

ELIJAH IN THE EARLY CARMELITE LITURGY*

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If we look through the early manuscripts of the Carmelite liturgy, dating before 1500, there is a noticeable absence of any trace of a liturgical feast for Elijah, even though there are frequent references to a similar feast for Elisha, and even though there was a fervent devotion to Elijah within the Order from of old. Not without reason was he called, and is, the Father and Leader of the Carmelites. We can therefore justly ask ourselves why this fervent devotion never found liturgical expression before 1500. In the following pages I would like to offer a few basic premises which, as hypotheses, can shed some light on this subject.

1. ELISHA IN THE LITURGY

We find the first trace of a liturgical feast for Elisha in the Constitutions of 1369, published by Patrick de Saint-Joseph and Marie-Joseph du Sacré-Coeur¹ with the text:

*De beato Eliseo propheta Montis Carmeli fiat festum duplex.*² The feast of blessed Elisha, prophet of Mount Carmel, is to be celebrated as *festum duplex* [feast of double grade].

This text is not found in the main body of the document but rather appears to be a later addition.³ Also, in other documents from

* In 1956, I published an article on this topic (see: PASCAL (ARIE G.), KALLENBERG, *Le culte liturgique d'Élie dans l'Ordre du Carmel: Études Carmélitaines, Élie le prophète*, vol. II, 1956, 134-145). Since then, there have been new insights and opinions based on more recent research.

¹ *Constitutions des Grands Carmes: Manuscrit de Lunel du XVme siècle* / Transcribed by PP. PATRICK DE S.-JOSEPH and MARIE-JOSEPH DU SACRÉ-COEUR, Carmes Déchausés; with the collaboration of M. Ferdinand Courtoy: *Études Carmélitaines*, 1920.

² *Ibidem*, 27.

³ See: ARIE G. (PASCHALIS), KALLENBERG, *Fontes Liturgiae Carmelitanae*, Rome, Institutum Carmelitanum, 1962, 42.

this same period and later, there is no reference to the establishment of a feast for Elisha, in spite of the decree in the Constitutions of 1369.⁴ For this reason it is seriously questionable whether this feast actually has been celebrated in the Order since 1369, especially since it was only in 1399 that it was formally introduced by the General Chapter of Le Selve in Florence. The text of that decree reads as follows:

*Primo ordinaverunt, quod de sancto Heliseo propheta Montis Carmeli fiat omni anno 18 Kalend. Julii, scilicet die 14a mensis Junii festum duplex vel maius.*⁵ First of all, we have ordained that the feast of Saint Elisha, prophet of Mount Carmel, is to be celebrated every year on June 14 as a *festum duplex* or *maius* [feast of double grade or more].

The General Chapter of Bologna (1411) reiterated this decree⁶ and, in 1456, the General Chapter of Paris decreed that the invocation *Sancte Elisee, ora pro nobis* (St. Elisha, pray for us) be added to the litany.⁷ Millendunck⁸ cites an additional decree, that of the General Chapter of Brussels in 1462, in which is stated:

Inseruntur in Breviario Ordinis festa... Elisei prophetae... sub ritu duplici celebranda. The feast of the prophet Elisha should be added to the breviary of the Order, to be celebrated according to the ritual for *festum duplex*.

But this too seems to be an addition,⁹ not based on authentic sources, in spite of the fact that Lezana¹⁰ holds a different opinion. This is what he has to say about it:

In the same year (1462), a breviary of the Order appeared which I have here in my hands, a manuscript transcribed by Yvo Joel Britto, undoubt-

⁴ The liturgical paragraph from the Constitutions mentioned in footnote 1 is also present in a manuscript of the Vatican Library (Roma, Bibl. Vatic, ms. Vat. Lat. 3991) and is published in *Analecta Ordinis Carmelitarum*, II (1911) 71-78. The text of this edition differs from the text in Constitutions mentioned above and does not list the feast of Elisha. Two other manuscripts (SIBERTUS DE BEKA, *Ordinale* [1468], Dijon, Bibliothèque Municipale, ms 121, 54v – 55v; and *Breviarium Carmelitarum* [1489], Dublin, Trinity College ms B 3 10, 112 – 112v) mention not only the liturgical decrees of a number of General Chapters, but also the Constitutions of 1369, mentioned above; these also include nothing about the introduction of the feast of Elisha.

⁵ KALLENBERG, *Fontes*, 45.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁸ JACOBUS, MILLENDUNCK, O.Carm., *Historia Provinciae, tom. B seu secundus*: Frankfurt, Stadt-Archiv, ms. C 47a, 350.

⁹ KALLENBERG, *Fontes*, 52.

¹⁰ JOHANNES BAPTISTA DE, LEZANA, *Annales sacri prophetici et eliani Ordinis Beatae Virginis Mariae de Monte Carmeli...*: 4 vols. Romae, ex typographia Mascardi, 1645-1656.

edly at the request of the Most Reverend General Soreth. The following saints of our Order are included in that calendar: ... St. Elisha, June 14... The integrity and the knowledge of General Soreth guarantee beyond any doubt that this did not happen without the approval of the Holy See.¹¹

Whether the provision of 1369 is authentic or a later addition, in any case, it is an indication that a substantial interest in the liturgical feast honoring Elisha existed at that time.

