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Review Essay: Joseph L. Baird (with G. Baglini and J. Kane), *The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam*

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Joseph L. Baird (with G. Baglini and J. Kane), *The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam*, Binghamton, 1986.

I was first introduced to the *cronica* of Fra Salimbene in 1961 by Dr. Allen Breck, the founding father of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association. In those days one was limited to O. Holder-Egger's edition (vol. 32) of the *MGH* published in 1913. There was no English translation except for abridged passages in George Coulton's *From St. Francis to Dante*. Since then, important translations, partial translations, and new editions have appeared in French, German, and Italian. Most notable is the edition by G. Scalia (Scrittori d'Italia; Bari, 1966). Although long recognized as a major reference need among medievalists, the present work is the first complete translation of the chronicle into English.

The *cronica* of Fra Salimbene of Parma (1221-1290) is one of the major sources of information about thirteenth-century Europe. The author traveled extensively in Italy and France, met important people, and saw many interesting events. The work is a storehouse of information, and the friar's anecdotes have made the *cronica* a source of popular enjoyment. Beginning in the 1280s, the the friar was still editing the manuscript up to the time he died. The original (or a copy of the original—a matter still in dispute) is held at the Vatican (MS 7260). It contains 279 sheets with copious marginal notes written by both Fra Salimbene and by various owners of the manuscript.

Joseph Baird, assisted by Giuseppe Baglini and John Kane, has done an admirable translation with critical analysis. Perhaps most important, he has given us a literal translation in the conversational tone and free-flowing sentence structure of the original. Fra Salimbene used the language of his times and some passages have offended sensitive ears. Baird translates the text keeping the ribald language for which Fra Salimbene is known.

The *cronica*, as stated above, is a storehouse of information. Fra Salimbene recorded the sanctity and cruelty, the humility and intolerance, the poverty and the greed of his age. He recorded events around famous persons such as Popes Innocent III and Innocent IV, Saint Louis of France, Bernard of Quintavalle, John of Parma, and Frederick II and his descendants. Many of these people he met and knew personally. Details about the early years of the Franciscan Order are to be found nowhere but in Salimbene's chronicle.

Professor Baird's translation is highly readable. There is a substantial introduction, abundant footnotes, a complete bibliography, a table of correspondences between major editors, and a comprehensive index. I only wish the book were cheaper and in paperback in order to assign it as supplemental reading in medieval history courses.

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