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Tracing the Identity and Mobilities of a Rediscovered Medieval Route Network: Via Francigena (1695-2020)

Nowadays, the Via Francigena has become internationally famous. However, its historical geography remains a subject of heated debate. This paper explores changing understandings and interpretations of the Via Francigena by geographers, historians, archaeologists and other disciplines over the last three centuries. We examine scholarly claims made from the late eighteenth century onwards concerning the origin of the «Strade Francesche» or «Romee» and the proliferation of local studies and research in the first part of the twentieth century. When historical roads, and more broadly mobilities, became an approach to the analysis of the territorial organisation, the Via Francigena represented a common thread of historical and cultural dynamics. In the second half of the twentieth century, especially from the eighties, the Via Francigena acquired the perspective of an international road network and the number of studies increased. After 1994, when it was proclaimed a Cultural Route of the Council of Europe, there has been much valuable interdisciplinary research concerning the meanings and purposes of its cultural, social and economic values. There has also been considerable debate and scepticism regarding the modern configuration and definition of the itinerary.

Rintracciare l'identità e la mobilità di una rete viaria medievale riscoperta: la Via Francigena (1695-2020)

Oggi, la Via Francigena ha raggiunto una popolarità internazionale. Tuttavia, il dibattito geostorico rimane acceso. Questo articolo esplora le mutevoli conoscenze e interpretazioni della Via Francigena da parte di geografi, storici, archeologi e altre discipline nel corso degli ultimi tre secoli. Esaminiamo i passaggi chiave riguardanti l'origine delle «Strade Francesche» o «Romee» dalla fine del Settecento in poi e la proliferazione di studi e ricerche locali dagli inizi del ventesimo secolo. Quando i percorsi storici, e più in generale le mobilità, sono diventati un approccio all'analisi dell'organizzazione territoriale, la Via Francigena ha rappresentato un filo conduttore delle dinamiche storiche e culturali. Nella seconda metà del Novecento, in particolare dagli anni Ottanta, la Via Francigena ha acquisito la prospettiva di una rete viaria internazionale e gli studi hanno incominciato a diffondersi. Dopo il 1994, quando è stato proclamato Itinerario Culturale del Consiglio d'Europa, se da un lato si assiste ad un fermento interdisciplinare dato dagli obiettivi e valori socio-culturali ed economici, sorgono anche dibattiti e scetticismi sulla moderna configurazione e definizione dell'itinerario.

Keywords: Via Francigena, medieval roads, mobilities, cultural routes

Parole chiave: Via Francigena, viabilità medievale, mobilità, itinerari culturali

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1. Introduction

What we now call the Via Francigena or Romea was a plural medieval road system that linked, through NW Alpine passes, the areas to the north and west with Rome and then on to the Holy Land. It was a fundamental thoroughfare for the Christian West, with a history dating back to the Frankish dominion in the ninth century, and earlier under the Longobards. Some sections followed pre-existing Roman roads which over time developed a different hierarchy and generated further local connections. During the thirteenth century, the routes altered according to the growth of towns and trades. The

names of different sections of the route also changed and a diverse road hierarchy was established.

The Via Francigena has since the 1990s become increasingly famous. Its popularity is linked to the reinvention of the phenomenon of pilgrimage, the associated growth of tourism and the considerable research interest in Via Francigena by academics and local enthusiasts. Its official recognition in 1994 by the Council of Europe led to lively multidisciplinary investigations. These have amplified cultural interest in the areas crossed by the route, but they have also shifted the spotlight to a single, easily comprehensible and commodified path and disguised its medieval complexity. In this paper we assess the historiography of the Via Francigena from 1700-2020, noting how research approaches have evolved and demonstrate how the composite identity of the Francigena road network has been constructed.

Thomas Szabò (1992, p. 15) observed that «roads are not only an essential prerequisite for any historical development, they represent structures whose nature is continuously and in every age subject to the transformations caused by the comparison of humans with the environment». The concept of mobility constitutes a new paradigm with novel research questions and approaches (Sheller and Urry, 2006). It «enables the social world to be theorized as a wide array of economic, social and political practices, infrastructures and ideologies that all involve, entail or curtail various kinds of movement of people, or ideas, or information or objects» (Urry, 2007, p. 43). In geography, mobilities incessantly rework places and landscapes (Cresswell and Merriman, 2011). Landscapes change, viewpoints shift, and people inhabit and move through their surroundings in different ways (Merriman, 2012). Anthropologists have also dealt with movements, mobility and travelling cultures (Turner, 1973; Clifford, 1997). More specifically, within pedestrianism, mobility is conceived through the act of walking as a quintessential feature of a human form of life. In this way, walking as a profoundly social activity, enters properly into the sphere of human sciences (Ingold and Vergunst, 2008).

