

A Database for Capestrano's Correspondence: Why and How?*

Luca BASILI 

University of Macerata

E-mail: l.basili1@unimc.it

Abstract: The friar John of Capestrano (1386-1456) was a key figure of the Quattrocento, with a core during his "European Mission" (1451-1456). He was, in his lifetime as (sometimes) still at present a controversial character: Franciscan reformer, jurist, inquisitor, promoter of the Observant movement, Vicar general of the Observance, preacher and a crusader on the occasion of defending Belgrade. It is necessary to definitively overcome apologetic, romantic and ideological interpretations and break through the distorting mirrors at the root of opposing prejudices.

The friar's rich correspondence has been identified as an indispensable starting point not only to read his figure in other terms. In fact, the 'Capestrano-case' – if placed in the complex European political and religious contemporary context – proves to be an excellent detector for the intertwining of religious reforms, political perspectives and the process of making Europe at a crucial moment.

Two objectives are therefore primary:

1. to study the entire *corpus* of his correspondence in a critical edition;
2. to process this *corpus* by making it available to European scholars on an electronic platform.

My dissertation is focused on the so-called Italian letters and my challenge is fine-tuning a database to be then applied to the whole *corpus*.

Keywords: Late Medieval Europe; Franciscan Studies; John of Capestrano; Correspondence; Digital Humanities; Database.

* The paper was presented at the International Conference *Revising Revisionism: Paradigms, Interpretative Models and Heuristic Tools in Historical Research* (Cluj-Napoca, Doctoral School in History, Civilization, Culture – 11 Novembre 2023). It offers an overview of the motivations, objectives and provisional results of my doctoral research: *Una piattaforma informatica per la corrispondenza di Giovanni da Capestrano. Dal campione delle lettere "italiane" al database del Grand Tour (1451-1456)*. In the meantime, the thesis has been discussed in July 2024.

©2025 STUDIA UBB HISTORIA. Published by Babeş-Bolyai University.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

Rezumat: Călugărul Ioan de Capistrano (1386-1456) a fost o figură cheie a secolului al XV-lea, cu un rol central în timpul „Misiunii europene” (1451-1456). El a fost, în timpul vieții sale și (uneori) chiar și în prezent, un personaj controversat: reformator franciscan, jurist, inchizitor, promotor al mișcării Observante, vicar general al Observanței, predicator și cruciat cu ocazia apărării Belgradului. Istoriografia necesită depășirea interpretărilor apologetice, romantice și ideologice și înlăturarea oglinzile deformante care stau la baza prejudecăților aflate în opoziție. Corespondența bogată a călugărului a fost identificată ca un punct de plecare indispensabil nu numai pentru a-i citi figura în alți termeni. De fapt, „cazul Capestrano” – dacă este plasat în contextul complex al politicii și religiei europene contemporane – se dovedește a fi un excelent detector al împlinirii reformelor religioase, perspectivelor politice și procesului de construire a Europei într-un moment crucial. Prin urmare, două obiective au fost primordiale: 1. studierea întregului *corpus* al corespondenței sale într-o ediție critică; 2. prelucrarea acestui corpus, punându-l la dispoziția cercetătorilor europeni pe o platformă electronică.

Cuvinte cheie: Europa medievală târzie; Studii franciscane; Ioan de Capistrano; corespondență; digital humanities; bază de date.

John of Capestrano: the Figure, his European Tour, and his Correspondence

The Italian Franciscan friar John of Capestrano (from now on: JoC) was born in 1386 in Capestrano, a small town near L'Aquila, in Abruzzo. The region, bordering the Papal State, was then part of the Kingdom of Naples, ruled by the Angevin dynasty until 1442, then by the crown of Aragon.

As a student, JoC moved to the University of Perugia, at that time renowned for juridical studies, regularly attracting students from all regions of Central Italy. After his studies, he became a jurist. He was a councillor at the royal court of Naples and then a civil judge in Perugia. In 1416, he joined the Friars Minor, within the Observant branch of the Order. He continued to use his legal skills after becoming a friar and was a key figure in the institutional development of the Observance from the 1440s, when he collaborated with Bernardino of Siena. Immediately after Bernardino's death (in 1444), the first bitter controversies broke out between the two branches of the Order, worsening later, throughout the second half of the century. JoC

took the opportunity to provide the Observant branch with a canonized saint: he was the principal hidden manager of the process, which ended with Bernardino's canonization in 1450. In the name of saint Bernardino, and in close collaboration with Pope Eugene IV,¹ he conceived and promoted a project of Observance, aimed to transform the originally eremitic movement subjected to the Order's hierarchy, in a group substantially self-governed, *de facto* alternative to the Order and openly competitive with it. The group was generally called in papal text as *fratres minores de observantia*, and by themselves *fratres de familia*: all of them used the word 'family' to denote the Observance, and the word 'Conventuals' to denote the other part of the Minors' Order.

In 1451, on the order of Nicholas V, JoC left for Vienna, to meet the emperor, Frederic III.² He could not imagine, then, that his journey over the Alps would be without return. His initial diplomatic task, turned into a European mission, developed according to an unplanned itinerary. From time to time, he faced different degrees of urgency: the pressing invitations addressed to him from various towns and Countries (first, the Polish Kingdom), or his attempts to meet in person the 'supposed' enemies of Christianity (first,

¹ He is considered the author of the Martinian Constitutions (issued at the Chapter of Assisi in 1430) and of the bull *Ut sacra* (18 July 1446), issued by Eugene IV, which established the regime of substantial self-government of the Observance *sub Vicariis*. See Mario Fois, 'I papi e l'Osservanza minoritica,' *Il rinnovamento del francescanesimo: l'Osservanza*. Proceedings of XI Conference of the International Society of Franciscan Studies [Assisi, 20-22 October 1983] (Assisi: University of Perugia – Centre of Franciscan Studies, 1985), pp. 29-106, especially 48, 53; Grado Giovanni Merlo, *Nel nome di san Francesco. Storia dei frati Minori e del francescanesimo sino agli inizi del XVI secolo* (Milano: Editrici Francescane, 2003), pp. 235, 332. On the pontificate of Eugene IV (Gabriele Condulmer) see at least: Denys Hay, 'Eugenio IV,' *Enciclopedia dei papi* (Rome: Treccani, 2000), vol. II, pp. 634-640.

