

SIMON STOCK (XIII cent.)
Saint, priest

It is not easy to give any sure information about this saint made popular by the vision of the Carmelite Scapular. Our information comes from three categories of sources:

The first source comes from outside the Carmelite Order and is offered by the *Vitae Fratrum* /Lives of the Friars/ of the Dominican Gerard de Frachet, who in writing about the first half of the XIII century speaks of a «Simon, prior of the Order (of Carmel).» This Simon relates a vision Of the Bl. Jordan of Saxony which occurred after the latter's death (1237).

The second category of documents is (1) a catalogue of priors general of the Carmelite Order (the catalogue in its original composition has not come down to us, but the notice on St. Simon Stock is contained in the Necrology of the Florentine Carmel); and (2) a brief catalogue of priors general compiled by John Grossi, who, in turn, took it from a calendar of the Ordinal of the convent of Orange. Both these catalogues are dated at the end of the XIV century and contain the following information: Simon Stock, of the English province, prior general, a holy man well known for his miracles, died on May 16 and was buried at Bordeaux in the province of Gascony (Vaschoniae).

It is not said where he should be placed in the chronological series of generals; only later is he given the fifth, and then sixth place: fifth in the second catalogue of the generals by Grossi, included in the «Avignon» edition of his *Viridarium* /Garden/; and sixth in the «Italian» edition of the same work, edited after 1411, and in some editions of the *Catalogus Sanctorum* of the Carmelites.

This *Catalogus* (and here we treat of the third category of documents), such as we have it today and taken in its entirety, does not antedate the beginnings of the XV century, though nothing prevents us from believing that the various «notices» of the single saints can be older, in whole or in part. Of this *Catalogus* there remain three or four principal editions, called by Xiberta (who re-published them): the shortest (or abbreviated legends), the short, the long, and the Parisian long. They all have a common origin, and it is evident that the longer texts are the more recent. The lengthier texts sometimes provide greater detail of information, sometimes a correction regarding a current opinion, and at other times additional items. Since it is inconceivable that the shortest text, merely for the sake of brevity, would omit information of prime importance in regard to some saint, it must be concluded that, if such information is wanting in any edition, this is the result of the edition's greater antiquity.

These observations can be applied to the case of St. Simon. Indeed, the shortest text not only does not call the saint a «prior general,» but, given the fact that in listing the various names the *Catalogus* follows an order that is not chronological, but ideal (prophets, popes, patriarchs, archbishops, bishops, martyrs, confessors, priors general, simple religious, priests and lay brothers and, finally, women), it lists Simon among the confessors and not among the generals.

In the various editions some details are constant, in others they are amplified, and in others new details are added. The basic minimum of information, contained in the shortest text and also common to the others, is the following: the name Simon, his English nationality, his great holiness and devotion, his prayer to the Virgin that she would deign to adorn his Order with some privilege, the apparition Of Our Lady, who gives him the Scapular, called by her a privilege and a pledge of eternal salvation.

The short, text adds that the saint was the sixth prior general and gives the prayer that St. Simon addressed to the Virgin (the *Flos Carmeli* /Flower of Carmel/). It adds that when Our Lady appeared to him she was accompanied by a multitude of angels, that he died at Bordeaux, where he was engaged in visitating the province of Gascony, and is buried there. Thus, also, some call him St. Simon of Gascony and others, of Bordeaux; but more rightly is he called Simon of England, where he was born.