The Via Francigena is challenging to circumscribe in space and time. It both crosses and carries culture and gives shape and leaves marks on the landscape. Given its historical-geographical complexity and recent controversies over the nature of its identity, as well as the transdisciplinary popularity it has achieved, we argue that it requires greater critical attention. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to trace the configuration – in several nebulous and fragmentary passages – of this medieval road network by recovering «the histories of history» on the topic since the beginning of scholarly interest in early 1700s. These histories include those that have contributed significantly but have then been forgotten, those of considerable interest but not sufficiently analysed, up to the most influential disciplinary studies. At the same time, sources employed by the authors addressed here and direct documentary and cartographic data have been examined.

2. 1695-1900: From the origins of the «Strade Francesche» or «Romee»

Until 1700 the interest of scholars was focussed on the persistence of Roman roads; medieval roads were of little antiquarian significance. The historian Cesare Sardi, writing in 1914, was the first to appreciate the work of eighteenth-century historians in an article about historical roads in the territory of Lucca. Indeed, he claimed that Italian studies of Roman consular roads in Tuscany, by Giovanni Lami and Giovanni Targioni Tozzetti, had been forgotten by the early nineteenth century, with the exception of the geographer Emanuele Repetti (Sardi, 1914, p. 151). Targioni Tozzetti, a Florentine medical doctor and naturalist, was the key eighteenth-century figure. He published his travels in a vast work of six volumes. In a chapter on *Ancient Itineraries* he critically examined the difficulty of rediscovering Roman and military roads (Targioni Tozzetti, 1776, p. 155). He also discussed the «Strada Francesca» (Targioni Tozzetti, 1752, pp. 180-181), which he used himself in his travels «Once in Pietrasanta I took the road to Lucca, which is called Via Francesca [...]» (Targioni Tozzetti, 1774, p. 2), affirming that the name meant that «the road that leads to France» (Targioni Tozzetti, 1776, p. 245). Targioni Tozzetti used Lami's work and the latter was among the first to try to connect the Francigena with medieval history arguing that the «Strada Francesca» almost certainly existed in the eighth century (Lami, 1766, p. CLVI).

The map (fig. 1) shows that between Montignoso and Pietrasanta, the name Via Francigena was still in use to indicate the main road in the early 1590s. Aloisio Mansi discussed border controversies in the same area in the eighth volume of his *Consultationum*. He referred several times to the Francigena route there as «Via Francigena», explaining that the name derived from the famous transit of the Frankish army: «dicta via à celebri transit Francorum exercitus» (Mansi, 1695, pp. 19-21). Noteworthy that he used the plural form «vie Francigene»
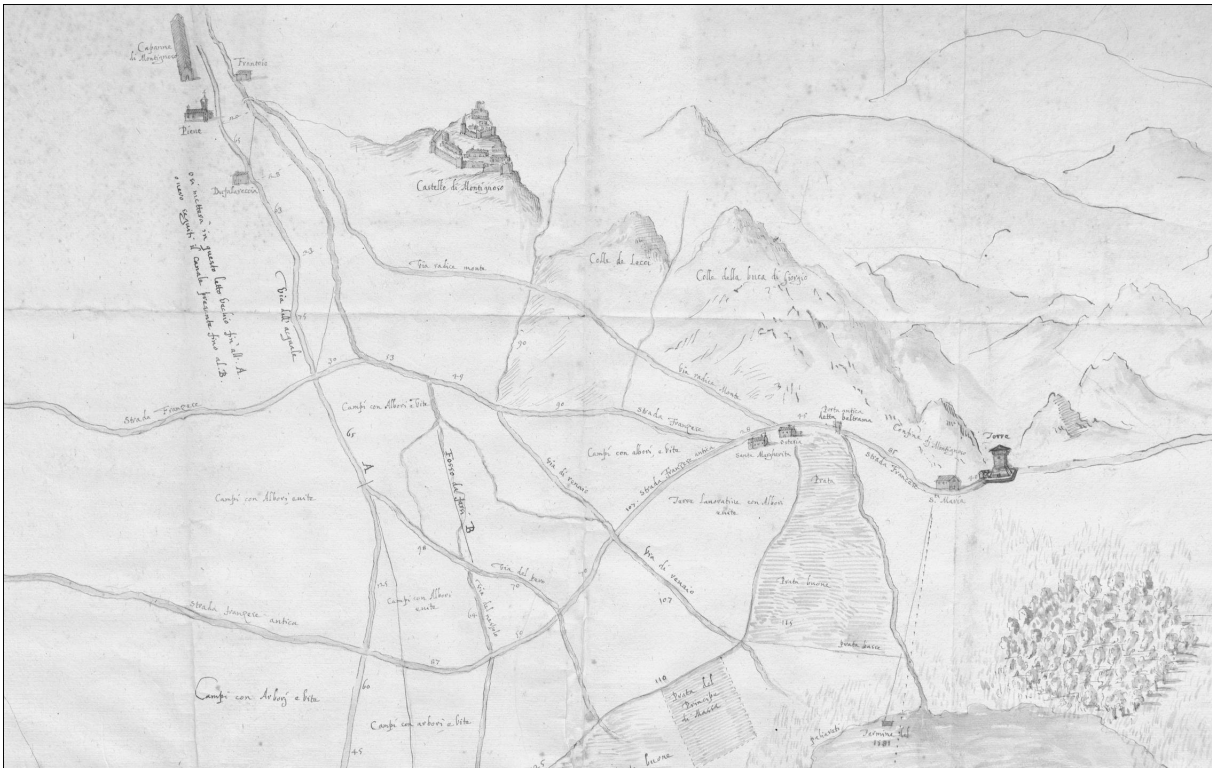
Fig. 1. *Pianta della zona di confine fra il territorio di Montignoso e quello di Pietrasanta presso il lago di Montignoso*, 1592-1593 (detail). This names «strada Franzese» and «strada Franzese antica».
Source: State Archive of Florence, archival collection *Piante antiche dei confini*, cas. VI, 6, map 71a.