² It was the imperial secretary Enea Silvio Piccolomini who had invited JoC to preach in Vienna. The aim was to pacify, with his charisma, the relations between the Roman papacy and the German nobility after the troubles following the Council of Basel. For JoC's travel, reference is made to the historiographical 'refoundation' elaborated by Letizia Pellegrini for an unfunded ERC project and presented in summary in Letizia Pellegrini – Ludovic Viallet, 'Between Christianitas and Europe: Giovanni of Capestrano as an Historical Issue,' *Franciscan Studies*, 75 (2017): pp. 5-26; see also Letizia Pellegrini, 'Riforme religiose, movimenti osservanti ed Europa. Intorno alla (e oltre la) missione di Giovanni da Capestrano (1451-1456),' in György Galamb (ed), *Franciscan Observance Between Italy and Central Europe*. Proceedings of International Conference [Szeged, 4-6 December 2014], [Chronica. Annual of the Institute of History – University of Szeged, 15 (2017)], pp. 19-36.

the Bohemian 'heretics'). After the conquest of Constantinople, the 'Turkish nightmare' became for many (including JoC) a reality even more raw and threatening than in the past. Thus, 1453 was a turning point in his mission: from then on, JoC was almost exclusively concerned with the totally unsuccessful diplomatic attempt to organize a crusade against the infidels. He saw a crusade of Christian princes as the only means to prevent the Ottomans of Muhammad II from conquering the heart of Christian Europe, particularly the Kingdom of Hungary. However, only John Hunyadi was willing to support this plan and was ready for battle, with Pope Callixtus III ideally supportive of the undertaking. On the other hand, – perhaps in the wake of the recent 'Christian' defeat of Varna (1444) – the imperial Diets convened for the purpose failed.³ On these occasions, the inflammatory sermons of JoC (although effective within the crowds of citizens) seem to have been, compared to the political powers, a *vox clamantis in deserto*.

In parallel with these political and religious activities, there is a constant in the mission of JoC: to disseminate the 'Italian style' Franciscan Observance in the Countries of Central and South-East Europe, subjected to the jurisdiction of the Italian friars since 1447. The Italian observant family had been involved in this commitment for a long time before JoC.⁴ It is necessary to investigate these previous experiences (with more or less success)

³ On the broad topic of 'late crusades' the basic references are at least Norman Housley, *The Later Crusades, 1274-1580. From Lyons to Alcazar*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); Idem, *Crusading & the Ottoman Threat (1453-1505)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Iulian Mihai Damian, 'From the 'Italic League' to the 'Italic Crusade': Crusading under Renaissance Popes Nicholas V and Pius II,' in Iulian Mihai Damian – Dan Ioan Muresan *et alii* (eds), *Italy and Europe's Eastern Border. 1204-1669*. Proceedings of the International Conference [Rome, November 2010] (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2012), pp. 79-94.

⁴ In many of the areas in which he acted, JoC also moved in the footsteps of a confrere, James of the Marches, who had travelled to Hungary and especially to the Balkan and trans-Adriatic regions during the pontificate of Eugene IV; however, there was not only James, but also several figures – mostly still unknown – who moved from Italy visiting or residing in the convents of Central and South-Eastern Europe to govern the local Vicars and Provinces. See *San Giacomo della Marca e l'altra Europa: crociata, martirio e predicazione nel Mediterraneo Orientale* (secc. XIII-XV). Proceedings of the International Conference [Monteprandone, 24-25 November 2006], Fulvia Serpico (ed.), (Impruneta (FI): Sismel – Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2007); *San Giacomo della Marca nell'Europa del '400*. Proceedings of the International Conference [Monteprandone, 7-10 September 1994], Silvano Bracci (ed), (Padova: Centro Studi Antoniani, 1997).

in promoting 'Italian style Observance' (*Observantia more Italico*) in foreign lands, at least as a long prelude to the success or failure of JoC.

The mission had its end point in the victorious battle of Belgrade, fought with the army of John Hunyadi, with the involvement of the papal legate Juan de Carvajal, and with the few crusaders gathered by JoC through his preaching. Immediately after the battle of Belgrade, JoC moved to present-day Croatia and died in the convent of Ilok on October 23, 1456.

Belgrade was the event that made him famous. His role as 'the hero of Belgrade', the victorious crusader, defender of the *antemurale Christianitatis* was what ultimately won him the prize. He has traditionally been regarded as the hero of Hungarian national pride, and for Catholics as the patron saint of military chaplains and the 'Apostle of Europe'.⁵

JoC's large correspondence that accompanied his entire mission is still only partially known, and – one would say – more exploited than studied. Yet it is a fundamental historical source, because it directly connects events and turns of the 'Great History' of Late Medieval Europe, as well as the internal struggles of the Franciscan world of the fifteenth century.

During his mission, JoC was constantly in touch with popes, cardinals, papal legates and other local members of the high ecclesiastical hierarchy (mainly bishops); with the hierarchy of the Franciscan Orders and Observant family; and with single Italian friars. Also, he established relations with kings, princes and nobles, and built a web of local friars who collaborated with him as secretaries, translators and supervisors of the convents he founded or reformed. All these figures became his correspondents, admiring or contesting him.

⁵ «Pio XII in coincidenza con il centenario della morte, lo qualificò con l'appellativo di 'Apostolo d'Europa' (...) riproponendo, in uno dei momenti più duri della 'guerra fredda' vissuti in Europa orientale, il modello di cattolicità rappresentato da Giovanni»: Hélène Angiolini, 'Giovanni da Capestrano, santo,' *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, 55 (2001). Actually, Pius XII in the letter, in reconstructing the pronouncements of his predecessors on JoC, states that the appellation 'Apostle of Europe' was given to him by Alexander VIII, at the time of his canonization in 1690; cf. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 48 (1956), pp. 714-716. The reference to contemporary Europe and the context of the Cold War remains: Pius XII's letter begins and ends with the state of Europe in his time compared to that in which JoC lived. The same Pope beatified Innocent XI Odescalchi, celebrating him as "salvatore della Cristianità dalla invasione dei Turchi" and recalling the diplomatic activities that preceded the victory at the Battle of Vienna. (*Ivi*, pp. 762-778, especially 774-778).

Correspondence is highly intertwined with the development of the mission. In essence, letters were the only communication media with strategic and absent interlocutors; they served, also, to state and manage his meetings. Moreover, the letters were an official proof of his prerogatives (granted by the pontiffs). Finally, JoC's letters expressed his concerns and urgencies, and his personal views on issues close to his heart. Thus, the letters reveal both his expectations and the reactions of his influential interlocutors.

Much of this vast epistolary *corpus* is well known. A consistent number of individual letters have been transcribed in manuscripts throughout Europe and published in major printed works, starting with Luke Wadding's *Annales Minorum*.⁶ Ottokar Bonmann – the greatest systematic scholar of JoC correspondence – discovered that Wadding's source was a register kept by JoC («Ex Reg. Cap.») which, like all Vicarial registers, served as an archive of sent letters.⁷ Instead, the letters received by the friar were carefully preserved in a kind of 'travel archive', as is shown by the fact that the originals – especially

⁶ In the first edition of the *Annales Minorum* (8 vols, 1625-1654) at least one hundred and fifty letters from JoC's correspondence are published. For some of them, the sources are the register of his chancellery-register, documents from the Vatican Archives or manuscripts from the Convent Library in Capestrano. The letters relating to the years of the European mission are in vol XII (1448-1456) of the latest edition: Luke Wadding, *Annales Minorum seu trium ordinum a S. Francisco institutorum*, t. XII, Editio tertia, (Ad Claras Aquas: Frati Editori di Quaracchi, 1932).