The decision of the General Chapter of Le Selve in 1399 was the first of a long series of liturgical documents in which the feast of Elisha appears. Of the total number of manuscripts dating from before 1450 (about 140), sixty of them were produced after 1400. These manuscripts include Psalters, books containing the Little Hours, and fragments of liturgical texts. The feast of Elisha doesn't appear in any of these manuscripts, which is to be expected, considering the nature of these texts. The other manuscripts are calendars, breviaries, missals and martyrologies and, among these documents, the feast of Elisha is found in twenty-eight calendars, twenty-seven breviaries and missals, and four martyrologies. The feast of Elisha is also found as a later addition in six other calendars and five other breviaries and missals. In addition to the usual hymns which are part of the daily prayer of the breviary, I have also discovered a hymn in honor of Elisha three times. The invocation *Sancte Elisee, ora pro nobis* appears fourteen times in the Litany of the Saints in manuscripts dating later than 1450.

It often happens that the feast of Elisha is not to be found in the body of a breviary or missal, even though it is listed in the calendar included in these works. This can be viewed as an inconsistency, but the reason is probably that, until 1462, there were no proper Mass or breviary texts for the feast available; instead, texts from the Proper of Saints would have been used. In such a case, mentioning it in the calendar at the beginning of the work would have been sufficient to call attention to the feast day.

From all this it can be concluded that almost all liturgical manuscripts dating from later than 1400 know the feast of Elisha. The liturgical veneration of Elisha had been introduced throughout the Order.

¹¹ LEZANA, *Annales* IV, 902-903. The original Latin text reads as follows: *Prodiit eodem anno breviarium Ordinis, quod prae manibus habemus ms. opera fratris Ivonis Ioelis Brittonis, de mandato absdubie Reverendissimi Generalis Soreth. In calendario porro describuntur Ordinis nostri hi Sancti:... S. Eliseus 14 Junii... Id porro non sine auctoritate Sedis Apostolicae factum, vel vitae integritas, ac doctrina Generalis Soreth sufficienter suadent.* See also: KALLENBERG, *Fontes*, 52.

2. ELIJAH IN MANUSCRIPTS DATING FROM BEFORE 1500

From the preceding section, it seems that the origins of the feast of Elisha can be described with relative certainty. The traces of a liturgical feast for Elijah, however, are less clear or even totally absent. The Constitutions and Acts of the various General Chapters do not mention anything at all about it, not even when the feast is first mentioned in a missal from 1551.¹²

For this reason it is quite difficult to determine when the Carmelites began to venerate their Father and Leader with a liturgical feast, even at a local level. According to Benedict Zimmerman, OCD, the day on which Elijah was carried off in a chariot of fire was commemorated on June 17 by several provinces of the Order since the fifteenth century; however, it was not a universal or obligatory feast.¹³ Unfortunately, Zimmerman doesn't refer to any of the sources on which he bases his opinion. Johannes Baptista Lezana (1568-1659) also writes of an early missal which included a Mass in honor of Elijah:

But what attests to an even greater antiquity is the fact that a Mass for the feast of the prophet Elijah on June 17 is included in a really old missal which is found in the Holy and Apostolic Library of the Vatican as part of a parchment manuscript in an old, antique hand. The introit is taken from the mass of the Common of Confessors, namely *Os justi meditabitur sapientiam...* and is found on page 519... No one has any idea when this missal was copied or when it was placed in this library.¹⁴

¹² *Missale Carmelitarum fratrum vtriusque ordinis beate Dei genitricis Mariae de Monte Carmelo, secundum vsum Hierosolymitan Ecclesie*: In Venetiarum vrbe: arte et impensis heredum Lucantonij Iunta, 1551.

¹³ BENEDICT, ZIMMERMAN, *Ordinaire de l'Ordre de Notre-Dame du Mont Carmel par Sibert de Beka (vers 1312) publié d'après le manuscrit original et collationné sur divers manuscrits*, Paris, Alphonse Picard et Fils, 1910, xxi.

¹⁴ JOHANNES BAPTISTA DE, LEZANA, *Consulta varia theologica, iuridica et regularia pro conscientiarum instructione circa controversias in Alma Urbe, etiam apud tribunalia agitatas*, Venetiis, apud Franciscum Baba, 1651, Consultum tertium, 49 n° 23. The Latin text as written by Lezana reads as follows: *Sed quod maioris antiquitatis evidentiora signa praestat, illud est quod in antiquissimo Missali in Sacra et Apostolica Bibliotheca Vaticana reperto, antiquis et vetustis litteris manuscriptis et membranis compacto, Missa in natali S. Eliae Prophetae sub die 17 Junii habetur. Ipsi vero introitus est idem qui pro missis St. Confesorum assignatur ab Ecclesia, videlicet: Os justi meditabitur sapientiam. Vers.: Noli aemulari etc. Numerus folii, seu paginae est 519... Quo autem tempore Missale hoc descriptum fuerit, aut in praedicta Bibliotheca ad custodiam repositus est, nec suspicari licet.*

Lezana then transcribes the collect (the opening prayer) of the Mass as far as is possible. Unfortunately, he too gives no indication as to which missal the collect can be found in and, more importantly, it is not clear whether this missal belongs to the Carmelite liturgy or to another rite. It could possibly be a Franciscan document, since the Friars Minor also knew the feast of the *Raptus Eliae*, the Rapture of Elijah, being carried off in a chariot of fire, as is demonstrated by the Bollandists.¹⁵ Their source is cited as a Franciscan breviary from 1406, in which the feast is celebrated on June 17. Leroquais also knows of a similar feast¹⁶ among the Franciscans. Why the *Raptus Eliae* would be celebrated by the Franciscans is not really clear. Is it perhaps because St. Francis' soul appeared to his brothers in a chariot of fire to plumb their consciences, as Thomas of Celano wrote?¹⁷ This vision is poetically sung as an antiphon in first Vespers for the feast of St. Francis, having been put in rhymed verse by Julian of Speyer.¹⁸

In the *Praetermissa* (the omissions) for June 17, the Bollandists¹⁹ refer to a number of documents providing evidence for the *Raptus Eliae*, and they add:

The early Carmelites (we know that all, or at least most, of them were Latin and that they were instructed by their first priors on Mount Carmel, Berthold and Brocard, to celebrate only according to the Latin

¹⁵ *Catalogus codicum hagiographicorum latinorum antiquorum saeculi XVI qui asservantur in Bibliotheca Nationali Parisiensi (ediderunt Socii Bollandiani)*: III, Bruxelles 1893, *Supplementum II, Liste synthétique*, 658.