(*ibidem*, p. 14) to highlight the multiplicity of the road network; other scholars debated the meaning of the adjective Francigena. Ludovico Muratori, the leading Italian historical scholar of the age, considered linguistic issues but not the road itself in his *Antiquitates* (Muratori, 1739, p. 1019). Giusto Fontanini, an Italian archbishop and historian, examined medieval documents that mentioned Francigena in the context of a road or, as he put it, roads in the plural («Francigene») (Fontanini, 1737, p. 18)[1]. He thought that «some royal roads of Italy, such as the Flaminia, and Emilia, through which the armies of Lamagna [German] passed, descended into Italy, were therefore called Francigene» (*ibidem*, p. 18). We can conclude that at this time studies of road networks were centred on Roman roads with medieval roads being understood strictly in relation to them. This debate later became very heated (see paragraphs 4 and 5).

In the second half of the eighteenth century, Ireneo Affò noted that the «Strada Teutonica», as evidenced by a papal edict of the twelfth century published by Muratori, was so called because Germans organised it as the Franks had done with the «Francigena» or «Francisca» between Fornovo and Tuscany (Affò, 1790, p. 61). Tiraboschi, in his topographical and historical dictionary of the *Stati Estensi* published posthumously, cited Affò in a section on the «Via o Strata Francigena» which he associated with a stretch of the Via Emilia, but he dealt at greater length with the Roman road Via Clodia (Tiraboschi, 1824, p. 401).

Another significant Tuscan scholar was the geographer, historian and naturalist Emanuele Repetti who published his *Dizionario* on the natural and social history of all places in Tuscany between 1833 and 1846 in five volumes. Although some early twentieth-century scholars (for example, Sardi) believed that Repetti had not added much to Targioni Tozzetti's work on ancient roads, this is not true. First, he recorded many more instances of «via francesca» or «francigena» (the word «francesca» appears 33 times in the fifth volume), using previously unexploited archival documents. Second, he always carefully described the territory crossed by a given ancient road, making it still possible today to trace routes. It can therefore be argued that, with Repetti, a precise interest in the Francigena on the ground developed. He dedicated several paragraphs to the medieval road network, recognising stretches of the Francigena, especially in the area around

the Cisa pass between Emilia Romagna and Tuscany (Repetti, 1833, I, p. 86). He devoted a whole chapter to the Francigena route, entitling it «Via Francesca, Francigena, Romea e Pontremolese», all names used at that time. In doing this, Repetti was undoubtedly the first scholar to trace the continuous route of the Francigena from Rome across the whole region of Tuscany to Monte Bardone in the north using the itinerary of Philip Augustus, king of France in 1191 on his return from crusading in the Holy Land to France via Rome. In the course of this analysis he presented an insightful definition of the Via Francigena: «Many *strade maestre* crossing Tuscany towards Rome in the Frankish period were given the generic name Via Francesca» (Repetti, 1843, V, pp. 715-716).