⁷ Registers of this kind were found and published for the Observant Vicars of the second half of the century: *Regestum Observantiae Cismontanae (1464-1488)*, Clemente Schmitt (ed) (Grottaferrata: Editiones Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1983) [*Analecta Franciscana* 12]. About JoC's register see Ottokar Bonmann, 'L'epistolario di S. Giovanni da Capestrano nel corso dei secoli,' *Studi francescani*, 53 (1956): 275-298, especially 286-287. Bonmann tried, unsuccessfully, to find the register that should have been in Rome, at the Irish College of St. Isidore, where the writers of the *Annales* worked. He writes that it was probably stolen by a private individual whose name he does not mention. The elements he provides in the course of the article are enough to identify him as its last user: Antonio Sessa of Palermo. The Register is still lost. See also Ottokar Bonmann – Johannes Hofer, *Johannes Kapistran. Ein Leben im Kampf um die Reform der Kirche von Johannes Hofer, neue, bearbeitete Ausgabe*, band I (2 vols, Heidelberg – Rome: Editiones Franciscanae, 1964), pp. 367-368 (excursus 1: *Das Briefregister Kapistrans*). Filippo Sedda comes, in parallel, to the same results as Bonmann: Filippo Sedda, 'Corpus epistolarum Capistrani (CEC): An Overview of the Database of John of Capestrano's Epistolary,' in Paweł Kras – Halina Manikowska – Marcin Starzyński – Anna Zajchowska-Boltromiuk (eds), *The Correspondence of John of Capistrano. Letters Related to the History of Poland and Silesia (1451-1456)* (Warsaw – Lublin: Tadeusz Manteuffel Institute of History – Polish Academy of Sciences, Wydawnictwo KUL, 2018), pp. 35-46, especially 41-42.

those of legal value – are currently kept in the library of the convent of Capestrano, where they were brought back (together with his books) by his confreres, at the explicit request of JoC himself on his deathbed. Moreover, traces of the letters sent to him can be found in the records of the chancelleries of origin or transcribed in ‘national’ chronicles: the libraries of the mission Countries are still largely unexplored mines.

Partially handing down JoC’s correspondence was friar Alessandro de Ritiis of L’Aquila, in his *Chronica Ordinis Minorum* (last quarter of the 15th century).⁸ He transcribed around fifty letters (twelve of which relate to the mission years).

Compared to a relative silence on JoC’s epistolary in the 16th century, the consistent recourse to it in the *Historie Hussitarum libri XII* by Johann Cochlaeus stands out.⁹ Due to the anti-Hussite character of the work, letters sent or received by JoC concerning the Bohemian political-religious situation are transcribed there.

From the seventeenth century, Capistranian source-collections became more systematic: in addition to the already mentioned first edition of the *Annales Minorum* (1625-1654), the strongest impetus for the systematic collection and transcription of correspondence was the resumption of the job around his canonisation process. JoC had died almost two centuries earlier. In the absence of eyewitnesses to his biography and early miracles, the plan was to proceed with the analysis of his writings and authoritative testimonies in indirect support of canonisation. In this documentary context, letters sent to JoC by the ‘very important persons’ of his time were transcribed in the so-called *Liber Epistolarum* (c. 1623).¹⁰ Moreover, in 1680, the General Minister

⁸ L’Aquila, Archivio di Stato, ms. S73. Single pieces of the *Chronica* have been published by Aniceto Chiappini, ‘De vita et scriptis Fr. Alexandri de Riciis,’ *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum*, 20 (1927), pp. 314-355, 563-574; *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum*, 21(1928), pp. 86-103, 289-291. The Observant chronicler (a member of the L’Aquila convent of St. Bernardine), for the JoC letters probably resorted to materials preserved in Capestrano and now lost. The criterion for selecting the letters he transcribed is to focus on the conflict with the Conventual friars (particularly exacerbated in L’Aquila, where it broke out in 1452).

⁹ Johann Cochlaeus, *Historiae Hussitarum libri duodecim (...) quibus adiuncti sunt* (Moguntiam: apud S. Victorem prope, 1549).

¹⁰ When the trial resumed, in 1623, the reliquary kept in the chapel of the convent in Capestrano was opened and many letters were found. Some of them, selected according to the rank and importance of the senders, became judicial documents and formed the *Liber epistolarum*.

charged friar Antonio Sessa of Palermo with a new compilation of JoC's *opera omnia*, known as *Collectio Aracelitana*:¹¹ and among his Works, the letters are also transcribed.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the uses of JoC's correspondence, and thus the edition of some of his letters, took another direction, which we would call selective on a territorial basis. Alongside partial editions, however, also great works contained the transcript of many letters: e.g. Amandus Hermann's *Capistranus triumphans*,¹² and the critical masterpiece of the dossier in the *Acta Sanctorum*.¹³

In the twentieth century – for the fifth centenary of JoC's death – the Franciscan Order promoted a systematic interest in his figure. A *Commissio Capestraniana*¹⁴ was then established, which decided to focus initially on the

This collection, in the first manuscript identified – coming from the Jesuit College of Rome – has the title *Epistolae summorum pontificorum, cardinalium, episcoporum, presbyterorum, regum, principum, aliorumque personarum missae ad beatum Ioannem de Capestrano, Ordinis Minorum*. It was rediscovered at the end of the 19th century by the Czech historian Ferdinand Tadra. It contains about one hundred letters to JoC, written by illustrious personalities, both ecclesiastical and secular, and transcribed in the hierarchical order of the senders (*Liber epistolarum B. Johannis de Capistrano*, Rome, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, ms. 2468, ex Ges. 339).

¹¹ The realisation of the *Collectio Aracelitana* took twenty-five years. It therefore lasted much longer than the canonisation of JoC (1690). The monumental work includes two tomes devoted to the correspondence: vol. I, t. 1/a letters received; vol. V t. 3 letters sent. As the work is intended to attest to the candidate's orthodoxy, the letters are ordered according to their genre and content. The work is easily accessible in anastatic reprint: *Opera omnia sancti Ioannis a Capistrano*, Giacinto Marinangeli (ed) [5 vols. – facsimile reproduction of the *Collectio Aracelitana* compiled by Antonio Sessa of Palermo (Rome, Aracoeli Provincial Archives, 1700] (L'Aquila: Provincia di S. Bernardino da Siena dei frati minori in Abruzzo, 1985).

¹² Amandus Hermann, *Capistranus triumphans, seu Historia fundamentalis de sancto Joanne Capistrano, Ordinis Minorum insigni regularis observantiae propagatore* (Coloniae: apud Balthasarem Joachimum Endterum, 1700). The work is divided into 38 sections, each consisting of a series of chapters, in which many letters are copied but without stating the source. In any case, Hermann's compilation is valuable, at least for the abundance of material.

