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Introduction

In the last three decades and more, substantial new scholarly work on John of Capistrano has slowly begun to expose, and to push beyond, the limits of the venerable synthesis of Johannes Hofer.¹ Ovidio Capitani first pointed the way, with a seminal essay in a 1989 volume of conference proceedings devoted to the saint: For all of its interpretive allure, any vision of Capistrano as champion of Christian unity and as the “Apostle of Europe” presumed both a hopelessly generalized view of a centuries-long “middle ages,” and a hopelessly romanticized view of a unified and Christian medieval Europe. And to view Capistrano as a figure fighting for reform and against the enemies of Christendom, even in Hofer’s cautious and scholarly manner, merely replicated the sanitized story of a solitary, saintly hero – a story rooted in historiographical and polemical traditions that reached back ultimately to the hagiographers themselves.² The task, so Capitani, was to resist these temptations, and to place Capistrano in the full range of the historical contexts of his era – plague, schism and war; Observant Franciscan reform; a changing urban landscape, fraught with tensions between Christians and Jews. At the end of the same volume, Kaspar Elm assessed Capistrano’s significance synthetically once again, with particular emphasis on Observant reform. Elm reached similar conclusions. For all of Capistrano’s importance, it was crucial to move beyond focusing on him as a singular hero or catalyst, and beyond Franciscan reform as a story focused on the Order alone. Broader contexts were key: the educational and pastoral

¹ HOFER, *Johannes Kapistran*.

² OVIDIO CAPITANI, “S. G. da Capestrano nella storiografia”, in: *San Giovanni da Capestrano nella Chiesa e nella società del suo tempo*, ed. Edith PÁSZTOR and Lajos PÁSZTOR (L’Aquila, 1989), pp. 1-19, here 2-3.

revolution of the day, greater in scope and depth than even that of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; the power of popes, bishops, princes and city councils to shape reform; the transformations of the urban economy and the rise of civic culture.³

In the same year, 1989, Elm also published what remains an important starting point for arguably the most compelling phase of Capistrano's career, and the focus of this volume: the friar's "grand tour" north of the Alps in the last years of his life.⁴ Long fragmented across many national traditions (Czech, German, Austrian, Polish, Hungarian) this crucial five-year period had received something of a first modern synthesis as the culminating drama of Hofer's biography (where it occupies all of the second volume of Bonmann's revised edition). Elm's essay now offered a fresh account of the mission, and the friar behind it. Elm showed how, through a carefully planned itinerary and carefully staged preaching events, a keen jurist and stern papal diplomat preached, taught, and worked in a European context, in ways that inspired many of the contradictory assessments – saint, strident traditionalist, fraud, persecutor – that have swirled around him from his own day to ours.

As he wrote his reflections on Capistrano, Elm was then taking the lead in a broader scholarly movement to place late-medieval religious life at the center of broader questions about the history of Europe.⁵ Elm's vision is today still bearing fruit in Europe and North America, as a growing corpus of specialized

³ Kaspar ELM, "Die Bedeutung Johannes Kapistrans und der Franziskanerobservanz für die Kirche des 15. Jahrhunderts", in: *San Giovanni da Capestrano nella Chiesa e nella società del suo tempo*, pp. 375-90, here p. 382: "Was sich aus der erweiterten Perspektive besser und deutlicher erkennen läßt, ist die Tatsache, daß sich Giovanni mit diesen persönlichen Leistungen in einen großen Prozeß einordnete, in dem sich die Entwicklungstendenzen der spätmittelalterlichen Gesellschaft, die Sorge des aufstiegenderen Bürgertums für irdisches Wohlergehen und ewiges Heil, das Interesse der Städte, die Politik der Landesherren, die Ziele der Kirche, der Hierarchie und des Papstums, zu einem einzigen Strom vereinigten."

⁴ ELM, "Johannes Kapistrans Predigtreise diesseits der Alpen (1451-1456)", in: *Vitasfratrum. Beiträge zur Geschichte der Eremiten- und Mendikantenorden des zwölften und dreizehnten Jahrhunderts. Festgabe Kaspar Elm zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. id. and Dieter BERG (Werl, 1994), pp. 321-360; in English: "John of Capistrano's Preaching Tour North of the Alps (1451-1456)", in: *Religious Life Between Jerusalem, the Desert, and the World: Selected Essays by Kaspar Elm*, ed. James D. MIXSON (Leiden and Boston, 2015: Studies in the History of Christian Traditions, 180), pp. 255-227.