Repetti identified two key archival references: a 952 reference to a *mansio* and residence (in Altopascio) for hosting travellers, taking care of pilgrims and maintaining public roads (Repetti, 1833, I, p. 66) in the episcopal Archive of Lucca; second, he notes that a document concerning a property dispute dated 1107 in the *Codex Diplomaticus Amiatinus* (St. Salvatore abbey in Monte Amiata) identifies a road called «via Francesca» at «Callis Malus» (Callemala) in Val di Paglia (*ibidem*, p. 310). However, the reliable modern edition of these documents by Kurze shows that Repetti was incorrect: the reference is to a «via publica» (which nevertheless is probably the Francigena). Instead, the first mention of Via Francigena («via francisca») is found in an earlier document (876 A.D.) related to St. Salvatore abbey on Monte Amiata in the same *Codex* (fig. 2) (Kurze, 2004, p. 109). Pio Rajna (1887, p. 36), whose work bridged the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, was the first person to discuss this document (see paragraph 3).

In the later nineteenth century the work of other scholars demonstrates a growing awareness of the itinerary. De Bartholomaeis argued that the greatest impact of pilgrims on the Italian peninsula came from France, as evidenced by references to «strata francigena» (De Bartholomaeis, 1888, p. 169). In the same year, don Davoli corrected the error made by Muratori, Tiraboschi and Bethmann of associating the Francigena with the Via Emilia, emphasising that its true route was through Pontremoli in Tuscany (Davoli, 1888, p. 361). Mazzi added documentary references to the history of the Francigena by confirming the use of the «strada Francesca» between Adda and Oglio (Mazzi, 1894, pp. II-III). He noted the plurality of medieval roads and emphasised the adjectival use of «franciscus» (Mazzi, 1880, p. 194).
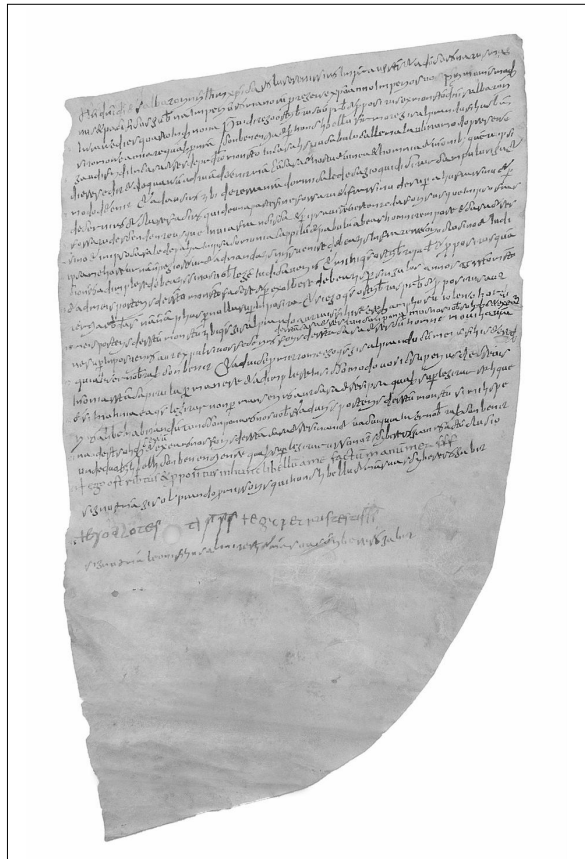

Fig. 2. Parchment contained in the *Codex Diplomaticus Amiatinus*, 4th May 876. Line 9th: «usque in via francisca».
Source: State Archive of Siena, archival collection *Diplomatico San Salvatore MA*, cas. 6 (Leonardo Porcelloni's photograph, 2018).

French, Spanish and German scholars also discussed the Francigena. In France, Alart dealt with the evolution of place names for a stretch near Roussillon and noted that the earliest document to use the term «strata francisca» dates to 865 (Alart, 1856, pp. 70-71). This has interesting parallels with the Italian evidence. Four years later, he also referred to the plural form «voies Francesques» for the routes in the Eastern Pyrenees, which meant, according to him, that they could have nothing in common with ancient Roman roads. This contrasted with contemporary Italian opinion in favour of continuity. His earliest documentary reference was to a text from 801 which used the phrase, «via publica que dicitur Francisca» perhaps one of the earliest references to the Francigena (Alart, 1860, pp. 158-159).

