

## ANGELUS OF SICILY (d. 1220?)

Saint, martyr, priest

Angelus came into Sicily with the religious who emigrated to the island from Carmel and he died there, according to the traditional data – which, however, seem worthy of belief – having been killed at Licata at the hands of "impious infidels", during the first half of the XIII cent. Since he was considered a martyr, a church was erected in his honor on the site of his death, and his body was placed upon an altar in the church. These brief details are gathered from the Catalogue of Saints, which dates from the end of the XIV cent. or the beginning of the XV, while another mention, gathered, it is said, about 1370 by Nicholas Processi, a beneficiary of St. John Lateran's, speaks of a visit of Angelus to Rome. These items were then enriched with legendary particulars until they formed a true and proper biographical account.

Especially well-known and widespread is the life written by a certain Henoah, who is said to have been a Carmelite and a patriarch of Jerusalem. Reputedly he lived during the first decades of the XIII century; but, as one learns from the errors and from the chronological elements contained in his work, he was, with all probability, a Sicilian who wrote during the first half of the XV cent. and used historical Palestinian sources (William of Tyre and James of Vitry), plus Benedictine and Dominican hagiographic sources, together with the apocalyptic literature of the XIV century. His errors are evident in his ignorance of the topography of the Holy Land, and in his statements that the Carmelite rule dates back to a Patriarch Albert in 412, when actually it was given some years after the asserted entry of Angelus and of his brother John among the Carmelites in 1204-5; further, that Jerusalem was still in the hands of the Christians in 1219; that a young man was freed even from hell by a miracle of St. Angelus; that a certain Godfrey was archbishop of Palermo, while no such person existed in the period assigned to 'him. The chronological elements include the prophecies that are well suited to the situation following the battle of Cossovo in 1389, and the invasion of Bulgaria and of Wallachia in 1393.

According to this biography, Angelus was born of Hebrew parents, Jesse and Maria by name; he and his brother John had been foretold by the Blessed Virgin during the same apparition that decided the conversion of his parents to Christianity. When the two brothers were orphaned, the Patriarch Nicodemus educated them until their eighteenth year; they then joined the Carmelites of the convent of St. Anne, near the Golden Gate of Jerusalem, their birthplace, and after a year of probation they went on to Carmel, where they lived in rigorous asceticism for ten years. Angelus soon began to imitate the miraculous powers of his Fathers, Elias and Eliseus: he made an axe that had fallen into the water float; he crossed over the Jordan with dry feet; he healed a leper; he raised the dead to life; he made fire fall from heaven. When he was twenty-eight years old, after having gone to Jerusalem to receive his priestly ordination, he retired into the desert of the Forty Days, where he remained for five years in prayer and penance.

At the end of this period, Christ, in a vision, ordered him to go to Sicily, to work for the conversion of a sinner by the name of Berengarius, who had been living sinfully with his

sister for a long time and had had three children by her. First, however, he was to pass through Alexandria and take some relics from there. At the prayer of Angelus that the Lord protect the Holy City, he was informed of the future of Jerusalem, of the Promised Land and of Christianity in Egypt, Asia Minor and Southern Europe, prophecies that he was to promulgate in his preaching. Having returned to Jerusalem, where his brother John had meanwhile become patriarch, Angelus preached to 60,000 people and then, with three companions, he went to Alexandria, where he received the relics that the Patriarch Athanasius consigned to him.

He set out for Sicily on April 1, 1219, on a Genoese ship. Near Sicily he ran into four ships loaded with Saracens, who maltreated him and his companions. At the prayer of the saint, fire came down from heaven and killed seventy of the attackers. The others, about 300 in number, were struck blind, but were for the greater part miraculously cured after their conversion. After a stop in Messina, he went on to Civitavecchia, where he consigned the relics to Frederic of Chiaramonte, and then continued

on to Rome. Here, during a visit of the holy places, he met St. Francis and St. Dominic in St. John Lateran's. On this occasion Angelus foretold the stigmata to St. Francis, and St. Francis foretold his own early martyrdom. He returned to Palermo in Sicily and was the guest of the Basilians of St. Mary of the Grotto. He preached there for forty days, after which he went on to Agrigento. In passing through the baths of Cafalà he healed seven lepers (whose names and places of birth are given), as well as the Archbishop of Palermo, Godfrey by name. He preached in Agrigento for fifty days and ended his tour at Licata.