⁵ *Reformbemühungen und Observanzbestrebungen im Spätmittelalterlichen Ordenswesen*, ed. K. ELM (Berlin, 1989); earlier but still essential ELM, "Verfall und Erneuerung des spätmittelalterlichen Ordenswesens", in: *Untersuchungen zu Kloster und Stift*, ed. Josef FLECKENSTEIN, (Göttingen, 1980), pp. 167-197; in English: "Decline and Renewal of the Religious Orders in the Late Middle Ages: Current Research and Research Agendas", in: *Selected Essays*, pp. 138-88.

studies, conference proceedings and other works have come to focus on the complex spectrum of “Observant” movements that took hold after 1400.⁶ Within that larger field, John of Capistrano at first remained, oddly, a marginal figure. But he is now receiving increasing attention, not least due to the leadership of Letizia Pellegrini, who in recent years has done more than any other scholar to remind us of the friar’s importance, and above all to point to the centrality of his letters, some 700 in all, as an unrivaled source for the history of Europe in the fifteenth century. The letters, as she and Ludovic Viallet have recently argued, are the best way not only to free the friar himself from so many extreme and misguided interpretations, but more importantly to discern in his textual traces deeper and broader dynamics: diplomacy; preaching and propaganda; political power and coercion; defense of Christendom against the Turks; reform of the Franciscan order; purification of the Christian body politic from heresy and Judaism – these are all in evidence, and central to our assessments of the complex transition from “Christendom” to “Europe,” a process for which the fifteenth century is crucial and contested ground.⁷

But before historians can further engage these questions, they must first confront the intractable problems that have long plagued so many attempts at editing Capistrano’s works, and that still block proper scholarly access to his magnificent corpus of letters in particular – the confusing patterns of the letters’ survival; the many failed and partial attempts at previous editions; the aggravated fragmentation of so many national traditions across northern Europe. As Letizia Pellegrini outlines in her contributions to this volume, she and her colleagues have in recent years taken precisely this task. A key starting point has been the archive of Hofer’s disciple Ottokar Bonmann, preserved at the Franciscan Institute at St. Bonaventure University in New York. Building on the important work of Gedeon Gál and Jason Miskuly, as well as subsequent efforts by Jacques Dalarun and now Ludovic Viallet and Filippo Sedda, Pellegrini saw both the enormous potential and the enormous challenges that await scholars of Capistrano’s epistolary corpus. A 2010 essay began the conversation and outlined

⁶ See especially the project directed by Sylvie Duval, Haude Morvan and Ludovic Viallet, *Observer l’Observance Diffusion. réseaux et influences des réformes régulières en Europe (fin XIV^e – première moitié du XV^e siècle)*, and its series of conferences and their proceedings, to be published in the coming years. See also, among many other recent titles, *Religious Orders and Religious Identity Formation, ca. 1420-1620*, ed. Bert ROEST and Johanneke UPHOFF, (Leiden, 2016).

⁷ L. PELLEGRINI and L. VIALLET, “Between *Christianitas* and Europe: Giovanni of Capistrano as an Historical Issue”, *FSt*, 75 (2017), pp. 5-26, as well as the other essays in the same volume, a special issue intended to bring some of the latest European scholarship on Capistrano to an Anglophone audience. Pellegrini’s contributions to this volume now provide a definitive synthesis.

the vision.⁸ She then organized a large organizational workshop in Budapest in November 2013 with the aim of securing ERC funding for an international team of scholars who would collaborate on a definitive modern edition of Capistrano's correspondence. Though the challenge of securing funding proved too great, the team has remained together under her leadership and continues to work together. A series of conferences and proceedings has now been underway for some five years, with more to come, as each team works in its own national "laboratory" to produce a comprehensive, properly edited epistolary. This volume of essays, and its companion volume dedicated to a Latin-English edition of Capistrano's Polish-Silesian correspondence, are the first publications to result from that ongoing effort.⁹

As a scholar of the Observant movement, I first encountered Capistrano through the studies of Hofer and Elm, and have long encountered Capistrano's works in the manuscripts. Curiosity eventually led me to the Franciscan Institute in 2012 to see the "Bonmann archive" first hand – for North American scholars, a collection that remains a convenient and unusually rich point of access to late-medieval religious life on this side of the Atlantic. It was then that I first was aware of the work of Prof. Pellegrini and her colleagues. After my first contact with her in 2013, she has since been graciously welcoming of my modest participation in this collaborative project, and I am grateful to have been offered the opportunity to work with Paweł Kras in editing the contents of this important first publication.