Studies of the Francigena in Spain cited the «Strata francisca» with respect to the discussion on the identification of a port near Barcelona, where «el camino» passed there in the Mid-

dle Ages (Saavedra, 1881, p. 79). Concerning a road («carretera» or «calzada») that starts from Cardaña, a series of diverse legal documents from the nineth and twelfth centuries testify to a «strata francisca, francescha, francigena» which then becomes «strata regia» or «calciata» (Balari y Jovany, 1899, pp. 292-297). German scholars, including Bethmann, interestingly dealt mainly with Italian territory. They associated the ancient and imperial «strata Francigena» with the Piacenza-Rimini route (Tourtual, 1866, p. 68). Langer mentions the «via Francesca» around the Aghinolfi Castle in the vicinity of Montignoso (fig. 1) and correctly listed the main stages from the high Via Emilia to Pontremoli and then to Rome, using Repetti's work (Langer, 1882, p. 20). Like him, Hartwig mentions the «Strada Francigena» (1875, p. 125) or «Via Francigena» on several occasions, as a great military road that led from northern Italy to Rome (*ibidem*, pp. 92-93).

The scholars discussed in this section laid the foundations for future work, especially in gathering together reference to the Francigena in many medieval documents. The earliest authors generally focussed on Roman roads with the occasional mention of the Francigena (Fontanini, Muratori). A much livelier interest in both the route and the roads themselves is evidenced by Targioni Tozzetti, Lami and Repetti. However, this early phase of research also introduced errors which confused some later scholars. Interestingly the road name Francigena («Franzese») is on maps of the late sixteenth century indicating that it was known before scholars discussed it.

3. 1900-1940: The proliferation of local research

This period saw an increase in interest in medieval roads and the Via Francigena based on the widespread study of archival sources. Several micro-territorial case studies, mainly in Tuscany, helped to fill up some gaps in the itinerary (Chiappelli, 1926; Solari, 1929). Moreover, the route was beginning to be discussed in the context of pilgrimage and hospitality (Pavari, 1927) and broader socio-economic studies (Dompé, 1922). One of the earliest studies mentioning the Via Francigena was by the historian Giovanni Sforza, who worked in the area around Pontremoli and in Lunigiana (Sforza, 1887 e 1904). He edited the medieval itineraries of the roads connecting Pontremoli with Lombardy known as the Brattello and Cisa. Interestingly he used various names for the Cisa: «via di Monte Bardone, Romea, Francigena
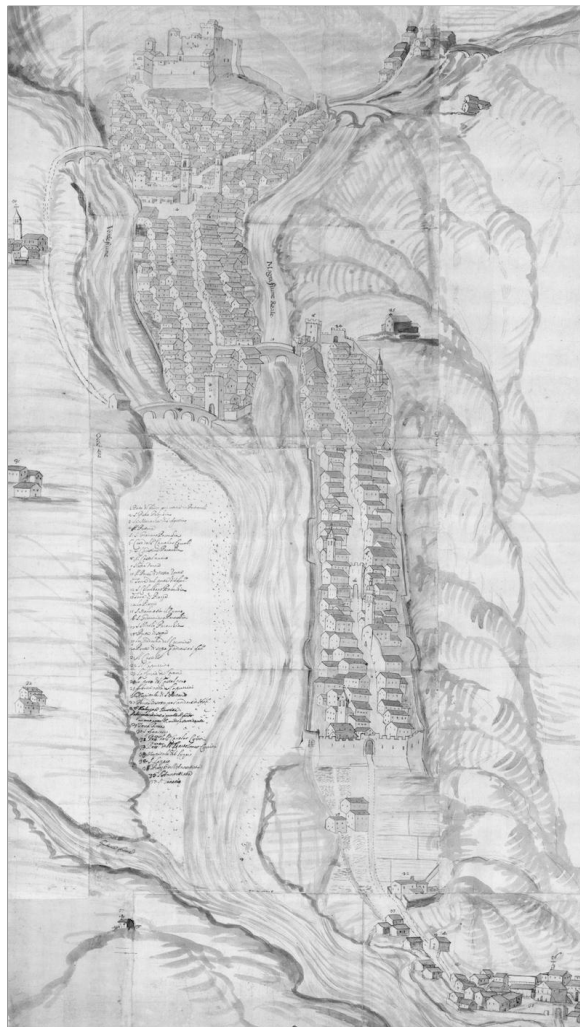

Fig. 3. Seventeenth century view of Pontremoli. «Road village» plan along the Via Francigena and Magra river.
Source: State Archive of Florence, *Miscellanea di piante*, n. 375.

o Francesca, Lombarda e Pontremolese» (Sforza, 1904, p. 341) depending on the likely destination (fig. 3). Road studies in Lunigiana represents a real identity trait of the region (Dadà, 2012, p. 65), perhaps as a valid answer to overcome the Apennine boundaries. Other work on the Via Francigena in Tuscany was published by Schneider (1975) and, in the Valdelsa area, by Mattone-Vezzi (1923) and Guicciardini (1939a e 1939b).