¹³ *Acta Sanctorum quotquot toto urbe coluntur (...)*, t. X, *Octobris*, Joseph van Hecke, Benjamin Bossue, Victor De Buck, Eduard Carpentier (eds) (Parisiis: Typis Henrici Goemaere, 1861), pp. 269-552. The *commentarius praeuius* (pp. 269-439) provides a wide biographical reconstruction, intertwined with the critical review of all possible sources.

¹⁴ An 'anonymous' and out of print pamphlet, dated April 1965, gives an account of the intentions, problems and difficulties that led first to the creation of a Capistran Commission and then to the transfer of the papers and documents collected by the Historical Commission at Quaracchi to the College of St. Anthony in Rome. This decision, taken by General Sépinski

correspondence. Furthermore, thanks to the job of Ottokar Bonmann, the *Commissio* procured a second edition (updated and broadened) of the classic biography of JoC by Johannes Hofer.¹⁵

In the 1950s, Bonmann undertook the research that resulted in the several boxes and files of his 'Capestranian archive': his aim was to give the edition of the entire correspondence, which he was unable to finalize due to his early death (1977). In any case, in 1956 he published an article that remains fundamental, on *L'epistolario di s. Giovanni da Capestrano nel corso dei secoli*:¹⁶ there he provided an overview of previous studies, the work in progress at the time and the outline of the research needed to achieve the task. Besides, he highlights the cultural impulses that led twentieth century scholars to develop a perspective capable of overcoming the secular and multi-directional approaches linked to multiple objectives, shifting interest from thematic collections of letters to the correspondence in itself, as a whole.

In the twentieth century, the first catalogues of JoC's correspondence were finally produced: the Italian friar Aniceto Chiappini and the Hungarian Ödön Bölcskey undertook this cataloguing work in the same years.¹⁷ The two scholars drew upon different sources and adopted disparate perspectives, resulting in catalogues that are not mutually overlapping. They frequently

in 1953, was the fulfilment of a resolution of the General Chapter of 1921, which proposed the realisation of the Opera omnia. The anonymous author of the pamphlet was Ottokar Bonmann: although he did not sign the pamphlet and wrote it in the third person, he can be identified as the pivot of the unfinished editorial project. See [Ottokar Bonmann], *La commissione capistraniana* (pro manuscripto), Rome: Pax et Bonum, 1965.

¹⁵ In 1936, a modern biography of JoC was published in Germany with a trumpeting title: *Johannes Kapistran. Ein Leben im Kampf um die Reform der Kirche*. Its author was the Austrian Redemptorist priest Johannes Hofer (1879-1939). The second edition of the work was edited by Ottokar Bonmann (Bonmann – Hofer, *Johannes Kapistran*, who added a preface and bibliography. The work was the first in the series *Bibliotheca Franciscana*, commissioned by the General of the Order, Augustin Sépinski. In his wishes, a *Prodromus* of the then known Capestran letters was also to be published here.

¹⁶ Bonmann, *L'epistolario*, pp. 275-298.

¹⁷ See respectively Aniceto Chiappini, 'La produzione letteraria di s. Giovanni da Capestrano: trattati, lettere, sermoni,' *Miscellanea Franciscana*, I: 24 (1924), pp. 109-149; II: 25 (1925), pp. 157-198; III: 26 (1926), pp. 52-66; IV: 27 (1927), pp. 43-103 (single volume extract: Gubbio: Scuola Tipografica Odorisi, 1927), Idem, *Reliquie letterarie capestranesi: storia, codici, carte, documenti* (L'Aquila: Vecchioni, 1927 (first published in *Bullettino della Regia Deputazione abruzzese di storia patria*, Serie III: 9-10 (1918-'19), pp. 27-185; 14 (1923), pp. 55-140), and Ödön Bölcskey, *Capistránói szent János élete és kora. I-III*, vol. III, (Székesfehérvár: Debreczenyi István, 1923-1924).

diverge in their dating of letters and exhibit a summary philological approach that gives rise to duplications and omissions of letters. Despite these shortcomings, the two catalogues remain a valuable resource. They should be considered, with due checks for unavoidable errors, alongside the more recent catalogue produced at the Franciscan Institute of St. Bonaventure University (NY) between 1989 and 1992 by Gedeon Gál and Jason Miskuly, on the basis of the Bonmann archive. This catalogue is entitled *Provisional Calendar*,¹⁸ reflecting the understanding that even this work, verified as far as possible, cannot be considered definitive.

Finally, in 2013, in a workshop held at the CEU in Budapest, Letizia Pellegrini, Ludovic Viallet, and Gábor Klaniczay, shared the new trend of Capestranian research with a group of scholars from all the European countries involved in the mission. Thus began a path articulated by national teams, which have already produced editions of the Polish and Hungarian letters.¹⁹ This is the new trend of Capestranian studies with a European scope, of which my PhD dissertation is conceived as a last step.

A Historiographic Turn about a 'Contested Hero'

In November 2012, when Gábor Klaniczay and Letizia Pellegrini presented the idea of a project on JoC's correspondence to Prof. Gert Melville,

¹⁸ Gedeon Gál – Jason Miskuly, 'A Provisional Calendar of St. John Capistrano's Correspondence: I. The Italian Period: Oct. 24, 1418 – May 30, 1451,' *Franciscan Studies*, 49 (1989), pp. 255-345; 'II. Mission in Central Europe and Poland: The Hussite Controversy: June 30, 1451 – May 17, 1455,' *Ibidem*, 50 (1990), pp. 323-403; 'III. The Crusade Against the Turks: May 18, 1455 – December 10, 1456,' *Ibidem*, 52 (1992), pp. 283-327.

¹⁹ The reflections and the historiographical focus that were developed between 2010 and 2013 have been published in Pellegrini – Viallet, *Between Christianitas and Europe*, pp. 5-26; Pellegrini, *Riforme religiose, movimenti osservanti*, pp. 19-36. The development of international research has been recalled on several occasions: for the edition of the volume concerning the Kingdom of Poland and Silesia in 2018 (Letizia Pellegrini, 'The Correspondence of John of Capistrano: The History of a Research Trajectory,' in *The Correspondence (...) Poland and Silesia*, pp. 21-34, especially 26-31), and more recent, in 2023, on occasion of the publication of letters relating to the Kingdom of Hungary (Gábor Klaniczay, 'An Itinerary of Cooperation,' in György Galamb (ed), *The Correspondence of John of Capistrano. Letters Exchanged During His Stay in the Kingdom of Hungary (1455-1456) and with Hungarian Recipients Beforehand (1451-1455)* (Budapest – Szeged: Research Centre for the Humanities, Institute of History – University of Szeged, 2023), pp. 21-31, especially 25-28).

the German scholar had a sudden and strong reaction: “*Why study such an obscurantist and fanatical figure?*”. This question is relevant for the persistent attitude of moral judgment directed at JoC. This attitude is entirely double-sided: he is, according to opposite ideological marks, a living saint or the devil in person; a martyr or a persecutor, and so on. After all, during his lifetime (above all during his mission) and over the centuries, JoC has had admirers and detractors, and drawn the attention of both hagiographers and polemicists. In the eyes of the Hungarians, for example, he was a national hero defending the challenged borders of the Kingdom; for Italian Catholic culture and the Observant friars, he was a holy hero, portrayed with the crusader’s flag. JoC’s haters included the Bohemian Hussites, several Jewish communities, some Franciscan friars who had a different idea of Observance, and the Saxon religious culture, which refused to recognise him as the *longa manus* of the Roman Curia.