The structure of this volume represents the multilayered nature of Capistrano's epistolary, and of his career. In these sources we see a figure whose correspondence and activity are constantly at work both on a European scale, and locally or regionally. Accordingly, the first part of the volume concerns Capistrano's correspondence as it reflects themes that are of broad importance, in varying ways, across the full range of European religion, politics, and culture.

⁸ For an early assessment of the challenges see L. PELLEGRINI, "More on John Capistrano's Correspondence: A Report on an Open Forum", *FSt*, 68 (2010), pp. 187-197.

⁹ *Corpus epistolarum Ioannis de Capistrano*, vol. 1: *Epistolae annis MCDLI - MCDLVI scriptae quae ad res gestas Poloniae et Silesiae spectant / Correspondence of John of Capistrano*, vol. 1: *Letters Related to the History of Poland and Silesia*, ed. Paweł KRAS, Halina MANIKOWSKA, Marcin STARZYŃSKI and Anna ZAJCHOWSKA-BOLTROMIUK, translated into English by Stephen ROWELL (Warsaw and Lublin, 2018). The introductions to the *Corpus* (by Pellegrini, Sedda, and Kras) offer a concise summary of the genesis and history of the project. See also the proceedings of the first conference, *The Mission of John Capistrano and the Process of the Making of Europe in the 15th Century: The State of the Art in the History and Historiography of Central and South-Eastern Europe* (forthcoming), and the newly-established Hungarian project under the direction of György Galamb.

The second part then shows the working out of those same themes regionally and locally, in the many particulars of the Polish-Silesian context. Here too we often see careful work on the technical details surrounding the tangled textual and archival histories of the letters. Of course, each of the essays concerning broader themes are themselves grounded in the details of the epistolary. And the detailed studies of the letters, conversely, capture regional or local inflections of a range of themes – from religious affiliation through confraternity letters to papal and episcopal politics to preaching and the persecution of the Jews – that were European in scope and resonance. The volume thus invites and reminds its readers always to hold in view this twofold tension between the local and the universal, the general and the particular, as key to the broader interpretive significance of Capistrano’s mission and his correspondence.

Part I frames John of Capistrano as a “Preacher, Papal Diplomat and Promoter of Observance.” As a papal diplomat, Antonín Kalous reminds us, Capistrano had no official standing as either legate or nuncio and was thus in one sense marginal. But in the interstices of the system, the friar was nevertheless a formidable advocate of the papal agenda in northern Europe. By virtue of his positions and roles as preacher, author, jurist, and inquisitor, by virtue of his talent and reputation, and not least the power of Bernardino’s sanctity, he found his way to the centre of the Hussite controversies, the disputes between Poland and the Teutonic Knights in Prussia, and the crusade against the Turks. And it was in these same capacities a preacher and propagandist, Ottó Gecser makes clear, that Capistrano shared in the wider culture of “mass communication” and “public intellectuals” recently explored by Daniel Hobbins and others. Capistrano’s letters and manuscripts reveal how the friar positioned himself within that culture, shaping the complex “tract-treatise-sermon” continuum in his own ways. Often bypassing *reportationes* and the publication of sermons, Capistrano went directly to circulating longer, authorized treatises that provided direct access to his teaching among the learned elite – and in this context, Capistrano’s networks and correspondence were central. Thomas Krzenck seeks a more localized and chronologically focused purchase on this same theme, in an essay that shows how preaching against usury and luxury, the passage of sumptuary laws, the recruitment of novices for newly established Observant houses all played out during Capistrano’s two-month stay in Leipzig in October-November of 1452.

At the center of Capistrano’s concerns during the Grand Tour, of course, were the multiple challenges of advancing the cause of moral renewal, with the Observant reform of the Franciscan Order taking the lead. As Ludovic Viallet’s essay makes clear, it was a project that not only involved the practice of religious life itself, but questions of civic power and authority, lay religious