Giuseppe Fatini (1922) was the first to include the «via Francesca» within the title of a paper about the medieval road at the foot of Mount Amiata. He related the arterial route in Paglia and Orcia valleys with the Langobardic abbey dedicated to St. Salvatore at Amiata. This was the first attempt to identify precisely the Via Francigena in this area. Fatini used the abbey archives (*Codex Diplomaticus Amiatinus*) (Fatini, 1922, pp. 1-2),

especially parchments from 876 and 887, both of which prove the existence of the medieval road in the nineth century. Giulio Veronesi Pesciolini (1933) argued that the road called «Romana», and before «Francigena» and «Romea», linked the lands between Lucca, the Valdelsa, and Siena with Rome. He was not particularly successful in identifying the route and argued that the lack of specific references to the road was due to its secondary importance.

The historian Arturo Palmieri argued that knowledge of medieval roads (based on his earlier thesis, 1887) was no less important than that of the great Roman roads and stressed that «Medieval roads deserve to be studied since they were an integral part of the heritage of the feudal regime» (Palmieri, 1918, p. 5). Using public documents of eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries and other medieval parchments, he linked the use of common lands and guarantees for road maintenance (*ibidem*, p. 13). Although Palmieri is one of the first researchers to focus on medieval roads, he tellingly makes no reference to the Via Francigena.

Pio Rajna (1887, p. 33) had considered routes from northern Europe to Rome in the Carolingian period where he found the term «Strata Francigena» in medieval Latin in documents translated into the vernacular as «Strada Francesca». He was first to identify the earliest documentary evidence for the Francigena in Italy (year 876, see paragraph 2), as himself claimed, thanks to Emanuele Repetti's archival research at St. Salvatore abbey on Monte Amiata (*ibidem*, p. 36). This research led him to understand the plurality of the Via Francigena, which he describes as «Strade Francesche». Rajna contextualised these territorial realities with diary sources of great medieval European journeys.

He stressed the plurality of the Via Francigena and also defined them as «Romee» where people travelled south instead of north (*ibidem*, pp. 40-41). He also emphasised the lack of maintenance of Roman roads in the medieval period noting that «if a landslide obstructed the path it was enough to find another way through the rubble» (Rajna, 1912, p. 103). For this he blamed the lack of a powerful central organisation, although he thought the Catholic Church helped to provide a regulatory power over pilgrim and trade routes (*ibidem*, p. 104 and p. 116).

A couple of years later Count Cesare Sardi (1914) attempted to reconstruct the medieval road system of the area around Lucca. He stressed that the roads continued to be used by medieval travellers and argued that Roman and medieval roads should be studied together (*ibidem*, p. 150). Sardi's innovative approach was to searched for local and original documents: «medieval documents can be a reliable guide for the verification of ancient itineraries» (*ibidem*, p. 153). Moreover, Sardi is the first twentieth century author to name the Via Francigena frequently and dedicates a chapter to «via romea o francisca». Why did Sardi use the name «francisca», rather than only «romea»? This is probably because he found two documents using the name. One concerning the entrance of Lucca is «a 1193 charter regarding a house in St. Romano contrada *que tenet uno caput in via francisca* (R. Archivio di Stato, Dipl. S. Ponziano 8th March 1193) [...]» (*ibidem*, pp. 230-231). He described it not as a Roman consular road but as a new itinerary, which followed a safer route between Rome and France and ignored the perilous and abandoned old road (*ibidem*, p. 224). His examination of old records suggested to him that «the via romea or francisca lost their direct links with old roads» but that at Lucca «we can see rise again the via francisca or romea. It is a phenomenon not dissimilar to that of a river flowing into a lake, disappearing, and then coming out and reclaiming its course and its own name» (*ibidem*, pp. 228-229). Some eighteenth and nineteenth century maps around Pescia, Montecatini Terme and Fucecchio (near Lucca), use «via [or] strada maestra Francesca». Through the interpretation of original documents and the decision to use the name Via Francigena, Sardi and Rajna are among of the most important contributors to the historiography of Via Francigena in the early twentieth century.

Overall, studies of the route of the Via Francigena in this period show an increased interest in the medieval period. This move was encouraged by scholarly interpretation of medieval documents. Although these rarely named the routes, successful attempts were made to link particular paths to landscape features in a series of local case studies.

