

A Note on the Date of the *Expositio Super Regulam* of Hugh of Digne

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A challenging issue for medieval Franciscan history is how and why the Rule of St. Francis was modified so shortly after the founder's death in 1226. One of the earliest and most important expositions of the Rule was written sometime in the middle of the thirteenth century by the southern French Joachite-Franciscan and scholar, Hugh of Digne.¹ It is remarkable that Hugh's writings have been little studied, since the friar was a central figure in the development of Franciscan Joachimism and served as an inspirator of the Spiritual movement. The Spirituals read his treatises with great respect and admiration. To them he was a zealot for poverty and a heroic figure who had attempted to reinforce the Rule of the founder by an extensive gloss during the first period of laxity among the Friars Minor. Thus, many times he is quoted by Olivi, Clareno, and Casale. In his own time, Hugh was a widely known scholar who counted among his friends John of Parma, Roberte Grosse-teste, and Adam Marsh.

The best contemporary account of Hugh of Digne is by the Franciscan chronicler Salimbene who left his studies at the University of Paris in order to join the circle of Joachite students around Hugh at Hyeres. Fra Salimbene was led to sketch the past of Hugh and to incorporate long extracts from Hugh's sermons and discussions in his *Cronica*.² What comes down to us is a picture of a superb teacher, debater, and preacher. A humble man, who wrote two treatises on poverty and an interpretation of St. Francis' Rule, Hugh once had been a Provincial Minister but he resigned this post in preference for the life of a small convent near Hyeres. Yet, his holiness and reputation remained such that he was allowed to continue receiving postulants into the Order. As a celebrated preacher, he was asked to address the papal curia on occasion, and when St. Louis returned from crusade, the king landed in southern France and went immediately to Hyeres in order to hear the friar.³

Hugh of Digne's early gloss of the Rule of St. Francis is a combination of scholasticism and Joachite-Franciscan exegesis in which the author analyses the Rule by chapter and section, applying the methodology of Biblical postills. The *Expositio super regulam* unfortunately is not dated.⁴ Perimetric dates can be established as sometime between 1242 and 1256. The work must have been completed after 1242, as Hugh made extensive use of the *Expositio Quatuor Magistrorum super regulam Fratrum Minorum*, which was finished early in that year.⁵ Hugh died either in 1255 or 1256.⁶ Internal evidence would seem to indicate that

Hugh wrote his exposition sometime between 1242 and 1243. In Chapter One of the *Expositio*, Hugh makes the curious statement that the Friars Minor's obedience should be placed with "the College of Lord Cardinals with whom authority abides while the Apostolic See is vacant." Such an appointment of authority is unusual on two counts. Hugh's recorded sermons question the office of Cardinal and the Cardinal's authority,⁷ and no such statement is to be found in the exposition of the Four Masters, written before Hugh's gloss, or in the exposition of the Rule by St. Bonaventure, written later than Hugh's. Under normal circumstances, such an allegiance would not have warranted this statement of authority. There is only one time during the perimeter of 1242 and 1256 when a papal vacancy was prolonged; that was from August, 1241 (Gregory IX) to June, 1243 (Innocent IV). The three week pontificate of Celestine IV was so short that it could be discounted. This unusually long vacancy of the Apostolic See could have prompted Hugh's comment, and therefore, places his treatise between the fall of 1241 and the summer of 1243.

NOTES

1. Hugh of Digne, *Expositio super regulam Fratrum Minorum in Firmamentum trium ordinum B. Patris Francisci* (Paris, 1512).
2. Salimbene of Parma, *Cronica*, ed. O. Holder-Egger (M.G.H. XXXII, 1905-1913), pp. 225-36, 238-54.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 236-238. This incident is also recorded by de Joinville.
4. C. Esser, *Origins of the Franciscan Order* (Chicago, 1970), p. 134 places the work "before 1250;" Bishop Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order* (Oxford, 1968), p. 118 states that the treatise had to have been done between 1245-1255. As others, Bishop Moorman took for granted that Hugh used the bull *Ordinem vestrum* (November, 1245). Although similarities exist between Hugh's exposition and this bull, there is no proof that Hugh knew it. R. Brooke, *Early Franciscan Government* (Cambridge, 1959), p. 221, n. 2, accurately notes, "there is an indication that the *Exposition* was written in the long vacancy of the Holy See which ended in 1243."
5. See, *Expositio Quatuor Magistrorum super regulam fratrum minorum* (1241-1242), ed. P. Oligier (Roma, 1950).
6. For the date of Hugh of Digne's death see, J. Albanes, *La Vie de sainte Douceline* (Marseille, 1879), pp. I-III.
7. Fra Salimbene tells us (*Cronica*, p. 227ff.) that in a sermon before the Cardinals in Consistory, Hugh proceeded to "berate them like asses." They are likened to the pagan Athenians of St. Paul's letters, and he condemns their simony, nepotism, and acceptance of bribes. He goes on that they could better be called "carpinales" rather than "Cardinales," and points out that the office of Cardinal was of questionable origin and unknown to the early church.