life, and Franciscan identity. Giacomo Mariani shows Capistrano at work on the same task, defending his reforming project from the likes of adversaries like Roberto da Lecce by way of his constant correspondence from beyond the Alps. The collective plea of these two essays is for a more nuanced approach to the place of Observant reform in the context of the “Grand Tour”. Instead of offering merely more raw material for the traditional heroic narratives of both hagiography and modern historiography, these essays frame Observant reform as both a reflection of and a catalyst for more complex dynamics – here shaped by tensions between approval and contest, success and failure, as well as long-term memory and legacies – that are European in scope. And it is in the same spirit of “strict observance”, now transposed into the broader registers of Christian society generally, that we can understand Capistrano’s stringent campaigns against both moral vices like luxury and usury as well as against the enemies of Christendom, the Hussites, Turks, and Jews. Gabór Klaniczay shows the powerful links between penitential preaching and persecution, embodied in the bonfires of the vanities and the “distinguishing signs” of the Jews. Hanna Zaremska shows Capistrano at work again as a papal diplomat, this time not far from the center of the host desecration and blood libel accusations in Wrocław, and how legal records informed the process of narrative construction around those events. From the bonfires in Florence and Bamberg and Wrocław, to the fires that burned the flesh of Jews in the same city, the “tireless preacher” of moral purity and discipline appears in these essays as the embodiment of the multifaceted workings of conversion and renewed “observance” that were at stake in fifteenth century Europe.

Another cluster of essays in Part I then address the theme of memory and memorialization. Daniele Solvi reads Capistrano’s hagiographical dossier not for biographical data as such (as Hofer had done, uncritically, long ago) but for dynamics of representation. Specifically, Solvi seeks to uncover how Nicholas of Fara selected, shaped and narrated the friar’s life, and especially the events and regions of the “Grand Tour” in ways that reflected both the evolving circumstance of the Franciscan Observants and the concern of a wider European project: to lead a fragmented periphery of northern lands back into unity and harmony with a Roman center. Halina Manikowska traces analogous issues of representation in the work of Peter Eschenloer, who in the German and Latin versions of his chronicles of Wrocław shaped (and reshaped) accounts of Capistrano for different purposes – a Latin treatment from the 1460s that is more hagiographic in tone and enlivened by concerns over George of Poděbrady and the Hussites, for example, against a German one from the 1470s that focuses on city politics, and especially tensions with the Franciscan Observants. Finally, in a succinct but compelling way Luca Pezzuto offers an overview of the ways

in which northern Europeans remembered and represented Capistrano in the decades after his death. The two primary themes of representation center on Capistrano's work as a penitential preacher and on his role as the leader of the crusade against the Turks. The former representations tend to survive in greater numbers, not least because of the losses of later centuries. But the patterns are consistent with those established in Italy and elsewhere. Collectively these essays offer concrete explorations of a key insight Ludovic Viallet offers at the end of his reflections on Observant reform: we must be attentive not only to the complexities of Capistrano's mission, but to matters of memory and legacy. At Capistrano's death in 1456, the memory of the friar and the impact of his "Grand Tour" had in many ways only begun to take shape.

Part II of this volume turns to more focused analysis of Capistrano's correspondence itself, as the specific context for the accompanying edition of the Polish-Silesian epistolary. It opens with Frederik Felskau's investigation of the epistolary corpus as it relates to the German lands. The essay is another reminder of Pellegrini's founding insight: For all of the advances made possible by the work of Bonmann and the *Provisional Calendar* completed by Gál and Miskuly, we remain only at the beginning of a long investigation into the complex patterns of survival and loss surrounding Capistrano's letters. Among the many insights offered here, for example, are those concerning Capistrano's "confraternity letters". Scholars have long neglected these documents, meant to establish spiritual and social ties among their senders and recipients, not least because of their seemingly formulaic nature. But as Felskau notes, careful tracking and reading reveals their particular settings and motives, and collectively they are crucial evidence for how Capistrano's "networking" strategies supported his broader goals, not least the promotion of Observant reform. Similar lessons about the complexities of transmission and context are found in Pavel Soukup's treatment of Capistrano's correspondence regarding the Hussites. This investigation of the textual and manuscript evidence reveals what on the one hand was clearly one of the friar's central concerns, especially in the early years of his mission – some 83 letters to and from correspondents on all sides of the debates have been identified thus far, with more awaiting discovery. And within this corpus, Capistrano's polemics with the likes of Rokycana and Borotín took center stage. Contemporaries were eager copyists and readers of the exchanges, even the longest and most intricate among them, and Capistrano himself – in ways that reflect Ottó Gecser's insights – was a careful curator of their dissemination among a broader public. And yet, Soukup reminds us, it is important to contextualize all of this activity: dating back to the earliest days of the crusades of the 1420s, theologians had written tirelessly on the same topics, and often traveled to the region in person. As attested by some

250 and more anti-Hussite treatises, surviving in some 700 copies, Capistrano was merely one among many similar figures, and future assessment of his work must discern what if anything was truly exceptional about it.