4. 1940-1980: Medieval roads and mobility as study approaches

In this period there was an increase in interest in the study of roads, but specifically to the Via Francigena mainly from the seventies. Most scholars assumed that the road network of late antiquity remained in use until the Middle Ages and constituted the basis of the road system. This con-

tinuity allowed the overall layout of arterial roads to be reconstructed making use of sources such as *Itinerarium Antonini* and *Tabula Peutingeriana*. Advances in aerial photograph interpretation led to increasing knowledge about the pattern of Roman roads and the extent of centuriation (Lugli, 1955; Ward-Perkins, 1957). The Italian historian Roberto Lopez summarised the arguments for and against continuity concluding that «many late medieval and modern roads follow the same routes as Roman ones, especially in Italy and England» (Lopez, 1956, p. 20). From the late sixties, popular interest in the design and structure of Roman roads was greatly stimulated by Daniele Sterpos's publications commissioned by Autostrade per l'Italia S.p.A. (Sterpos, 1969).

Perhaps the most novel contribution to the study of medieval roads in this period was by the Danish historian Johann Plesner (1896-1938), whose work on the thirteenth century road revolution was published posthumously in Copenhagen in 1938, but remained unknown in Italy for forty years until a translation was published (Plesner, 1979). Plesner, analysing in detail the infrastructural maintenance (mainly bridges) from the second half of the thirteenth century, argued that parish churches had a substantial and ancient link with the road management (*ibidem*, pp. 70-74). He identified a correlation between the building of churches and pre-existing «road districts» and the religious system took over the districts' functions. Indeed, he thought that parish churches had a double function: on the one hand to cure souls and on the other to maintain the roads and bridges of a defined territory (*ibidem*, p. 68). His ideas were positively received by some Tuscan scholars in the eighties although there was debate about the distinction between road districts and the rural territorial district known as the *pagus* (Szabò, 1992, pp. 30-31). However, Plesner's use of the term «revolution» is more problematic. This referred to the relocation of roads from the hills to the valleys and was associated with land reclamation processes in the Arno and Ema valleys (Plesner, 1979, p. 92). Consequently, it is very place specific, and is not relevant to areas such the Maremma, once crossed by the ancient Via Aurelia.

Francis Magoun researched travel sources for archbishop Sigeric, the abbot Nikolás of Munkathverá (Magoun, 1940) and King Philip II (Magoun, 1942). Parks (1954) made an important contribution to identifying the various routes used by English and other European travellers (such as the Matthew Paris and Albert of Stade's *vademecum*)

to reach Rome[2]. More broadly, in this period the concept of road studies came into view. A translation of Marc Bloch's *La Société féodale* was published in 1949. It included a rich discussion on the materiality and the management of roads, travellers and trades. In this respect his most productive insight was that travellers usually had a choice of routes «none of which was absolutely essential. The circulation, in a word, was not channelled along some large artery; it was distributed capriciously through a multitude of small channels» (Bloch, 1949, p. 118). Bloch also outlined the wide variety of medieval travellers including wealthy traders, church officials, fugitives, farmers and pilgrims. The geographer Elio Migliorini (1951) related the geography of roads to wider aspects of economic and social geography, and Jacques Le Goff (1956) stressed the broader cultural importance of communication routes and pilgrimage. The crucial importance of medieval roads and mobility was reinforced by Fernand Braudel who argued that «each city is made of movement that swallows, stops to its advantage, then relaunches» (Braudel, 1976, p. 330).

Bloch and Braudel provided the theoretical underpinning of the study of medieval routes and roads. It is in this context that the importance of work of the art historian Arturo Carlo Quintavalle (1975 and 1977) needs to be placed. He reconstructed medieval itineraries in the Emilia region and at the crossings of Monte Bardone (a medieval toponym referred to the Tuscan-Emilian Apennine chain) using evidence from architecture, art history and historical events. He also linked the study of architecture and iconography to pilgrimage and major roads. Interestingly, he called the first book *La strada Romea* noting that it would have been pioneering to call it «la strada Francigena» which would have stressed its origin rather than at the destination (Quintavalle, 1975, p. 7). Crucially, from a methodological point of view, Quintavalle introduced a way of interpreting territory that is neither typological nor regional, but based on the study of the roads; as well as analysing buildings and plans of towns and cities.

Further research in the mid-seventies showed burgeoning interest in medieval roads and the Via Francigena. Alessandra Borgi (1976) reviewed the literature on medieval roads in Tuscany and collected a wide range of information from published sources to provide a chronology from the Etruscans to the early modern period. She linked territorial development with the road network and noted the importance of pilgrimage and associated structures. Moretti, Ruschi and Stopani (1975)

studied the art on the structures built along the roads with the Via Francigena in the centre. But the most important contribution to studies of Via Francigena was Moretti's paper based on a micro-territorial case study in Valdelsa. He used the principal itinerary sources and established data on posts and structures along the road, noting the scarcity of medieval sources and the need for more research on medieval roads, especially at the territorial scale (Moretti, 1977). These works paved the way for the growth of research on Via Francigena after 1980.

