with any understanding of Islam, although a century before, in 1143, a translation of the Koran had been made by Robert de Retines at the request of Peter the Venerable.¹⁸ One only has to read the '*Gesta Francorum*' or the '*Chanson de Roland*' to see that for the average mediaeval, a moslem was an idolatrous pagan with a god Mahound. In such a climate of ignorance, dialogue was impossible. The Dominicans tried to remedy this. Already in 1236 Matthew Paris writes that Dominicans from the East have sent Pope Gregory IX a document containing an account of the life and death of Mohammed, and the doctrines and beliefs of the

Saracens.¹⁹ Riccoldo de Monte Croce, a fluent Arabic-speaker, went off on a bizarre solo preaching mission on the borders of modern Turkey and Iran, with a Turcoman interpreter. He finally reached Baghdad, where he began to translate the Koran, breaking off, he says, in disgust and never finishing the work. John VI Cantacuzenes, the Byzantine Emperor who became a monk in the fifteenth century, wrote two books against Islam, the "*Apologiae*" and the "*Discursa*"; in the latter he quotes from the translation of Riccoldo, which has since been lost.²⁰

As well as their attempts to make Islam more widely and properly understood, the Dominicans were heavily involved in relations between the Holy See and the Oriental Churches; the task of bringing them back into union with Rome was confided to the Dominicans of *Terra Sancta* as their special apostolate by Innocent IV. They were involved in this field before that, however, for the document sent to Gregory IX also contains details of a visit made to Jerusalem in 1236 by the Jacobite Patriarch of Syria, Ignatius II. The visit had been a great success; the Patriarch joined the Palm Sunday procession, swore an oath of allegiance to the Holy See, abjured his errors, signing a document in Arabic and Syriac to that effect, and asked to be allowed to wear the Dominican habit.²¹ In 1244 Innocent IV sent the province some guidelines for the way to deal with these Jacobite submissions: they may continue in membership of their own church and thus work for unity from the inside, if the Dominicans choose to grant such a dispensation; and it is not necessary for them to adopt the Latin rite or to secede to a Uniate Church.²² In 1246 Andrew of Longjumeau OP conducted negotiations with Ignatius II and drew up plans with him for corporate reunion with the Holy See of the whole Syrian Church. However, when the Patriarch took the plans back to his bishops and clergy, they were unimpressed and the scheme came to nothing. The same document of 1236 which carried so much information from the Dominicans to Gregory IX also mentioned the reception into the Church of a Nestorian archbishop, although it is not clear who *or* where he was. Encouraged by this example, a Dominican mission had set out for Baghdad under William of Montferrat OP and had had an audience with the Nestorian Patriarch who apparently had expressed a desire to be in communion with Rome.²³ In the thirteenth century the Papacy was able to ascertain, via the Dominicans, the great differences between the Oriental Churches and the Greeks and Armenians. The Jacobites and Nestorians were poorly instructed on matters of faith and many of them no longer held the teachings that had been the original cause of their schisms; with them the Dominicans created an atmosphere of goodwill. With the well educated and theologically sophisticated Greeks and Armenians, however, they made

very little headway.²⁴

The Dominicans, as has already been noted, were great travellers, setting out on journeys that even at the end of our own century are impressive. Fortunately, many of these intrepid travellers committed their experiences to paper. The most interesting is the travel journal of Fra Riccoldo de Monte Croce, a Dominican originally from Santa Maria Novella in Florence, who had been a lector in the priory of Pisa before arriving in Acre in 1288. He soon wandered off on his own, crossing the Saracen lines to attempt to visit all the pilgrim sites. By the end of 1288 he was in Cana, where he was moved to pray: "I pray the Christ who changed the water into wine, to turn the water of my lukewarmness and lack of devotion into an exquisite wine of spiritual tenderness." He managed to get to Jerusalem itself and with some subterfuge to the Holy Sepulchre. He returned to Acre but, luckily for him, shortly before the siege of 1291 he set off again, preaching his way across the Taurus mountains and along the borders of Turkey and Iran. From there he journeyed through Mesopotamia to Baghdad, where the news and evidence of the fall of Acre confronted him. In his distress he composed many laments, addressing them to God, Our Lady, the Church Triumphant, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, and his dead brethren at Acre, quoted above. He became too frightened to stay in Baghdad and moved on to Nineveh, where further evidence of the fall of Acre awaited him; he saw some soldiers about to tear up a copy of the *'Moralia in Job'* and an altar missal to use the parchment for drumskins and just managed to purchase them and rescue them. At this point the journal breaks off and it is hard to know how, in these extremely unsettled years, he could have travelled from Nineveh back to Florence, but he did and lived in his home priory, serving as prior and subprior, until his death in 1320 at the age of 77. As well as his *'Itinerarium'* and his lost translation of part of the Koran, he wrote *'Contra Errores Judaeorum'* and *'Libellus contra Nationes Orientales'* in which he gave future missionaries his golden rules: do not use interpreters; know the Scriptures thoroughly; know the doctrines and arguments of the different sects; always discuss with the sect leaders (others may well convert, but they will not persevere without their leaders' example); and, above all, be fervent and constant and moved only by the love of God and of souls.²⁵

Another Dominican traveller was Burchard of Mount Sion, a German from either Magdeburg or Strasbourg, who wrote a very popular work, *'Descriptio Terrae Sanctae'* which enjoyed considerable vogue in the Middle Ages and which recounts his visit to the Holy Land in the early 1280s. He too managed to visit most of the Christian sites in Moslem hands but stayed longer in crusader society than Riccoldo.