The long common text adds many other details, beginning with the surname Stock and its explanation (before the Carmelites arrived in England Simon was awaiting them, in prophetic spirit, in the hollow of a tree trunk, which in English is precisely called a stock); then, having heard from one of his servants that the Carmelites had arrived in England from Mount Carmel and had settled in the two convents of Alnewick and Aylesford, he joined them; later, at a chapter held in England, he was miraculously elected prior general of the Order and remained such for twenty years. It is said that this happened during the period in which St. Louis of France brought the Carmelites into his kingdom, and during the time when Honorius III, Gregory IX and Innocent IV, moved by the holiness of Simon, confirmed, mitigated and corrected the rule of the Order, having received the two religious clerics, Reginald and Peter, whom he had sent. Then follows the fame of his miracles, two of which are related: the changing of water into wine, in order to celebrate Mass; and the bringing back to life of a cooked fish. Finally, after the account of the Scapular vision, the text adds that some prominent English personages wished to receive the Scapular and died wearing it. Among these were Edward II of England and Henry I, duke of Lancaster. St. Simon, it is said, died at one hundred years of age.

The long Parisian text provides the same information, but changes the period of Simon's government of the Order to fifty years, just as it appears in Grossi's *Viridarium*.

From what has been said it follows that the information regarding the generalate, the surname Stock and the burial at Bordeaux, proper to the *Catalogus* of the generals, is not found in all the editions of the *Catalogus* of the saints (in fact, they are lacking in the shortest one), while in all of the latter the Scapular

vision is narrated, something not found in the *Catalogus* of the generals. We have, therefore, a borrowing of information from the *Catalogus* of the generals for that of the saints, which latter is also called a *Sanctoral*; the responsibility for the amalgamation of the two sources would then fall on someone who would have wished to enrich the account of the *Sanctoral* with particulars which he believed—we cannot say whether

rightly or wrongly—pertained to the same person. This amalgamation could have been favored by the common name of Simon and by a common repute for holiness and miracles.

However, the chronological indications relative to Simon's term as general of the Order are impossible of admission, in the case of both the common long version and the Parisian version. The twenty or fifty years would have begun in 1241-2 at the earliest, which is the precise time of the arrival of the Carmelites in England. But then how is it possible that Honorius III (in 1226) and Gregory IX (in 1229), moved by the holiness of the saint, could have intervened on the subject of the Carmelite rule? Moreover, the fifty years of the Parisian edition would bring the end of Simon's term to about the year 1295, a period documented well enough for us to be able to say that the assertion is not true.

In regard to the date of the Scapular vision: until 1642, various years were given; then, in 1642 a false document attributed to Peter Swanington, the reputed secretary of St. Simon, was published and gave the year 1251.

The liturgical cult of St. Simon appeared at Bordeaux from the year 1435; in Ireland and England, from 1458; in the rest of the Order, from 1564. Various concessions of relics of the saint are documented, beginning with the year 1423. After the French revolution, what remained of the relics was brought to the cathedral of Bordeaux, and from here other concessions of relics were made. The most recent examination was made in 1950, and on that occasion a notable part of the skull was allowed to be transferred to the restored Carmelite convent of Aylesford in England, where it was placed in 1951. The most recent liturgical reform permits the celebration of the saint's feast in the places of cult dedicated to him.

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ICONOGRAPHY. In the iconography of the saint the scene of the giving of the Scapular on the part of the Blessed Virgin has a practically absolute importance; and the representation of «Our Lady of Carmel» with the saint at her feet is one of the most frequent pictures, not only in the churches of the Order, but in very many others, throughout the world. The episode is repeated according to the inspiration of artists from the XV cent. on, but it is above all in the XVII cent. that it spread most widely. From the Carmel of Paris, decorated with images of Walther Damery of Liège in 1640, to

the convent of the Carmelites of Ghent, for which Gaspard de Crayer painted a picture now in the Museum of that city, from Valladolid, where a sculpture of Gregory Fernandez is kept, to Aix-en-Provence, which boasts of a work by Nicolas Mignard, the memory of the heavenly gift of devotion is repeated in a thousand ways and in a thousand expressions of artistic sensitivity. Nor are there lacking, in this iconographic panorama, works Of Italian artists, among others, Alexander Tiarini (Pinacoteca of Bologna) and, in the XVIII century, J. B. Tiepolo, who painted the scene of the Scapular vision for the Carmelite School in Venice.

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