¹⁶ V. LEROQUAIS, *Les bréviaires manuscrits des bibliothèques publiques de France*. Paris, 1939, vol. II, 435.

¹⁷ THOMAS OF CELANO, *Franciscus van Assisi: Eerste levensbeschrijving*, Haarlem, 1976, 52. See also: *Vita Francisci prima*, XVIII, 47 in: *Analecta Franciscana*, X (1926) 37; compare THOMAS OF CELANO, *Eerste levensbeschrijving*, Boek XVIII, n° 47 where we read: «At midnight, while some of the brothers were sleeping and others were piously praying, a bright, shiny, fire-emitting chariot suddenly came in through the door of their residence and rode back and forth through the room two or three times. A large ball was on top of the chariot, a kind of sun, which enlightened the night with a radiant brightness... The brothers understood this as having been the soul of their holy Father who had appeared to them, radiant in that bright light».

¹⁸ Brother Julian of Speyer composed what became well-known offices in rhyme for the feasts of St. Francis and St. Anthony. Until 1226 he was choirmaster at the court of King Louis VIII in Paris, after which he entered the young order of Friars Minor; see KEES, BAK, *In de Echo van het Zonnelied: Over Minderbroeders en hun liedcultuur*, Wijchen, 2000, 1.

¹⁹ *Acta Sanctorum... collecta, digesta commentariisque et observationibus illustrata*, a Godefrido Henschenio, P.M. Daniele Papebrochio, Francisco Baertio et Conrado Janningno, e *Societate Jesu Presbyteris Theologis*, Venetiis, 1734-1770, Junius, vol. II, 265.

Rite) celebrated the *Raptus Eliae* on the same day, as can be seen in an early *Proper of the Saints* which is in our possession.²⁰

However, they do not mention which *Proper of the Saints* nor where it can be found. In the next volume of the *Acta Sanctorum*, comprising the month of July, the Bollandists treat extensively the feast of Elijah on July 20, where they have this to say about his veneration:

The venerable Order of the Carmelites maintained the same day (namely, June 17) for the feast, as can be seen in an early, hand-written calendar which is in our possession, as is mentioned in the *Praeternissa* (the omissions) for that day.²¹

But once again, the Bollandists do not give their source.

The following text appears in a manuscript dating from 1389, which originated in a Carmelite monastery in Sutera (near Caltanissetta in Sicily),²² in the calendar preceding the *Ordinale / Breviary*, as the entry for May 27: *Assumptio Helye prophete fundatoris nostri ordinis*²³ (the Assumption of the Prophet Elijah, the founder of our Order), but it is a later addition by another scribe and, as such, does not give evidence of an early feast.

The same applies for a calendar²⁴ dating from the beginning of the fourteenth century which mentions the *Raptus in celum Helye propheta*²⁵ (Rapture of the Prophet Elijah into heaven) on June 23. This too is an addition, made at the end of the fifteenth or the beginning of the sixteenth century. More examples of breviaries and missals could be cited where the feast is added at a later date, namely during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but since these do not add anything to our knowledge of the origins of the feast, they are omitted here.

In the appendix of his edition of the *Ordinale* of Sibertus de Beka,²⁶ Benedict Zimmerman, OCD, published a number of offices

²⁰ *Acta Sanctorum, Junius*, vol. III, 265, where the Latin text reads: *Veteres Carmelitae (utpote Latini omnes aut plerique, et ex Latino ritu solo procedere in Carmelo edocti, sub primis suis Prioribus Bertholdo et Brocardo) eundem diem retinebant in veteri Proprio quod habemus.*

²¹ *Acta Sanctorum, Julius*, vol. V, 6. The text in Latin reads as follows: *Venerabilis Carmelitarum Ordo eundem diem tunc retinebat, ut patet ex antiquo, quod penes nos est, istius Ordinis ms. Calendarium, sicut inter Praeternissa eo die dictum est.*

²² PALERMO, *Biblioteca Nazionale*, Dep. Museo 2.

²³ KALLENBERG, *Fontes* 157.

²⁴ PARIS, *Bibliothèque Mazarine*, ms. 428.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, fol. 2.

²⁶ ZIMMERMAN, *Ordinaire*, 289 ss.

relating to certain Carmelite saints. These offices were taken from a manuscript dating from around 1525²⁷ and one of them concerns:

The history of the rapture of the most holy Prophet Elijah, first leader and founder of the Order of Carmelite brothers and an inhabitant of Paradise, published by Brother Robert Bale, lecturer in theology and prior of our monastery in Burnham.²⁸

Since Robert Bale died in 1503,²⁹ it can be assumed that he compiled this office for the Assumption of Elijah at the end of the fifteenth or the beginning of the sixteenth century.