The European research developed by a group of scholars since 2013 completely overcomes these opposing interpretations, which had the same idol and made the same methodological mistakes. My doctoral dissertation is conceived as the last step of this research and my approach to JoC’s correspondence shares its assumptions.

The words of two prominent Italian scholars clarify some methodological stakes for the topic (as for historical research in general). Giovanni Miccoli asserted that: «È affermazione consueta che non è compito dello storico instaurare processi: bisognerebbe tuttavia aggiungere che anche le difese d’ufficio non hanno ragion d’essere in sede di ricerca».²⁰ Ovidio Capitani – specifically about JoC – in 1986, stated:

Il bisogno di scrivere una storia “in difesa” non si comprende (...) nella ricerca di una spiegazione storica: Giovanni da Capestrano nella Chiesa e nella società del suo tempo non deve essere difeso o accusato (...) deve essere capito come emblematico di quella società (...) C’è da riscrivere una storia dell’età di Giovanni da Capestrano: non per fare centro su di lui ma per far reagire tutto un contesto sull’ultimo modello che si fosse concepito nella prima metà del Quattrocento.²¹

²⁰ Giovanni Miccoli, ‘La storia religiosa,’ *Storia d’Italia*, II.1: *Dalla caduta dell’Impero romano al secolo XVIII* (Torino: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1974), pp. 429-1079, especially 443.

²¹ Ovidio Capitani, S. Giovanni da Capestrano nella storiografia, in Edith Pásztor – Lajos Pásztor (eds), *San Giovanni da Capestrano nella Chiesa e nella società del suo tempo*. Proceedings

What does this historical perspective mean, if applied to JoC's case? According to the quotation from Capitani, we did not discover anything new; we have simply made free JoC from the iron and golden cages in which his figure has been trapped for centuries. The core of our research is not a new or different moral judgement on JoC's person and charisma. Our concern is the making of Europe in the middle of the fifteenth century. As historians, we have no prejudices against (or for) JoC's actions. Instead, reading his correspondence becomes a detector of dynamics developed around and beyond his personality. JoC is recognized as a touchstone not as himself, but with respect to the reactions – by outstanding personalities – to his political-religious project.

When he crossed the Alps in May 1451, he was not only an efficient popular preacher and a learned jurist, but also a delegated inquisitor and penitentiary of the Roman Curia. He was also the leader of the Italian Franciscan Observance during the years of its great development, in the wake of Bernardino's preaching and, moreover, after his canonization, intended as a ratification of his religious family. JoC managed his mission according to his previous experience at the heart of the Italian Observance, and with relevant consequences to our 'European' theme: he had a clear project for the political set-up of Europe. He was confronted with several embryonic 'national' identities. What is historically telling is the impact he had, and the revealing reactions to his vision.

The letters written and received by him reflect the network built during his mission in several European Countries and are the mirror of his activity: letters written by him are the hidden control panel of his mission; letters addressed to him are the feedback (sometimes really frustrating) of his activity. Only by reading these documents as a *corpus* can one reconstruct the dynamics of action and reaction generated by his proposals (pastoral, ecclesiastical and, definitely, political).²²

There is also a historiographical reason for systematically studying his correspondence: in fact, we realised that the letters are the hidden skeleton

of the International Historical Conference [Capestrano – L'Aquila, 8-12 October 1986] (L'Aquila: Arti grafiche aquilane, 1989), pp. 1-19, especially 4.

²² The reference is here to Pellegrini – Viallet, *Between Christianitas and Europe*, pp. 5-26: especially 20.

in the reference work for JoC's biography, by Johannes Hofer.²³ This work written in the 1930s sounds sometimes like a modern hagiography, or an apology of the friar; therefore, it is ideologically fuelled. Nevertheless, for scholars in general, Hofer's biography is still the 'royal road' to JoC (together with hundreds of pages and documents collected in the Wadding's *Annales Minorum*). As I said, correspondence is the skeleton of Hofer's work: his narrative pattern is an undeclared paraphrase of the letters. To write the biography, Hofer collected hundreds of small cards, one for each letter. These cards were then passed on to Ottokar Bonmann as the basis for his (planned and unfulfilled) edition of the correspondence. Bonmann's heritage has been used by two friars in St. Bonaventure University, to produce their *provisional calendar*.²⁴

A Database for JoC's Correspondence (EpICa – *Epistolarium Iohannis de Capistrano*)

My dissertation was conceived as the final step in the international research on the edition of JoC's correspondence. It is developed in two levels that correspond to different purposes:

- At the informatic level, the aim is to create a database to systematically collect and organise the edition of the correspondence related to JoC's mission (1451-1456). The database is not intended as a mere storage tool or a basis for statistical purposes. It is designed to make possible a full historical investigation on the whole *corpus*; after all, it is well-known how serial reading, and computerised filing allow research paths impossible or difficult to realize on printed editions.
- At the historical level, my dissertation fills a pivotal gap in the project. The volumes of the letters concerning Poland and Silesia, and the Hungarian Kingdom have already been published. A team in Olomouc is currently working on the volume of the Bohemian correspondence,²⁵

²³ Johannes Hofer, *Johannes Kapistran. Ein Leben im Kampf um die Reform der Kirche* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia Verlag, 1936).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6 and n. 18.

²⁵ The related project, currently in progress, is coordinated by Antonin Kalous and Petra Mutlová and is entitled *Observance Reconsidered: Uses and Abuses of the Reform (Individuals,*

while a group of scholars is set up to deal with the correspondence concerning the imperial German lands. The letters exchanged between JoC and the Italian correspondents are absent in this panorama. Thus, since I had to choose a documentary basis to test the database, I decided to deal with the 'Italian' letters. The sample is relevant if one considers the role of Italy and the Papacy in the European balance of the mid-fifteenth century and in the institutional structuring of the Cismontane Observance.

The approximately 250 letters so far published demonstrate the need for a digital collection of correspondence. In addition, the work made to publish the letters has highlighted the difficulties in dealing with the *corpus*, and thus indirectly indicates the characteristics of the database.

The work of the national teams has produced excellent results, parcelling out a huge amount of correspondence that was otherwise difficult to publish as a *corpus*. The wide range of contexts in which the letters were produced multiplies the themes and contents linked to the individual history of each country: this made it necessary to entrust the task to scholars who mastered the history and historiography of their countries, and thus able to grasp (and rightly deepen) local figures and aspects emerging from the epistolary source.

