Manuscript and Material Evidence for the Sources and Reception of Angela of Foligno: an Umbrian Adventure, by Michael Hahn, Sarum College, Salisbury

This newsletter's guest columnist is Dr. Michael Hahn (mhahn@sarum.ac.uk), a medieval theological historian whose work focuses on the early Franciscan mystical tradition. He is currently Programme Leader for Postgraduate Programmes in Christian Spirituality at Sarum College in Salisbury. While researching medieval theology and spirituality more generally, he has published primarily on Clare of Assisi, Bonaventure and Angela of Foligno. His book Bonaventure, Angela of Foligno and Late Medieval Mystical Theologies *is forthcoming with Routledge, and Michael has recently began co-editing* A Companion to Angela of Foligno *with Pablo Acosta-García.*

In collaboration with Franciscan friars, the little-known Angela of Foligno – an Umbrian laywoman who died in 1309 but was only canonized very recently in 2013 – produced 37 mystical-theological texts. The originals, however, are not known to us. While often this is not a problem, in the case of Angela's textual conglomerate, the surviving manuscript versions of these texts are often so different that it has proven impossible for modern scholars to produce a definitively accepted reconstruction of the text. Indeed, the 1985 critical edition by Thier and Calufetti has been heavily criticised and was described by Cristina Mazzoni as "a missed opportunity." This edition was based on the assumption that a 15th-century family of manuscripts from the Low Countries preserved a redaction of the text closer to the original, an idea now debunked. Scholars now agree that the 14th- and 15th-century manuscripts originating in modern-day Italy are much more faithful to the lost original, but still there is disagreement about how best to approach these manuscripts; in 2013, Enrico Menestò produced a new critical edition of the so-called *Memoriale* (the longest text connected to Angela) based on five manuscripts from Italy, while a year previously Fortunato Frezza produced a diplomatic edition of Assisi, Biblioteca Comunale ms. 342, the earliest extant edition of Angela's texts. Indeed, many follow Frezza in considering that this text (labelled "Liber Lelle") comes as close to the exemplar as we could possibly know. The debate continues, and I do not think – excepting with a new rediscovery of an early manuscript – we will ever know which of the versions preserved in this manuscript family is really closer to the exemplar.

My interest in Angela's work has, since being a master's student, regarded her theology in and of itself: what did the person (or people) writing these 37 texts want to convey theologically, and what does this tell us about "Franciscan" (used in a broad sense) mystical-theologies and perceptions of such theologies at the turn of the fourteenth century? While this continues to be of interest, I have recently begun a project focusing on Angela's reception history and, with this project in mind, the development of the text in different manuscripts becomes more greatly of interest. The text is not viewed as a static set of words created in the 1290s and 1300s, but as a fluid textual object circulating and developing throughout medieval and early-modern Europe, impacting theologians and being impacted by theologians. With this in mind, I have been attempting to study as many manuscript versions as I can. (cont.)

I have been fortunate to be able to consult manuscripts from the Italian family – versions held in Rome and Subiaco, a short extract preserved in Oxford and a heavily edited epilogus produced by John-Jerome of Prague and preserved in Florence – and from the Low Countries family – two manuscripts held in the Bibliothèque Royale in Brussels. Still, considerable interest lies in the Assisi manuscript and what it tells us about Angela's very early reception. The manuscript has been speculatively dated to 1308 or (very early) 1309 based on the sense that, since a notification of Angela's death was added to the margins of the manuscript, her texts must have been added to the parchment before notice of her death (on 4th January 1309) had reached the ears of the copyist. With more certainty, we can say that it was written in an early-fourteenth century *littera gothica textualis rotunda* hand and the manuscript contains several marks added to all items in the library of the Sacro Convento in Assisi in 1360. The hand is very neat – perhaps even of a professional standard – but the parchment is very scrappy and full of holes which pre-dated the text being added. This leads us to consider it may have been produced by an Assisi-based friar copyist for his own personal use. While I am a textual and theological historian rather than a historian of physical objects, the physical manuscript can – in many cases including that of the Assisi codex – be very important in themselves. As such, I have been fortunate to be able to consult the Assisi codex twice.

In the most recent consultation, in late September this year, I also had the opportunity to visit a lot of the surviving original Franciscan sites – such as San Damiano and the Porziuncola – and the San Rufino Cathedral (which pre-dates Francis and Clare). In the Upper Basilica of St Francis, a particular favourite of mine is the stained-glass window immediately to your left when you enter the Basilica; this stained-glass window features Christ holding a miniature-sized Francis on the left, and the Virgin Mary holding the Christ child on the right (Figure 1). This window existed in the late-thirteenth century, and was seen by Angela when she went to Assisi on pilgrimage; after seeing the window, Angela – according to her texts – fell to the floor and started screaming out of fear of losing the presence of God. This event gained the attention of the friars in the Basilica, and one of them became her scribe and confessor.

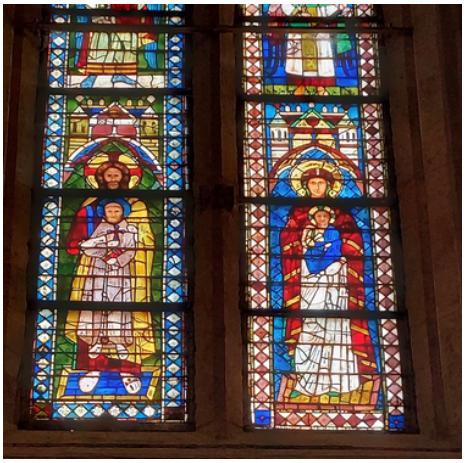
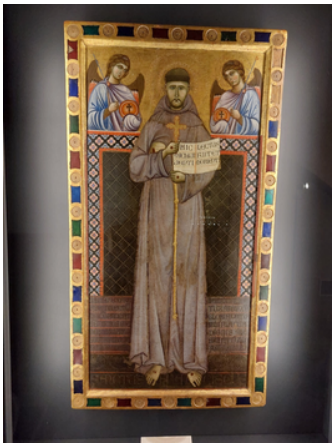


Figure One: 'Vetrata degli angeli.' Assisi, Upper Basilica, c. 1275.