At first in private and then publicly, Angelus endeavored to convert Berengarius, who grew more exasperated at the conversion of his sister. On May 5, 1220, while Angelus was preaching to 5,000 persons near the church of SS. Philip and James by the sea, Berengarius wounded him mortally with five strokes of his sword. Before dying, the saint urged the others not to avenge his death. After his death Angelus appeared to the Archbishop of Palermo and asked him for burial, which occurred eight days later accompanied by various prodigies. Then there follows, in the codices of the life attributed to Henoah, the apparition of St. John the Baptist, who orders Athanasius of Chiaramonte, Patriarch of Alexandria, to consign some relics to Angelus, who was to bring them to Italy and to the Patriarch's brother, Frederic of Chiaramonte.

Henoah's biography merits no belief, even though some elements seem to be confirmed by other sources (v.g., a document of consignment of relics to Frederic of Chiaramonte, reported by F. Ughelli-N. Coleti, in *Italia sacra*, I, Venice, 1717; and the fact that the monastery of St. Mary of the Grotto in Palermo belonged to the Basilians in 1219-20). The author merely introduced some certain information into an imaginative composition.

CULT. Angelus was venerated already in the XIV cent., after the publication of the life attributed to Henoah; and his cult was greatly diffused among the Carmelites and the

people, so that in the general chapter of 1498 it was prescribed that a daily commemoration of Angelus be made in all the convents of the Order. In 1564 it was decided to celebrate his feast with a solemn octave.

His relics were placed in a church that was not Carmelite; hence his Carmelite brothers obtained permission from Pope Callixtus III, in 1457, to annex the church to their convent. But nothing was done about the matter until 1605. Meanwhile, in 1486, the remains had been taken from their casket of wood and placed in an urn of silver; and on May 5, 1623, they were put into a still more precious urn. On Aug. 15, 1662, the urn was brought into the present church. In 1625, in order to commemorate a liberation from the plague, a feast was instituted in August and is still celebrated. On May 4, 1626, St. Angelus was also proclaimed patron of Palermo.

ICONOGRAPHY. About 1430 Philip Lippi represented the saint in the Madonna Trivulzio (Civic Museums, Milan). The saint is also found several times in the frescos of 1472-73 in the Carmel of St. Felix of Benaco. The painting attributed to Thomas De Vigiliis — now in the Carmelite church of Palermo — dates from the last years of the same century. Pordenone represents him in the Madonna del Carmine /of Carmel/ (Academy of Fine Arts, Venice).

Afterwards representations become more frequent. His attributes: his habit of a Carmelite (which distinguishes him from the Dominican martyr, St. Peter); a scimitar in his head; a dagger in his breast; a palm in his hand, either the palm alone or decked with three crowns. The painting of L. Caracci, in the Pinacoteca of Bologna, has a false title: the picture does not represent the martyrdom of St. Angelus (crucified to a tree and with an arrow in his breast), but of another Carmelite, St. Peter Thomas, bishop. Peter Testa, in the church of St. Martin of the Mountains in Rome, has represented him in his vision of Christ in the desert.

LEGENDS AND FOLKLORE. Sant'Angelo Muxaro in the province of Agrigento is named after St. Angelus, because of his reputed stay there. He is also said to have dwelt in a cave in the vicinity which had formerly been infested by evil spirits, who, in leaving, left a large fissure in the form of a cross in the vault. In the same cave is shown the cot of the saint, hollowed out of the rock. At Cafalà. Diana is shown the footprint of St. Angelus, in the rock from which the hot water gushes

forth. At Caltabellotta there is preserved the pulpit from which he preached; at Agrigento there was the chapel in which he reportedly said Mass. He is said also to have been at Lentini.

As is natural, the greatest devotion is found at Licata; he is patron of the town. To the right of the church is the fountain which reputedly sprang up on the site of his martyrdom and from which the devout draw water, especially on his two annual feasts in May and in August. The people of Licata ascribe to him the preservation of the town from an attack of the Turks in 1533 and liberation from the plague of 1625. On this latter occasion it was decided to enlarge the church (already

enlarged a first time in 1564), which was then inaugurated in 1662. Until recently, and partly even today, the feast of May 5 was celebrated with local customs: on the evening of the vigil a boat was burned in the saint's honor; on the feast itself there was the offering of garlanded animals (reduced today to the blessing of horses) and of candles. During the evening, the procession with the urn of the saint – which is surrounded by four great candles on huge candelabra – winds through the streets. In the "Via Principe di Napoli the townspeople yield the urn to the sailors, who carry it on the run, with lighted candles in their hands, in memory of the episode of the Turks, who were constrained to leave.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: L. Saggi, *S. A. di Sicilia; studio sulla vita, devozione, folklore*, Rome, 1962, with an added bibliography. For the iconography, see also: Emond, I pp. 130-136; II, pp. 79-83.

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