On the other hand, the work by national teams – although necessary – has some limits, foreseen from the outset:

- Each volume runs the risk of producing a partial edition. Due to the difficulty of fixing shared selection criteria, some letters can be included in different volumes, while others may be excluded altogether. Each volume is organized by a 'reasoned arbitrariness' which depends on the history of the Country and the specific nature of related sources.
- The national laboratories follow the editorial criteria and philological traditions usual in each European historiography/historical tradition, but different from one another. The individual volumes are therefore internally coherent, but not homogeneous as a book-series.

Institutions, Society) and provides for the edition of 'Czech' letters. The project was sponsored by Palacký University (Olomouc) and Masaryk University (Brno) and was funded by the Grant Agency of the Czech Republic.

- The production of a book-series – apart from the editorial and financial difficulties – would not achieve the goal of systematic research on the entire *corpus*.
- A printed edition in traditional format fits static and ‘closed’ writings. An epistolary edition, on the other hand, must be updated in progress: open to new documents and the results of ongoing research.

The creation of the database aims to overcome these difficulties (or address these issues):

- It provides the whole collection of correspondence in a single repository, easy to consult according to different search paths.
- It allows the updating (integration, correction and modification) of the documentary series: the dynamic and flexible approach required by epistolary sources, is one of the specificities provided by the IT tools.
- It guarantees the physical preservation of documents, often considerably deteriorated, through digital editions and digitization of the associated manuscripts.
- It allows one to create connections among documents, for multidirectional, polythematic and interdisciplinary levels.
- It provides immediate access to data and information for each document.
- Finally, taking advantage of the multimedia nature of the digital tool, a website could host files and devices that could be integrated into the edition of each letter like GIS (geographical information systems), iconographic galleries, and so on.

To sum up: a digital platform for the study of JoC’s correspondence and dissemination of the outcomes can have the following benefits:

1) To bring order to centuries of scholarship, among works that served a rationale for the time they were conceived. Such works produced pioneering, selected ‘editions’, but they show gaps and/or overlaps and, philologically speaking, cannot fit the requirements of contemporary historiography.

2) The database speaks English: it means to link scholars/users to the previous (and rich) results of national historiographical traditions, that currently do not communicate because they are produced in non-international

languages (this is the case of present-day Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic, Croatia, Romania and even Italy).

3) A database can provide the European network of scholars with a reliable and well-defined documentary basis for future exchanges and historiographical outcomes. This is not a mere omen. The database is an unprecedented achievement, fed by the research of the national teams; at the same time, it is the first step for updated research, fed by the database itself.

4) I would like to end with a cultural topic: all the activities I have recalled are evidence of the need to share research among different European countries and their scholarship; this is precisely the core of the humanistic, multilingual and open-minded approach that is the basis of our European identity.

From the sample of 'Italian' letters: provisional outcomes of the historical research

It is worth noting that the letters that would have been designated as 'Italian' (and thus subjected to analysis by a national team, as were the 'Polish', 'Hungarian' and, in the future, 'Germanic' and 'Czech' letters) were not so far included in the work in progress on the correspondence. This was because in Italy, unlike in the other countries involved, no sponsors or research funds could be found.

The 'Italian' sample can thus also be usefully employed to extend the research on the correspondence and to bring the edition to completion.

To have a documentary *corpus* on which to test the database, it is essential to have a sample of significant size and variety, and this is fully satisfied by the more than one hundred letters exchanged with subjects from and realities pertaining to the Italian Peninsula.

Considering these matters, I identified a *corpus* of letters that could be reasonably (and conceptually) designated as 'Italian', meaning the political and territorial realities – different in structure, borders and governments – that correspond to the current Italy. It is also noteworthy that during the fifteenth century, 'Italy' also encompassed Rome and the papal Curia: an eminent institution that had its own territorial jurisdiction for centuries, yet on a different level, was 'ecumenical-universal'.

Furthermore, JoC was Italian, a collaborator for decades with the Roman Curia, the most frequent destination for him and the friars of the Observance. He had played a pivotal role in shaping the Observance, whose most renowned members had preached in various regions across the Peninsula. In conclusion, while Italy in the modern sense did not exist, the *fratres Italici* defined themselves as such. The physical borders of the seas and mountains could not be blurred: when the friars crossed the Alps or went overseas, they perceived that they were crossing a frontier by leaving the Peninsula. Italy was also referred to by JoC and other 'Italians' in their correspondence.²⁶

I have therefore selected all letters written or received by JoC to/from Italian interlocutors, even in cases where the 'Italians', senders or recipients, were temporarily and for various reasons elsewhere. For example, Enea Silvio Piccolomini, as imperial secretary and resident in Vienna, would be politically and strategically an 'Austrian', representing an authority from the Germanic area. And yet, the completeness of an 'Italian' epistolary requires that he be taken into consideration: not for his status as bishop of Siena, but for his significance in Italian history and culture of the time, and for the activity he carried out in Italy, before and then periodically up to the papal throne. This criterion applies even more to popes. Strictly speaking they are one Italian and one Spanish;²⁷ but letters exchanged with the Roman Curia have the same value in JoC's eyes: they represent 'Rome', i.e., the main interlocutor for the two major themes dealt with in the 'Italian' letters (the *status* of the Observance and the tension towards the 'crusade'). The papal letters cannot therefore be excluded from the 'Italian' correspondence: they are fundamental to investigate the role of the papacy in the European and Peninsular balances and in the institutional affairs of the Franciscan Order in the mid-fifteenth century. Lastly, the 'Italian' letters are the constant backbone of JoC's entire mission, transversal to every phase of it, regardless of the itinerary he was following.

²⁶ Altogether, the term *Italia* has, in the letters I selected, 51 occurrences and has no synonyms; for its adjective, however, the forms *Italus* and *Italicus* occur.

²⁷ Tommaso Parentucelli (Nicholas V) and Alonso Borja (Callixtus III). See respectively: Massimo Miglio, 'Niccolò V,' *Enciclopedia dei Papi*, vol. II (Rome: Treccani, 2000), pp. 644-658; Michael E. Mallett, 'Callisto III,' *Enciclopedia dei Papi*, vol. II (Rome: Treccani, 2000), pp. 658-662.

Screening the correspondence in light of these criteria, a *corpus* of 110 letters emerged, the first written on 6 April 1451, and the last on 21 October 1456, two days before the death of JoC, the sender of both.

Now, I would like to present one of the properly historical results of my research, derived from the search (facilitated by the database queries) on the strongest documentary contribution of the 'Italian' correspondence: the events concerning the structuring of the Observance, the content of the term 'observance' itself, and how JoC intervened in these processes 'from a distance', as head of a sort of parallel workgroup acting from beyond the Alps.

