

ALBERT OF SICILY (of Trapani, degli Abati, d 1307?)
Saint, *priest*

The discussion regarding the birthplace of St. Albert has been long and plentiful: Trapani or the Mount of Trapani, that is, Erice? On the basis of official documents, however, the controversy must be decided in favor of Trapani /Sicily/. A *Life* of the saint, composed in the second half of the XIV century, has come down to us in many copies or revisions of the XV cent. According to a base common to the various redactions, the biographical data can be reduced to the following.

Albert was born (after twenty-six years of sterile marriage) of Benedict degli Abati and Joan Palizi, both of whom promised to consecrate him to the Lord. While the boy was still of a tender age, his father thought of arranging an honorable marriage for him; but his mother was able to make her husband keep their vow. After Albert had joined the Carmelites of Trapani, he spent his period of formation growing in virtue and was ordained a priest. His superiors sent him to Messina, which he freed from the famine caused by a siege: some ships loaded with provisions miraculously passed through the besiegers.

Albert was a famous preacher in various places on the island, and for a certain time provincial superior of the Carmelites of Sicily. He died at Messina on Aug. 7 in an undetermined year, probably in 1307 (as J. B. Lezana, O. Carm., with others, suggests). Heaven itself, it is narrated, wished to decide the controversy that arose between the clergy and the people about the kind of Mass to be celebrated on that occasion: two angels appeared and intoned the *Os justi* /The mouth of the just man/, the introit of the Mass of Confessors.

The presence of Albert in the convent of Trapani on Aug. 8, 1280, April 4 and Oct. 8, 1289, is attested by several parchments of the same convent, now in the Fardelliana library of the same city. Here is also found a parchment in the date of May 10, 1296 from which his office as provincial superior is ascertained.

The date of a translation of his relics, said to have been made in the year 1309 or 1316, is uncertain. (This latter would seem more exact, if it is true that the provincial, who is said to have supervised the translation, died soon after, on his way to France to a general chapter — that held, in fact, at Bordeaux in 1318.)

Albert was among the first Carmelite saints venerated by the Order, of which he was later considered a patron and protector. Already in 1346 there was a chapel dedicated to him, in the convent of Palermo. At various general chapters, beginning with that of 1375, his papal canonisation was proposed. In the chapter of 1411 it was said that his proper office was ready.

In 1457 Pope Callixtus III, by verbal consent (*vivae vocis oracido*); permitted his cult, which was consequently confirmed by Sixtus IV with a bull of May 31, 1476. In 1524 it was ordered that his image be found on the seal of the general chapter; moreover, the general of the Order, Nicholas Audet, wanted an altar dedicated to him in every Carmelite church. Even earlier, the chapter of 1420 had ordered that his image with a halo should be found in all the convents of the Order.

With this intense and extended cult, his abundant iconography is easily understood. In it he is represented (with or without a book), first, bearing a lily, a symbol of his victory over the senses at the beginning of his religious life; then, in the act of overcoming the devil, or also, from the XVII cent on, while he is working his miracles.

In 1623 one of the gates of the city of Messina was dedicated to him. He is the patron of Trapani, of Erice, of Palermo and of Revere (Mantua). St Teresa of Jesus and St Mary Magdalen de'Pazzi were especially devoted to him; the Bl. Baptist Spagnoli composed a sapphic ode in his honor. His relics are spread throughout Europe. They are necessary for the blessing of St Albert's water, much used, especially in the past, against fevers. The head of the Saint is in the Carmelite church of Trapani.

St Albert appears frequently in the legends and popular traditions of Sicily. Agrigento vaunted a well, the water of which Albert had purified; Corleone, the receptacle in which he preserved absinthe; Petralia Soprana, a stone on which he rested. The first chapel erected to him was claimed to have been at Piazza Armerina.

In the last liturgical reform the rank of *feast* was granted for St. Albert to the Carmelites, and of memorial to the Discalced of the same Order.

SOURCES. Unfortunately, the life of St. Albert remains filled with uncertainties and doubtful information, because we possess only biographies of the Saint that are posterior to 1385. The Bollandists (particularly Fr. Boschi) tried to put some order into these lives. and to use a severe critical spirit of the pages that they devoted to him to the *Acta SS.* (Aug.. II Antwerp 1735 pp. 215-226) and the *Anal. Boll.* XVII (1898), pp. 314-336). To the various compositions of his life (for which see BHL, I.. Bruxelles 1898, p.38 e Suppl.. Bruxelles 1911. p.12) must be added the Carmelite *Catalogus Sanctorum*. The parchments that contain the name of Albert are In the Fardellian Library of Trapani. *Pergamene dell'Annunziata*. For the vicissitudes relative to his cult, see *Acta* cap. gen., I passim (see *index personarum*, in fine), and *Bull. carm.*, I. pp. 250 sg. 314-316.

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ICONOGRAPHY. The most typical iconographic attribute of this saint is a crucifix between two lines. as he appears in one of his most famous representations: the polychrome sculpture of Alfonse Cano in the Carmelite convent of Seville (XVII cent.) At other times the saint is represented with the Child Jesus in his arms while he drives away the devil with his foot. He is, in fact, invoked for exorcisms of the possessed as also against earthquakes and for the cure sick. The healing of some sick on the part of the saint is represented in the Sforza *Book of Hours* of the British Museum.

In a German xylograph of the XV cent. Albert and St. Angelus flank a group including Our Lady, St. Anne and the Child Jesus; the same arrangement is taken up by Philip Lippi in a painting of the Trivulzio collection, where the theme is enriched by figures of angels. Albert is also represented with a lily in his hand: in the panel of a polyptych, of the Jarves collection (New Haven), attributed to a follower of Agnolo Gaddi; in the fresco of Thaddeus di Bartolo in the public palace of Siena; and in a picture of Jerome Muziano in the church of St. Martin of the Mountains in Rome. In 1515 F. Francia represented Albert at the side of the Virgin in his *Pieta* dated 1515 and now found in the *Pinacoteca* of Turin.

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