Compared with the fourteen times that Elisha is invoked in the Litany of the Saints,³⁰ Elijah is invoked only once, in a litany in a breviary from Bamberg dating from 1476.³¹ Four martyrologies³² from this time are known – manuscripts from before 1500 – however none of them mention the feast of Elijah. In a breviary included in a manuscript dating from 1481,³³ Elijah is mentioned, saying that his commemoration should be added to the martyrology. The relevant text reads as follows:

On June 17 in Arabia: The Assumption of Elijah, the great prophet and patriarch of the Order of the Carmelites, into heaven in the year nine hundred and three before the incarnation of Christ, who in the sight of the Lord had received the grace to open and close the heavens with his word, and of whom it is said that he had a glorious and noble spirit, enflamed with zeal for the Lord, more than the other prophets of the

²⁷ CAMBRIDGE, *University Library*, manuscript Ff 6 28.

²⁸ ZIMMERMAN, *Ordinaire*, 341. The original text in Latin reads: *Historia Raptus sacratissimi Heliae Prophetae, primi principis et fundatoris Ordinis fratrum Carmelitarum, incolae paradisi, edita per theologiae lectorem Fratrem Robertum Bale priorem conventus nostri Burnhamiae*.

²⁹ COSMAS a S. STEPHANO, VILLIERS, de (O.Carm.), *Bibliotheca Carmelitana, notis criticis et dissertationibus illustrata Curâ et labore unius à Carmelitis Provinciae Turoniae collecta. Opus P. Cosmae de Villiers; additis nova praefatione et supplemento luce exprimendum curavit P. Gabriel Wessels, Carmelita*, Roma, 1927, vol. II, col. 686.

³⁰ See above.

³¹ BAMBERG, *Staatliche Bibliothek*, msc.lit. 78, fol. 222v; compare KALLENBERG, *Fontes*, 194.

³² MÜNCHEN, *Bayerische Staats-Bibliothek*, clm 646, compare KALLENBERG, *Fontes*, 200-201; PARIS, *Bibliothèque de l'Université*, ms. 791, compare KALLENBERG, *Fontes*, 225-226; LYON, *Bibliothèque de l'Université*, ms 12, compare KALLENBERG, *Fontes*, 226-227; SAN MARINO, *H.E. Huntington Library*, ms H.M. 1044, compare KALLENBERG, *Fontes*, 227-228.

³³ BAMBERG, *Staatliche Bibliothek*, msc.lit. 97, fol. IXv.; compare KALLENBERG, *Fontes*, 198.

Lord, as can be seen in the history of the Old Testament and the grace-filled proclamation of the Gospel.³⁴

This same text also appears in a printed breviary,³⁵ an incunabulum from 1480.

In liturgical manuscripts dating from before 1500, we encounter Elijah only once as the subject of a miniature or a decorated letter. This image of Elijah in a graduale compiled between 1306 and 1342 is quite exceptional. In the decorated letter A for the introit for the first Sunday of Advent³⁶ – the very first letter of the new liturgical year – Elijah is pictured as being carried off to Paradise in a chariot of fire.

We might wonder why the miniaturist chose to portray Elijah and his journey to Paradise at the beginning of the new liturgical year. Perhaps he wanted to focus our attention on the fact that we should keep our eyes on Elijah, the Father and Leader of the Order, during the entire liturgical year. In that case, he would have done better by portraying Elijah in his Carmelite habit, as was often done in that period. But he chose to portray Elijah on his way to Paradise. This is quite significant if we remember that, in the early Carmelite liturgy, the Resurrection of the Lord as well as our own resurrection from the dead were solemnly commemorated on the Sunday preceding the first Sunday of Advent, namely, on the last Sunday of the liturgical year.³⁷ Did the miniaturist want to return to this theme, as it were, on the first Sunday of the new liturgical year by portraying Elijah as being carried off into Paradise in a chariot of fire? It certainly appears so!

³⁴ The original text in Latin is: *Decimo quinto Kalendas Julii in Arabia: Raptus magni Eliae prophetae Carmelitanaeque religionis patriarchae in coelum nongentesimo et tertio ante Christi incarnationem anno. Qui tantam coram Dominum invenit gratiam ut verbo clauderet et aperiret coelum et zelo divino succensus super ceteros prophetas Domini, ex hystoria veteris testamenti et evangelicae praedicationis gratia gloriosum et nobilem habuisse spiritum predicatur.*

³⁵ *Breviarium iuxta ordinale novarumque ordinationum stilum fratrum sacri ordinis gloriosissime Dei genitricis semperque virginis Marie de Monte Carmeli, extractum de approbato usu domini sepulchri sancte hierosolymitane ecclesie...* Bruxelles, Fratres vite communis, 16 die mensis maij, 1480; compare KALLENBERG, *Fontes*, 261.

³⁶ *Graduale Carmelitarum*, Firenze, Museo San Marco, ms. C (580) fol. 1; compare KALLENBERG, *Fontes* 230.

³⁷ ARIE G. KALLENBERG, *The Resurrection in the Early Carmelite Liturgy and Carmelite Spirituality*: Carmelus 44 (1997), 5-20 and idem, *De verrijzenis in de vroege Karmel-liturgie en spiritualiteit*: Tijdschrift voor Liturgie - 82 (1998) 147-156.

A miniature of Elijah together with Elisha is found in another antiphonary,³⁸ one compiled between 1312 and 1362, and there is a votive mass in honor of Elijah included in a *graduale*³⁹ from the fifteenth century, however this votive mass was added later by another scribe. Neither the miniature in the antiphonary nor the votive mass allows us to draw any further conclusions regarding the existence of a liturgical feast for Elijah.

We find a first serious reference to a liturgical feast for Elijah in a manuscript originating in 1472 in Bamberg (Germany), a *diurnal*⁴⁰ (extracts from a breviary), preceded by a calendar in which we find the feast of Elijah on July 19: *Helye prophete*.⁴¹ The feast isn't included in the body of the *diurnal*, but that's probably because it was still too new and, as yet, there weren't any proper texts for the feast available.