The serial reading of the correspondence has brought to light entirely new dynamics and names that make it possible to rewrite what Letizia Pellegrini called the 'great tale' about the Observance.²⁸ It was transmitted (predominantly though not exclusively) by the 'pro-Observant' narrative of Luke Wadding's *Annales*, among whose sources – particularly for the polemical confrontation between the two branches of the Order – was certainly the *Chronicle* of Bernardino Aquilano.²⁹ What has been fixed by the Observant tradition as the 'great war' waged by the Conventuals against the *fratres de familia*, actually hiding the tensions within the Observance, both between eminent personalities of the *familia* itself (e.g. JoC and the Vicar Marco da Bologna) and with friars stigmatized as fugitives, rebels, emulators (*fugitivi, rebelles, emuli nostri*). They may have occupied a 'grey zone' within the Order, as some evidence in the JoC's correspondence suggests.

²⁸ It consists of the trite history of the Observance as reform, which lines up the hermitage of Brogliano, the 'four columns,' the war between the Observants and the Conventuals, and finally the triumph of the good reformed Franciscans. In several contributions Pellegrini has questioned the relationship (and potential divergence) between Observant projects and practices, going so far as to deconstruct the very internal history of the *familia*. See Letizia Pellegrini, 'Bernardino da Siena, il minoritismo e l'Osservanza: ambiguità e ambivalenze a partire da Monteripido,' in Fulvia Serpico (ed), *Giacomo della Marca tra Montepremonente e Perugia. Lo studium del convento del Monte e la cultura dell'Osservanza francescana* (Firenze – Perugia: Sismel – Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2012), pp. 21-35; Eadem, 'Osservanza / osservanze tra continuità e innovazione,' in *Gli studi francescani: prospettive di ricerca*. Study meeting on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the training seminars (Assisi, 4-5 July 2015) (Spoleto: Cisam, 2017), pp. 215-234; Eadem, 'Observantes de familia,' in *Identità francescane agli inizi del Cinquecento*. Proceedings of the Conference of the International Society for Franciscan Studies (Assisi, 19-21 October 2017) (Spoleto: Cisam, 2018), pp. 3-34.

²⁹ See the recent edition by Letizia Pellegrini, *Bernardino Aquilano e la sua Cronaca dell'Osservanza, con nuova edizione e traduzione a fronte* (Milano: Biblioteca Francescana, 2021).

With regard to the turmoil that threatened the regime of *sub Vicariis* Observance (and therefore JoC's idea of Observant reform) since the 1950s (JoC being absent), two letters – hitherto unpublished, that I found in the State Archives in Bologna – are particularly significant.³⁰ In these letters, JoC uses unprecedented tones and formulations.

In the first one, addressed to the Cardinal Protector of the Order, Domenico Capranica, he says that the familia was 'quiet, peaceful, one, uniform, united' but, after the suspension of the bull *Ut sacra*, it had become 'bifurcated, torn and divided'. It can be deduced that he clearly identified the papal decision to annul the bull of Pope Eugenius IV, which had sanctioned the *sub Vicariis* regime, as the discriminating factor in this metamorphosis. In the other letter – a circular addressed to all the Vicars of the Cismontan Observance – he even lists the names of those responsible for the division, i.e. friars who, from esteemed members of the *familia*, became his enemies following Roberto Caracciolo: Giovanni da Volterra, Giovanni da Ischia, Giacomo da Cagli.

Other names of this circle appear in a letter sent by the Vicar Marco da Bologna to JoC. He claims not to know how to define the condition of these friars: Paolo da Roma, first *de familia*, then *ad vomitum reversus*; Giovanni Colonna *vel de Nexio* who, it is said, had joined brother Robert.

These names (some of which are unknown today) seem to say that the biggest problem was not the Conventuals, but the friars *de familia* who no longer recognized themselves in it.

A further step in the research is possible by reading, alongside the correspondence, the *Chronicle* of Bernardino Aquilano. In it, in fact, a second group of 'enemies' of the 'grey zone' appear, who disowned the *familia* and formed separate communities residing in their own convents. This would not mean that – as the Observants tend to write – they 'returned to the vomit' by choosing Conventual membership: rather, they simply found themselves *sub Ministris* once they had undertaken other experiences of observance, lived outside the *familia sub Vicariis*.

³⁰ The existence of the two letters is not ignored by Celestino Piana who argues that in the envelope of the Archive of S. Paolo in Monte (now kept at the State Archive in Bologna), there were other letters in addition to those he published that were, however, dispersed: cf. Celestino Piana, 'Scritti polemici fra Conventuali ed Osservanti a metà del '400 con la partecipazione dei giuristi secolari,' *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 72 (1979), pp. 37-105, especially 51-52, note 3.

A passage from the *Chronicle* is decisive in this regard:

In fact, the Conventual friars and many friars who had passed from our *familia* to the Convents, and some of our emulators, used two prevailing arguments against us by reason of which the *familia* had to return to obedience *sub Ministris*: (...) firstly, that the bull of Eugenius (...) was surreptitious, and therefore of no juridical value (...); secondly the fact that, because of that bull, assuming it was valid, the Order, according to them, was divided, and therefore the *fratres de familia*, were not Minors friars et friars of St. Francis, but were to be called *fratres bullati*, or by any other name.³¹

Bernardino Aquilano distinguishes the *fratres sub Ministris* into three groups:

- the Conventuals, properly said *patres conventuales*, meaning the friars who always remained *sub Ministris*;
- the many friars passed from the *familia* to the Convent: this is the case of Roberto Caracciolo and his followers;
- some emulous of the *familia*: a third genre that does not explicitly appear in the JoC's correspondence, but that in the Aquilano's *Chronicle* includes at least Lorenzo di Puglia, Sante Boncor and Giacomo di Cittaducale.

The Latin term *emuli* is problematic in this context: does it mean 'competitor', 'antagonist', or rather 'imitator'? The distinction stated by the Aquilano between properly called *patres conventuales* and *emuli nostri* inclines toward the second meaning.

In the language of the Observants, therefore, the 'enemies' of the *familia* were on the one hand the rebels led by Robert of Lecce, and on the other the emulous, organized in various groups that imitated the lifestyle of Observance, but living separately *sub Ministris*. Among these appears Sante della Penna, whom Letizia Pellegrini has recognized as Sante Boncor, the first hagiographer of Bernardine of Siena, as he was the author of the legenda

³¹ Nam patres conventuales et plurimi qui de nostra familia accesserant ad Conventus, e nonnulli nostri emuli duo precipue contra nos allegabant, propter que familia ad obedientiam Ministrorum redire debeat (...): primum quod bulle Eugenii (...) erant surreptitie et consequenter nullius momenti (...); secundum erat quod per istas bullas, posito quod fuissent valide, secundum eos Ordo erat divisus, et consequenter fratres de familia, non fratres Minores et sancti Francisci, sed fratres bullati, vel alterius cuiuscumque nominis, appellandi. Cf. Pellegrini, *Bernardino Aquilano*, pp. 196-199, quotation: ll. 1404-1409, 1429-1432.