Consequently he became sharply critical of its laxity and interminable political intrigues, as well as its supine reliance on western aid.²⁶ Mention has already been made of the *'Itinerarium'* kept by William of Rubruck, the account of his journey to Karakorum and stately progress back, and the report made to Pope Gregory IX by William of Tripoli OP *'De Statu Saracenorum'*. This process of feedback from Terra Sancta to the Papacy, in the hope of injecting a certain realism into the increasingly threadbare idealism of the crusades as they were preached and understood at home in Europe, has as its great example the *'Opus Tripartitum'* of Humbert of Romans, fifth Master General of the Order. This contains three sections, as its title suggests, dealing with the Crusades; the Greek Schism; and Church Reform. It was composed as a consultation document to be laid before the General Council of Lyons 1274. In this work, Humbert stated that he had no faith at all in the likelihood of the Moslems ever converting to Catholicism, although he was prepared to believe in the eventual conversion of the Jews, as this had been promised by God. He listed and repudiated all the reasons that men put forward as excuses for not going on crusades, and urged a new crusade. Later he wrote a manual for the Order on how to preach the crusade and how to meet objections: *'De Praedicatione Sanctae Crucis'*.

The fact that preachers of this crusade must expect cynical heckling was a sorry sign of the times, as was the reluctant admission that conversion made no headway with Moslems. In 1291 Acre fell and the crusader kingdom after two hundred rather precarious years of existence came to an end. The Dominicans had only had a province in the kingdom for sixty-five years but in that short time they had quickly assumed a dominant role in Church affairs and distilled from their experiences in Outremer works that enriched the Church long after the crusaders had vanished, with their insights into Islam, the Oriental Churches, the languages and culture of the East, and, indeed, the whole nature of missionary activity.

- 1 See an article by Aryeh Grabois: "Christian Pilgrims in the 13C and the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, in Outremer", *Essays in honour of Prawer* 1982.
- 2 See three articles by R. P. Mandonnet OP: "Fra Ricoldo de Monte Croce", in *Revue Biblique* 1893, II pp. 44-61; 182-202; IV pp. 384-607.
- 3 Quoted in an article by F. M. Abel: "Le Couvent des Freres Precheurs a Saint Jean d'Acre", in *Revue Biblique* XLIII 1934, pp. 265-284.
- 4 Bernard Hamilton: *The Latin Church in the Crusader States*, p. 242.
- 5 *ibid*, p.235.
- 6 for the career of Thomas Agni, *ibid*. p. 269ff.
- 7 *ibid*, p. 276.
- 8 *ibid*, p. 278.
- 9 in F. M. Abel, q.v. *supra*.
- 10 *ibid*.
- 11 Steven Runciman: *History of the Crusades* Vol. III, p. 259.

- 12 in F. M. Abel, q.v. *supra*.
- 13 Runciman, q.v. *supra*.
- 14 *ibid.* p. 260.
- 15 *ibid.* p. 340.
- 16 *ibid.* p. 280
- 17 in F. M. Abel, q.v. *supra*.
- 18 in R. P. Mandonnet, q.v. *supra*, II pp. 182–202.
- 19 in F. M. Abel, q.v. *supra*.
- 20 in R. P. Mandonnet, q.v. *supra*, IV, pp. 584–607.
- 21 in B. Hamilton, q.v. *supra*, pp. 349–50.
- 22 *ibid.* p. 352.
- 23 *ibid.* p. 356.
- 24 *ibid.* p. 358.
- 25 see footnote 2.
- 26 see footnote 1.

Reviews

ARISTOTLE'S DE ANIMA, edited by Michael Durrant, *Routledge* paperback, 225 pp, £11.99.

This consists of Bks II and III (with a small introductory portion of Bk I) of Aristotle's *De Anima* in a light revision of R. D. Hicks's classical Cambridge translation of 1907, together with major essays on Aristotle's thinking in this area by Thomas J. Slakey, Terrell Ward Bynum, Malcolm F. Lowe, Michael V. Wedin, Richard Sorabji and William Charlton.

My own personal edition of Hicks's translation (1907) sits upon the shelf just above my desk as I write. An outstretched hand automatically falls on it, rather than on the Greek New Testament, smaller and just to its left, whenever I feel the need for a Greek example—be it for typographical, linguistic or philosophical reasons—more or less at random. Frequently throughout the thirty five years that I have lived in such companionship with it this has resulted in my having replaced it some hour or so later having been caught and fascinated once again, not only by the genius of Aristotle, but by that of Hicks in presenting him. All this would have no relevance to this review except in that it might indicate the extent to which I have immersed myself in this translation of the text, and have revered its author—it is indeed a classic as a translation.

Michael Durrant, in this current presentation, stresses the classic quality of Hicks's translation, and argues convincingly for its primal role in this field, and for the value of its being once again presented; but how

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