3. QUESTIONS AND POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS

Let us look at the results of our quest for a liturgical feast in honor of Elijah in more than 120 manuscripts dating from before 1500: the yield is moderate, especially in comparison with the results mentioned above regarding the liturgical veneration of Elisha. From the documents cited here, there appears to have been no liturgical feast for Elijah in the Order during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, except for a few vague traces which point to Germany.⁴² There was no question of a universal feast sanctioned by a General Chapter or the Constitutions.

This leaves us feeling bewildered, especially when we consider that the early Carmelites had a great reverence for Elijah and that his veneration goes back to the origins of the Order. Even though Elisha was only secondary in the hierarchy, his liturgical veneration was a common practice in the Order around 1400; but it would be almost two centuries before Elijah would win a place in this liturgy.

It is even more bewildering if we bear in mind that the Carmelite liturgy originated in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem,

³⁸ *Antiphonale Carmelitarum*, Firenze, Museo San Marco, ms. E (576) fol. 52; compare KALLENBERG, *Fontes* 253.

³⁹ *Graduale Carmelitarum*, München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, clm. 23027, fol. 176; compare KALLENBERG, *Fontes*, 239.

⁴⁰ Bamberg, *Staatliche Bibliothek*, msc.lit. 96.

⁴¹ KALLENBERG, *Fontes*, 192.

⁴² See footnote 39 and 40.

where the influence of the local saints was quite significant in the liturgy,⁴³ and that one of the local saints was, without any doubt, Elijah. For centuries, the Carmelite liturgy continued to commemorate the Palestinian saints, especially the first bishops of Jerusalem who were never venerated anywhere in the West. Even the Old Testament patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, had their own feast in the Carmelite liturgy, on October 6. So why not Elijah, who was venerated in such an exceptional manner throughout the entire Middle East and even more so on Mount Carmel?

In his book *Elias und Christentum auf dem Karmel*,⁴⁴ Clemens Kopp speaks of an annual feast on Mount Carmel in honor of Elijah, celebrated at the time of the Crusades. On that day, the *treuga Dei* (Peace of God) held sway: Knights Templar, Knights Hospitaller (Knights of Malta), and Teutonic Knights (*Ordo Teutonicus* from Germany) assembled peacefully, together with Arabs and Bedouins, and set up their tents – the feast lasted several days – passing the time with tournaments and throwing the javelin *in multa dilectione* (with great pleasure). This was precisely when the Order had begun to expand on Mount Carmel, so the Carmelites of that time would certainly have known of this feast. Nevertheless, as far as is known, they did not take the step of extending a popular feast to a liturgical feast, even though there was already a chapel dedicated to Elijah on Mount Carmel, as is related by Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela, who visited Palestine around 1163:

Mount Carmel rises on one side, with the graves of many Israelites lying at the foot of the mountain. Elijah's cave is on the mountain itself, in a high rock overlooking Ptolemaïs, facing the sea – a favorable sign for sailors. The Christians have built a small chapel in honor of Elijah beside the cave.⁴⁵

Even if the chapel was not built by the first Carmelites, they must have at least known of it,⁴⁶ so it would have been logical to institute

⁴³ KALLENBERG, *Fontes*, 88.

⁴⁴ CLEMENS, KOPP, *Elias und Christentum auf dem Karmel*, Paderborn: Schöningh, 1929, 74. See also: *Peregrinationes medii aevi quattuor*, ed. J.C. LAURENT, Leipzig, 1864, 22ss.

⁴⁵ *The Itinerary of Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela*, edited by A. ASHER, London-Berlin 1840, 31. The Latin text reads: *Ex latero uno Carmelus mons imminet, ad montisque radices Israelitarum quam plurimorum sepulchra sunt, inque ipso monte prophetae Eliae antrum super alta rupe quae respicit Ptolemaidem contra mare, signum videlicet opportunum navigantibus, iuxta quod christiani sacellum construxerunt sancto Eliae dictum.*

⁴⁶ With regard to this, see: VICTOR, ROEFS, O.Carm., *De oudste getuigenissen omtrent de Carmelorde*: Carmel I (1948) 7-35.

an annual liturgical feast day for Elijah; however, nothing seems to show that this actually occurred. With their forced migration from Mount Carmel to Europe, the Carmelites brought a special veneration of Elijah with them, but without any liturgical feast.

But neither Elijah wholly unknown in the liturgy in the West. There is a fragment of a Mass in honor of Elijah⁴⁷ in the Vatican Library and, as mentioned above, the Franciscans celebrated the feast of the *Raptus Eliae* (Rapture of Elijah) at the beginning of the fifteenth century. As far as the non-liturgical devotion to Elijah goes, the Bollandists tell us that it was quite extensive in the West,⁴⁸ adding that the Carmelite devotion to their patron was especially intense from the very beginning, even though it did not find expression in a liturgical celebration.

We are forced to conclude that, if the Carmelites did not have a liturgical feast for Elijah before 1500, then this must have been a conscious choice, for they had never lacked a deep veneration of Elijah and a special devotion to him. The most obvious reason for this choice seems to be that they hesitated to raise someone who had not yet died to the honors of the altar. When the question regarding a feast for Elijah came up for discussion, there was indeed a great deal of opposition within the Order, not so much because there was any doubt about the holiness of the prophet, but more because it was believed that someone who had not yet died, and who still had to return and undergo martyrdom, could not be considered a saint. Consequently, his *dies natalis* (the day of his birth to new life) could not be celebrated with a liturgical feast.