Fior novello.³² Bernardino Aquilano relates that friar Sante tried unsuccessfully to grab custody of Bernardino's body in L'Aquila, guarded by the *fratres de familia*.³³ Daniele Solvi has rightly remarked that these events are only seemingly contradictory if one considers the ambivalence of Bernardine of Siena's canonization: saint of the Order for the Friars Minor, later called Conventuals, and saint of the Observance for the *fratres de familia*, with the related controversies even around his custody.³⁴

The story of Sante Boncor can be related to that of Roberto Caracciolo. In fact, in a recent biography by Giacomo Mariani,³⁵ Caracciolo turns out to be the most 'Bernardinian' of the 'ex-Observants': he recounted in the pulpit that he had been miraculously cured twice through the intercession of St. Bernardine; in both cases he had made a vow to preach forever in his honour,³⁶ he had been commissioned by JoC to preach in Rome on the occasion of his canonisation.³⁷ Several elements prove the close relationship between JoC and Robert Caracciolo: looking at the dates and places of their preaching, we can see how Robert followed JoC step by step, preaching in the same places immediately after him;³⁸ furthermore, JoC shows his esteem for Robert on several occasions, for example by appointing him as his replacement in Milan shortly before his departure, as can be seen from the correspondence between him and Francesco Sforza.

These considerations raise a question: had Robert suddenly gone mad in a few months (as Nicola da Fara said in a letter to JoC), or did the Observants call 'madness' (or 'pride' or 'betrayal') his refusal to conform/adjust

³² The first edition of the text was made by Serafino Gaddoni, *Vita inedita di s. Bernardino da Siena scritta circa il 1450 da Fr. Sante Boncor O.F.M.* (Arezzo: Cooperativa Tipografica, 1912); it has been re-published (with correction, introduction and footnotes by Daniele Solvi, *L'agiografia su Bernardino santo (1450-1460)*, vol. 2, in Alessandra Bartolomei Romagnoli – Daniele Solvi, *Le vite quattrocentesche di S. Bernardino da Siena* (4 vols) (Firenze: Sismel – Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2014).

³³ Pellegrini, *Bernardino Aquilano*, pp. 192-195; a similar feat had already been attempted by Lorenzo di Puglia, *Ibidem*, pp. 190-191.

³⁴ See Daniele Solvi, *Il mondo nuovo. L'agiografia dei Minori Osservanti* (Spoleto: Cisam, 2019), p. 41.

³⁵ Giacomo Mariani, *Roberto Caracciolo da Lecce (1425-1495). Life, Works, and Fame of a Renaissance Preacher*, (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2022).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 74-76.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 92, 94.

the idea of observance to the practices of the family? In his choices and in the whole of his behaviour, a Bernardine spirit seems to survive, linked to the primary concern for the unity of the Order. Bernardino had expressed this option in a clamorous episode, experienced with great embarrassment by the Observants: at the Chapter of Padua in 1443, he had refused to elect the Observant Alberto da Sarteano as General and, against the wishes of the pontiff Eugene IV and in agreement with the Conventuals, voted for the election of Antonio Rusconi.³⁹

If my reading is correct, Robert and his followers essentially rejected the vicariate regime granted to the *familia* with the *Ut sacra*, seeing it as a divisive measure for the Franciscan Order. As an Observant – which he remained, though he renounced the capital letter – he was more akin to the unionist ‘reform’ lines quite openly practiced by the two General Ministers, Angelo del Toscano and Giacomo da Mozzanica.

On the basis of these findings and considerations, I can anticipate here, in extreme summary, some conclusions of my research.

1. As Letizia Pellegrini has pointed out on several occasions, the relationship between Bernardino of Siena and JoC diplomatically contained the effects of their divergent vision about the Franciscan reform: an open clash between them was probably avoided only by the death of the Sienese in 1444. JoC took over from Bernardino the leadership of the Observant family, which he managed in his own way. Moreover, JoC also benefited from the death of the Sienese, such a popular and authoritative figure: in fact, it left him free to structure his own idea of an autonomous Observance (having the support of Pope Eugene IV); and allowed him – working largely in favour of Bernardino’s canonisation – to ratify the excellence of Observance, now endowed with a seal of sanctity. In this way, JoC made of Saint Bernardino the brand of Observance, marking a prestigious continuity, which in fact was not so. Now, JoC’s correspondence suggests that the Bernardinian unionist line was followed both inside the Order and among some of the *fratres de familia*. Internal differences emerged in terms of a hard and sharp rift in 1452, when Roberto Caracciolo (note: during JoC’s absence) rebelled against the *sub Vicariis* regime, which was precisely the institutional outcome of the

³⁹ On the events of the Padua Chapter, see at least: Fois, *I papi e l'Osservanza minoritica*, pp. 50-51; Pellegrini, *Bernardino Aquilano*, cap. 9, pp. 150-155.

reform programme conceived by JoC. It is therefore no coincidence that Bernardino's body was at the centre of this controversy: its custody was coveted as a sign of the Sienese friar's affiliation to one or another part of the Order, with the authority that this entailed.

2. The internal struggles of the Franciscan Order, although much studied, have been interpreted according to contemporary and partial paradigms that have remained static for centuries (mainly according to the perspective of Luke Wadding). One of the results of my research is the discovery of other characters and other facets of these conflicts, breaking with the consolidated vision of a head-on clash between two distinct groups (Conventuals and Observants). The 'grey area' of the 'Observants outside the Observance', even if it needs further investigation to make it less 'grey', would also configure in Italy an embryonic form of what Ludovic Viallet has called (as for Ultramontane Observance) the 'via media';⁴⁰ in short, friars who considered themselves Observants even if rejecting the Vicariate regime, thus placing themselves *sub Ministris*.

3. Thus, it becomes clear that, if the label 'Observance' in Italy has always remained in singular and capitalized form, this is only because the possible alternatives to the monopoly of the *familia* have not been structured, except sporadically and for a very short time. Moreover, the brothers who sought these 'other forms' were from the outset rejected and segregated within the same group, labelled as rebels, impostors, 'enemies' and so on: a group in fact not indistinct, but judged as disgraceful. All of them were in clear opposition to what was (and is still traditionally) recognized as Observance: but now, more accurately, it should be called 'Capestranian' Observance, trying meanwhile to deepen the stories of the Italian *via media*.

⁴⁰ Ludovic Viallet, *Les sens de l'observance. Enquête sur les réformes franciscaines entre l'Elbe et l'Oder, de Capistran à Luther (vers 1450 – vers 1520)* (Berlin : Lit Verlag, 2014), pp. 75-124; Idem, 'L'Observance franciscaine à l'époque de la canonisation de Bernardin : un état des lieux,' *Frate Francesco. Rivista di cultura francescana*, 77/2 (2011), pp. 421-431; Idem, 'L'autre Observance: les Reformati sub Ministris et les "Colétans",' in *Identità francescane agli inizi del Cinquecento*, pp. 121-139.