In the museum of the Porziuncola at the Basilica of Santa Maria degli Angeli (just outside of Assisi), I saw a piece of artwork I have studied for a few years which depicts Francis holding a book reading "this was my bed in my life and my bier in my death" (*hic michi vi venti lectus fuit morienti*) and was, according to legend, painted on the wooden board of Francis's bed (Figure 2). Having seen (I would argue) this image, Angela composed a short laud using very similar imagery where she referred to the Cross as a bed: simultaneously her and Christ's marriage bed and the bed on which she dies.

Figure Two: Maestro di S. Francesco, 'St. Francis with Two Angels.' Assisi, Nuovo Museo della Porziuncola, c. 1260.

Having seen scans of this image for years (including having a copy on my office wall), it was quite remarkable to see the real thing and to see the depth of the colours for myself.

A particular highlight was visiting Foligno and seeing the tomb of Angela in the Church of St Francis there. The public tomb – created after Pope John Paul II had preached about Angela – contains a modern sculpture-reliquary of Angela (a common feature in Italy to give the appearance of an incorruptible saintly body) in a glass coffin (Figure 3), with an inscription behind it reading "S Angela da Foligno" (the previous "B" being replaced by an "S" after her canonization), her dates "1248-1309" (although 1248 is completely speculative), and the title "Magistra Theologorum" ("teacher of theologians") (Figure 4), first used to describe Angela in 1624 by the Dutch Jesuit, Maximilian Sandaeus. I was incredibly fortunate – due to a chance meeting with the historical archivist of the city of Foligno – to also be allowed to see (and touch) the medieval wooden reliquary of Angela no longer used (Figure 5). This wooden reliquary is – as far as I have been able to tell – from the early sixteenth century. Seeing this material object raised an important question I had not previously considered in relation to Angela's reception: what happened in Umbria in the early sixteenth century that made people think Angela was worthy of a new reliquary? While I have no answer for this currently, it is the study of a combination of textual and material evidence that will yield fuller answers about the story of Angela's reception and perception than we currently have.

While the figure of Francis of Assisi rightly towers in Christian cultural history, it is important to remember that many female figures associated with the Franciscan movement are also very worthy of study and remembrance both in academic and devotional contexts.

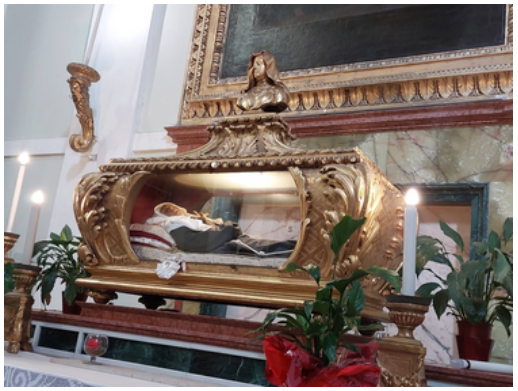


Figure Three: the modern tomb of Angela of Foligno, Church of St Francis, Foligno

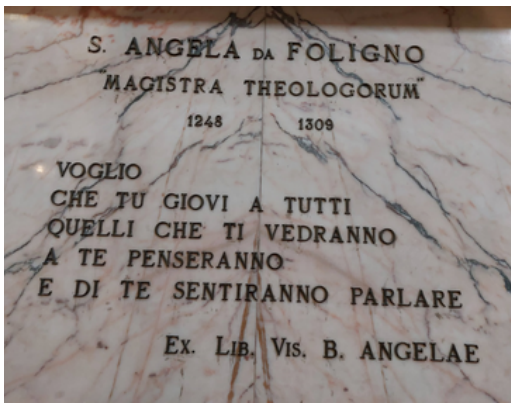


Figure Four: the inscription behind the tomb of Angela of Foligno, Church of St Francis, Foligno

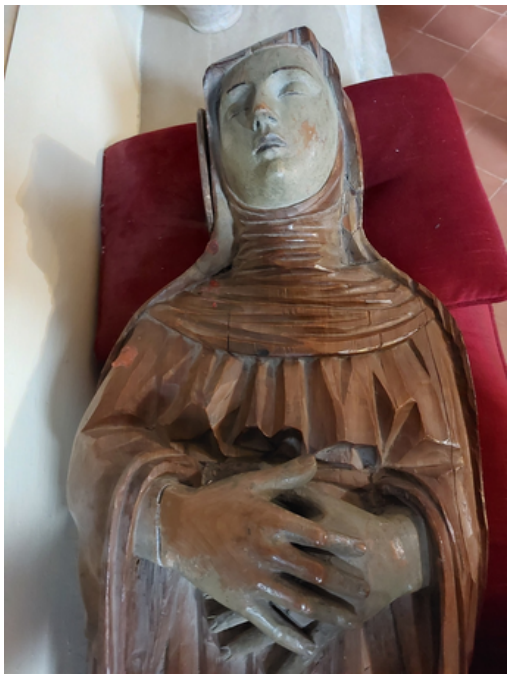


Figure Five: the medieval, wooden reliquary of Angela of Foligno