There are numerous early texts which emphasise the fact that the prophet would complete his pilgrimage only at the end of time. We find an example of this in the Constitutions of 1357:

One should realize that since the time that Elijah was bodily taken up in a chariot of fire, as one reads in the Second Book of Kings, that it is believed that he, together with Enoch, has been placed in an earthly paradise where they both shall live until the coming of the Antichrist. Then, together with him,⁴⁹ they will valiantly defend the Catholic faith. Ultimately they will be killed by the Antichrist and so be crowned with a

⁴⁷ Roma, Bibl. Vatic., ms. Vatic.Lat. 10645, fol. 6v; published by ALBAN DOLD in: *Jahrbuch für Liturgiewissenschaft*, Band X (1930) 48.

⁴⁸ *Acta Sanctorum, Julius*, vol V, 6ss.

⁴⁹ In another manuscript (Nantes, Bibl. Publ., ms 89, fol. 3) we read: *contra ipsum* (against him).

glorious martyrdom. Then, after three and a half days, it is believed that they will arise and be taken up in the glory of the saints.⁵⁰

Another piece of evidence is found in a document entitled *Speculum Fratrum Ordinis Beatae Mariae de Monte Carmelo*, written by Jean de Cheminot in 1337, where we read:

The holy Jerome, in his letter to Paulinus, shows us who the first founders of this holy Order were. He says: Our patriarch and founder is Elijah, our leader is Elisha, and our guides are the sons of the prophets who lived apart in solitude, who made a dwelling place for themselves along the Jordan River... Elijah the Tishbite was the son of Sabacha, of the tribe of Aaron, and he lived on Mount Carmel. On this same mountain, and with fire that came down from heaven in response to his prayer, he destroyed those who served idols and violated the law. This is where he, together with Enoch, was taken up in a chariot of fire, to be placed in an earthly paradise until the coming of the Antichrist. At the time of the Antichrist, both of them will defend the Catholic faith. They will be killed by the Antichrist in Jerusalem and crowned with a glorious martyrdom. Then, after three and a half days, they will rise and be taken up in the glory of the saints.⁵¹

Belief in the survival and return of Elijah was widespread in the Order from the earliest times and continued for quite a while. As late as 1661, Lezana wrote:

At present we are compelled to avoid two errors... The first is that of the rabbis, concerning whom Générard wrote (*Lib. 1, Cronolog.*), who

⁵⁰ *Constitutions des Frères de Notre Dame du Mont-Carmel, faites l'année 1357*. Edited by R.P. ANTOINE MARIE DE LA PRÉSENTATION, Carme Déchaussé, from an early manuscript from Moulins, Marche 1915, 7. The original Latin text reads as follows: *Sciendum est quod a tempore quo raptus est Helias, ut habetur in IV lib. Regum, ubi legitur, quod assumptus fuit vivus in curru igneo et raptus in coelum, atque ut creditur, reservatus est cum Henoch in paradiso terrestri, ambo ibi viventes usque ad adventum Antechristi, et tunc fidem catholicam cum ipso viriliter defensuri, ab eodem Antechristo sunt in fine occidendi, et sic glorioso martyrio coronandi. Deinde post tres dies cum dimidio, ut creditur, resurgentes assummentur ad gloriam Beatorum.*

⁵¹ ADRIANUS, STARING, O.Carm., *Medieval Carmelite Heritage*, Roma, Institutum Carmelitanum, 1989, 117-118. The original Latin text reads as follows: *Primos huius sanctae religionis fundatores ostendit beatus Hieronymus, in epistola ad Paulinum dicens: Noster princeps est Elias, noster dux est Eliseus, nostri duces filii prophetarum qui habitant in agro et solitudine, et faciebant sibi tabernacula prope fluentia Iordanis.... Elias Tesbites fuit filius Sabbacha, ex tribu Aaron. Qui montem Carmeli legitur inhabitasse, et in eodem monte ad preces eius igne de coelo descendente idolatrias et errores legis extripavit. Hic assumptus in curru igneo una cum Enoch in paradiso terrestri usque ad adventum Antichristi reservatur; ipsi ambo tempore Antichristi sunt fidem catholicam defensuri; ab Antichristo in Ierusalem occidentur et glorioso coronabuntur martyrio; deinde post tres dies et dimidium resurgentes assummentur ad gloriam beatorum.*

believe that Elijah, in his rapture, was separated from his body, which dissolved into its elements as soon as it came in contact with the ball of fire. This is why those Hebrews believe that he has already truly died.⁵²

In 1680, Daniel of the Virgin Mary still believed that Elijah had not died and that he would return.⁵³ Outside the Order, this belief was maintained even longer: in 1773, a non-Carmelite published an apology concerning the Prophet Elijah's life in the body, his later return and his martyrdom.⁵⁴ He mentions, among other things, that:

The holy prophet Elijah is not yet dead: he was taken up alive into heaven in a chariot of fire; at present he is still alive in body and soul, and he will continue to be a pilgrim until the end of the world.⁵⁵

The preceding testimonies sufficiently demonstrate the concurrence of the writers of old: they were convinced that Elijah was not dead, that he was still alive. Consequently, the early Carmelites hesitated to institute a liturgical feast for him, since the *dies natalis*, the birth to eternal life, could not be celebrated for someone who is still alive.