A cluster of essays in Part II ground Capistrano's mission further still, in the many particulars of the political, religious and cultural landscape of Poland. Maria Koczerska and Marcin Starzyński, for example, offer close readings of a corpus of letters whose overall significance are out of proportion to their relatively small number. Koczerska studies some 15 surviving letters (from an original corpus thought to be at least 3 times that size) between John of Capistrano, the bishop of Cracow and Cardinal Zbigniew Oleśnicki, and the three surviving letters of the bishop's secretary and famous Polish historian Jan Długosz. In these letters we find a case study in recruitment – detailed evidence of the rhetoric and posturing that inevitably shaped how a figure like Capistrano was lured to Poland. We find discussions of broadly shared geopolitical concerns (the Hussites, the Turks), alongside compellingly intimate details – an exchange about horses, for example, and a long account of Oleśnicki's death penned by Długosz. Starzyński teases out similarly compelling details from a single letter from King Casimir IV Jagellon to John of Capistrano. The unique witness, written in September of 1451, is of interest both because of its content and its circulation. The letter outlines the king's grand ambition for the conversion of the Ruthenians and tries to persuade Capistrano to apply his talent and commitment to that end. And though the original letter is lost, Starzyński notes, its survival in at least 13 copies (with surely more yet to be found) suggests an accidental but revealing popularity among later copyists and readers of Capistrano's Hussite correspondence, with which the king's letter often traveled.

Paweł Kras and Anna Zajchowska-Bołtromiuk offer similarly close readings of the Polish evidence as they relate to matters of religious life and lay piety. Kras shows how the general themes explored in Part I played out in the particulars of the Cracow scene. There we see Capistrano forging and expressing intimate relationships with the Cracow Brethren, "preaching with the pen" as a pastoral author and public intellectual. We witness the founding, funding, and even the physical construction of the Cracow friary, and the recruitment that helped establish it. We catch glimpses of the austere daily life of the friars, and the inevitable conflicts it inspired – not least for the converted Jew Peter of Hungary, otherwise unknown, who agitated against the Observant regime established by the guardian Ladislaus of Tar. We also catch glimpses of the lives and concerns of both Tertiaries and the sisters of the only Observant nunnery in Poland, who looked to Capistrano as their authority and guide. Capistrano's preaching in Cracow then comes alive in Zajchowska-Bołtromiuk's treatment, which reads evidence of Capistrano's preaching from his treatises and sermons against the

(surprisingly scarce) evidence of preaching from his letters. Once again, the vital link between treatise, sermon, and audience is central. Marek Kowalski's essay then offers compelling account of how John of Capistrano could be drawn into the most tangled of local affairs. It centers on the case of the "Gnojnicki Cousins," Mikołaj son of Klemens and Mikołaj son of Przeclaw. The two clerics had initiated a lawsuit against rival claimants to benefices in Cracow. They were soon caught up in the legal and procedural vortex surrounding papal provisions, which was tied back to local politics. They quickly earned the enmity not only of the Cathedral Chapter but also Casimir IV, soon put on trial and, somewhat surprisingly, summarily beheaded. In the aftermath of their death, the city council wrote to John of Capistrano seeking his intervention in their attempt to be relieved of the penalties they incurred for executing two clerics. Capistrano, hundreds of miles away in Buda and busied with the looming crusade, never responded. But that he was consulted at all says a great deal about his ongoing importance and reputation as a public figure.

In all of the essays in Part II, the strength of the collaborative, "laboratory" model first envisioned by Letizia Pellegrini is on full display, working at its finest. These scholars collectively offer complementary readings of the epistolary evidence, using their local and regional expertise – and their command of an important corpus of modern Polish, Czech, and German scholarship – to interweave fine-grained analysis of local detail with larger themes. In that setting, a final essay by Lorenzo Turchi, which shifts to the life and letters of James of the Marches, might seem somehow out of place. But this is another fine contribution, and in fact a crucial one, intentionally positioned to test the boundaries of the thematic and methodological breakthroughs signaled in this project. Contemporary and companion of Capistrano and another of the famous "Pillars" of the Observance, James was just as active a writer, preacher, and public figure, and just as widely traveled. As Turchi's essay demonstrates, James is also a figure who, like Capistrano, challenges modern categories in multiple ways; a figure who is in need of much more study and contextualization; and a figure whose surviving corpus of letters presents analogous problems of access and analysis, as well as the possibility of electrifying new discoveries. In James, just as in the "Grand Tour" explored in this volume (and in the others to come) scholars encounter broad new horizons for the study of the "making of Europe" in the 15th century.