But we can also justly ask ourselves why they did not celebrate Elijah's *Raptus*, his being carried off in a chariot of fire, instead of his *dies natalis*, the day on which he was born to eternal life, or in some other way commemorate their Father and Leader in the liturgy. It is difficult to formulate an answer to this question, especially since there exists almost no documentation on the subject. As mentioned above, there are several traces dating from the fifteenth century which indicate a commemoration of the *Raptus Eliae*. The fact that this feast was

⁵² LEZANA, *Consulta*, Consultum tertium 50 n° 31-32. The text in Latin is as follows: *In praesenti autem extremos duos errores fugere compellimur... Primus est, quorundam Rabinorum, qui ut Genebrardus de illis scribit (Lib. 1, Cronolog.) putant, Eliam in suo raptu laxatum corpore et in sua soluta elementa, ubi ad ignis sphaeram pervenisset, unde vere mortuum jam esse Haebraei isti credunt.*

⁵³ DANIEL a VIRGINE MARIA O.Carm., *Speculum Carmelitanvm, sive Historia Eliani Ordinis Fratrum Beatissimae Virginis Mariae de Monte Carmelo... per R. Adm. Patrem F. Danielelem a Virgine Maria Carmeli Flandro-Belgici Ex-Provincialem & Historio-graphum*. Antverpiae, Typis Michaelis Knobbari..., 1680, tom. I, 100, n° 200; 107, n° 209 ss.

⁵⁴ GIUSEPPE, MAZZUOLI, *Apologia per la naturale vita, pel futuro ritorno e martirio del S. Profeta Elia, e per l'uso del color rosso nell'uffizio, e Messa in onore del medesimo Santo*, Firenze 1773.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, 47: *Il Santo Profeta Elias non è ancor morto: vivo fu rapito in aria sopra un Cocchio infuocato: vive in corpo, e in anima anche al presente, e sequiterá ad esser viatore fino alla fine del Mondo.*

only celebrated sporadically, and not throughout the entire Order; seems to indicate, on the one hand, a need to commemorate Elijah in the liturgy in some way but, at the same time, serious reservations. Since the average medieval Carmelite was convinced that Elijah had not died, he seems to have been of the opinion that it was premature to celebrate the *dies natalis* of Elijah liturgically.

In the sixteenth century, when opinions slowly began to change and people seriously began to think about a liturgical feast for Elijah, much opposition was encountered, precisely because of this conviction that Elijah was not dead, that he had not yet undergone martyrdom and that he had not yet joined the choir of saints. Ultimately, and with a delicate subtlety, a compromise was discovered which would allow a feast in honor of Elijah to be celebrated without doing violence to the belief that he was still alive. Lezana's third *Consultum* (recommendation) is devoted to a justification of the institution of an Office and a Mass for Elijah.⁵⁶ He tries to demonstrate their appropriateness by referring to various papal decrees of approval: we can not reject what the Church approves (n° 6 ss). Then he asks himself if Elijah has a right to such a feast, to which he answers in the affirmative, adding that even though Elijah has not yet died yet (n° 31 ss), and even though he is not yet in heaven, he still enjoys the beatific vision in an earthly paradise (n° 44) where, by means of a God-given privilege, Elijah's soul fully comprehends the beatific glory.⁵⁷

This is sufficient in itself to prove Elijah's right to a liturgical feast, but since the Holy See had not yet issued a declaration on the subject, Lezana submits himself to any future instructions from the Church in this regard. And as if this were not enough, he adds support to his thesis from still another angle: Elijah possesses a high degree of sanctity, he has the gift of perseverance, he is confirmed in grace (n° 100 ss), he is the intercessor for all who call upon him (n° 102); and even though he is still alive, he could have already been canonized (n° 129). Moreover, both the fact that he has been transported to an earthly paradise and now lives apart from mortal human beings, as well as the fact that his present life is no longer subject to decay, imply that he is a person who, as far as civil, moral and political status are concerned, is almost dead and buried (n° 130).⁵⁸

⁵⁶ LEZANA, *Consulta*, *Consultum tertium* 47.

⁵⁷ *Elias quoad animae gloriam comprehensor.*

⁵⁸ *Eum facit quasi civiliter, moraliter en politice mortuum seu defunctum.*

These are the arguments that Lezana presents as justification for a liturgical feast in honor of Elijah. But the fact that Lezana had to present such an extensive argument for his proposition reveals that there was still resistance for the feast, simply because of the prevailing opinion that Elijah had not yet died. There's also another similar apology written by Pietro Tomaso Saraceno which was published in 1627.⁵⁹

In the context of this resistance to the introduction of a liturgical feast, it is important to note that the feast of Elisha with an octave is found in a calendar published by the General Chapter of 1564,⁶⁰ but not that of Elijah, in spite of the fact that the feast of Elijah had been included in the missal of 1551⁶¹ which was used throughout the entire Order. It seems that the doubts about whether or not to introduce the feast were only definitively resolved in 1585, at least as far as the highest authority of the Order is concerned: that is when the feast was introduced into the calendar as well as into the body of the revised Breviary,⁶² to be celebrated on July 20 with an octave.

There did not seem to be a problem anymore, at least as far as the highest authority of the Order is concerned, but this was not the case among the lower levels of the hierarchy. Even as late as 1645 there still seemed to be resistance, since the General Chapter of that year had to issue a warning that the feast of Elijah was to be celebrated in all the monasteries of the Order. That was the last trace of any resistance to the feast within the Order. Since then, the feast has been part of the patrimony of both branches of the Order. Outside the Order, resistance seems to have continued until the end of the eighteenth century. As mentioned above, as late as 1773 abbot Giuseppe Mazzoli⁶³ published an apology to demonstrate that Elijah was still alive and would later return to undergo martyrdom.

⁵⁹ PIETRO TOMASO, SARACENO, O.Carm., *Menologium Carmelitarum iuxta novum – antiquum Ritum Sanctissimi Sepulchri Hierosolymitanae Ecclesiae Romanorum Pontificum pietate ad religionis amplitudinem concessum*, Bononiae: Typis Clementis Ferronij, 1627, 35 ss.

⁶⁰ In Alma Urbe in Carmelo Sancti Martini in Montibus, *Anni 1564 Comitiorum Generalium Acta*, Romae, apud Antonium Bladum Impressorem Cameralem, 1564, unnumbered.

⁶¹ *Missale Carmelitarum Fratrum videlicet ordinis Beatae Dei Genticis Mariae de Monte Carmelo, secundum usum Hierosolymitanae Ecclesiae innumeris pene mendis, quibus ante hac scatebat expurgatum...* Venetiis, arte et impensis heredum Lucae Antonii Juntae, 1551.

⁶² *Breviarium Carmelitarum, Capituli Generalis decreto restitutum, Auctoritate Apostolica approbatum, & Reverendiss. Prioris Generalis Magistri Joan. Baptistae de Celis jussu editum*, Romae, ex officina Francisci Zanetti, 1585.

⁶³ See footnote 54.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In summary, it can be established that the feast of Elijah is first mentioned in a printed missal from 1551,⁶⁴ designed to be used throughout the entire Order. In contradiction to what Norman G. Werling, O. Carm., writes,⁶⁵ the feast of Elijah is found in the calendar of that missal on July 20 with the text: *Elie prophete fundatoris ordinis nostri* (feast of the prophet Elijah, founder of our Order). In the missal itself, the feast in question is found on f. 161v, which is also July 20, where it is noted that the text of the Mass is that of the votive Mass. This is a reference to the Mass with the introit *Respexit Elias*. In 1564, the amended calendar was published, but this time without the feast of Elijah. The Mass with the introit *Zelo zelatus sum*, which is still used by the Carmelites of the Ancient Observance, first appeared in the missal of 1587.⁶⁶ The Discalced Carmelites, however, use the Mass text *Ecce ego mittam vobis*. In 1589, the Proper of the Saints⁶⁷ of the Discalced Carmelites was approved, which includes the feast of Elijah with an octave.

Once the feast was formally instituted, the date of July 20 has always been kept, probably due to the influence of the Eastern Church which, according to the Bollandists,⁶⁸ unanimously celebrated the feast of the Rapture of the Prophet on that day. According to these same Bollandists, the early Carmelites celebrated the feast on June 17;⁶⁹ however it should be noted that in all the documents which we have researched June 17 has not appeared as the date, either for the feast of Elijah or for his rapture. May 27, June 23 and July 19 have all been found, and later, the definitive date of July 20.

Looking through the *Acta Sanctorum* of the Bollandists once again, we have discovered a certain Helias on May 27 who, according

⁶⁴ *Missale Carmelitarum*, 1551, compare footnote 61.

⁶⁵ NORMAN G., WERLING, O. Carm., *The Liturgical Cult of Saint Elias and Saint Eliseus in the Carmelite Rite: The Sword*, VI (1942) 11.

⁶⁶ *Missale Fratrum Carmelitarum Ordinis Beatæ Dei Genitricis Mariæ, Capituli Generalis decreto, ad præscriptum Breviarii eiusdem Ordinis auctoritate apostolica probati, restitutum, et Reverendissimi Prioris Generalis Magistri Io. Baptistam de Senis iussu editum*, Romæ, ex typographia Iacobi Tornerii, 1587.

⁶⁷ *Proprium Sanctorum Ordinis Beat. Mariæ Virginis de Monte Carmeli, et aliorum de quibus consuetum est ibi fieri officium, ad formam Breviarii Romani redactum*, Ex auctoritate Sanctissimi Domini nostri Sixti V Pont. Max. En Segovia, por Juan de la Cuesta, año de 1589.

⁶⁸ *Acta Sanctorum, Junius*, vol III, 265.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, 265.

to the Martyrology of Jerome, suffered martyrdom in the company of others in *Tomis ad Pontum Eximium* (Tomis by the Eximius Bridge);⁷⁰ but in other manuscripts (for example, one from Aachen),⁷¹ the same Helias is commemorated, but this time without any companions. It is not impossible that this martyr Helias could have been confused with the prophet Elijah, with the result that Elijah's feast would then have been celebrated on May 27.

In regard to the choice of June 23 for the feast, the Bollandists⁷² are of the opinion that the preference for this date had to do with the fact that the feast of Elijah, or the feast of his Rapture, his being carried off in a chariot of fire, would then be celebrated as the octave of the feast of Elisha (June 16). The temporary choice for July 19 was most probably the result of a copyist's error: the Bollandists⁷³ mention that a martyrology written by Usuardus,⁷⁴ a Benedictine monk from Saint-Germain-des-Près in Paris (ninth century), records the feast of *Raptus*. Is this correct? Should be a genitive (*Eliae* or *Eliae*) as being on July 19, adding that this is not correct; but this does not exclude the possibility that others would have adopted this date, taking it from this particular martyrology.

For centuries the Carmelites worried and fretted about what they should do in regard to the long struggle over a liturgical feast in honor of Elijah. It was precisely their great respect for the prophet which held them back from exchanging a conviction, which had long been part of their spiritual tradition, for a more rational position, namely the belief that Elijah really was mortal and that he had entered the Kingdom of Heaven. Their respect for the spiritual heritage of the Order merits our great admiration.

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⁷⁰ *Acta Sanctorum, Maius*, vol VI, 24.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, 24.

⁷² *Acta Sanctorum, Junius*, vol III, 265.

⁷³ *Acta Sanctorum, Julius*, vol. IV, 579.

⁷⁴ Roma, Bibl. Vatic, ms. 5949.