5. 1980-2020: The popularity of the Francigena ways

By the end of the seventies, the term Via Francigena had gained a foothold in the imagination of archaeologists, historians and geographers, and there was a growing public interest in the history of medieval roads. This interest rapidly developed into a flood of research by scholars from a variety of traditions from the early eighties. The most important and influential contributions were made by the geographer Renato Stopani (1992, 1998, 2000 and 2010) whose books marks a clear turning point in the historiography of Via Francigena, in particular because he firmly established its national and international profile as a continuous route. Sestini (1984, p. 1) pointed the concept of a road as «a living organism strongly linked with the physical, economic, political geographies of the connected regions». Essentially, Stopani's methodology is interdisciplinary, including the analysis of architectural features and emphasises the need to focus research on sample areas based on medieval ecclesiastical territorial organisation. This approach links with research in the previous decade (Moretti, Ruschi and Stopani, 1975; Quintavalle, 1975 and 1977).

The early eighties also saw growing interest in what has been termed «route archaeology». This is exemplified in Italy by Tiziano Mannoni who argued that «the path itself, with its variants […] cannot be dated by direct archaeological methods, but only by means of written sources, or the topographical study of the settlements linked to it». He noted two key ways of dating physical road features and artworks: «the first is based on the typological criteria inherent in the techniques and materials used; the second on stratigraphic excavation» (Mannoni, 1983, pp. 214-215; 1993). This approach was further developed by Cagnana who emphasised the importance of identifying

Fig. 4. The «Scaleri». A medieval mule track with transverse drainage channels near a derelict *xenodochium*, Cirone pass, on the Francigena network between Pontremoli and Monte Bardone.
Source: Leonardo Porcelloni's photograph, 2019.

the underlying productive culture of the territory and linking historical and geomorphological approaches (Cagnana, 1996, pp. 71-73). Valenti (1996) reported on finds of coins and pottery from various digs near Poggibonsi and Buonconvento and related these to the Via Francigena, while Cambi studied ancient landscapes relevant to branches of Via Francigena (Cambi, 2003). Patitucci Uggeri (2004) stressed the value of using many sources: the geomorphological context; written sources; tracks, artefacts and structures connected with the road; associated settlements and toponymy in her studies of the Via Francigena in Tuscany. A related paper emphasised the value of GIS to help understandings of the links between human and natural elements of road landscapes (Patitucci Uggeri and Uggeri, 2007, p. 324).

The problem of how to study the areas through which medieval routes passed and the extent to which they influenced each other was considered by Giuseppe Sergi (1981, 1995 and 2000) who coined the term «area di strada» (road area). He was influenced by the geographers Paul Vidal de la Blache and Lucien Febvre and argued that

medieval roads consisted of «a territory within which long-lasting transients interact, that is, it contains a series of the routes» (Sergi, 2000, p. 4). He applied his ideas directly to the Via Francigena «there were many vie francigenae. It is rather difficult to talk about variations of a main path because mostly it was about routes of equal importance and equal intensity of the flows» (Sergi, 1995, p. 12). Vanni (1995) developed the road area perspective in the context of micro-regional studies in Tuscany. He also included an innovative contribution on food, culture and society related to the Francigena (Vanni, 2009) and a study on the symbolism of the labyrinths along pilgrimage routes, in particular the one at Pontremoli (Massola and Vanni, 2002). However, Dall'Aglio (2005) argues that the concept of «area di strada» could be misleading because it constitutes a vague aggregation and does not take into account a road system that is in continuity with the Roman one, but hierarchically different, where the substantial difference lies in the road as an artefact. Szabò also supports some continuity between Roman and medieval road networks, and believes this caused a lack of interest in studies of links between Municipalities and roads in Middle Ages (Szabò, 1986).

The relationship between the concepts of space and territoriality were developed by Cardini (1985) in studies of medieval roads around Siena. Cardini emphasised the relationship between roads and political power (*ibidem*, p. 25) and highlighted the importance travellers, specifically in the case of crusades and pilgrimages (Cardini, 1996). In addition to scholarly research, Stopani established the *Centro Studi Romei* (Centre of Studies on the Medieval Routes of Pilgrimage to Rome) in 1985, which has been influential through the
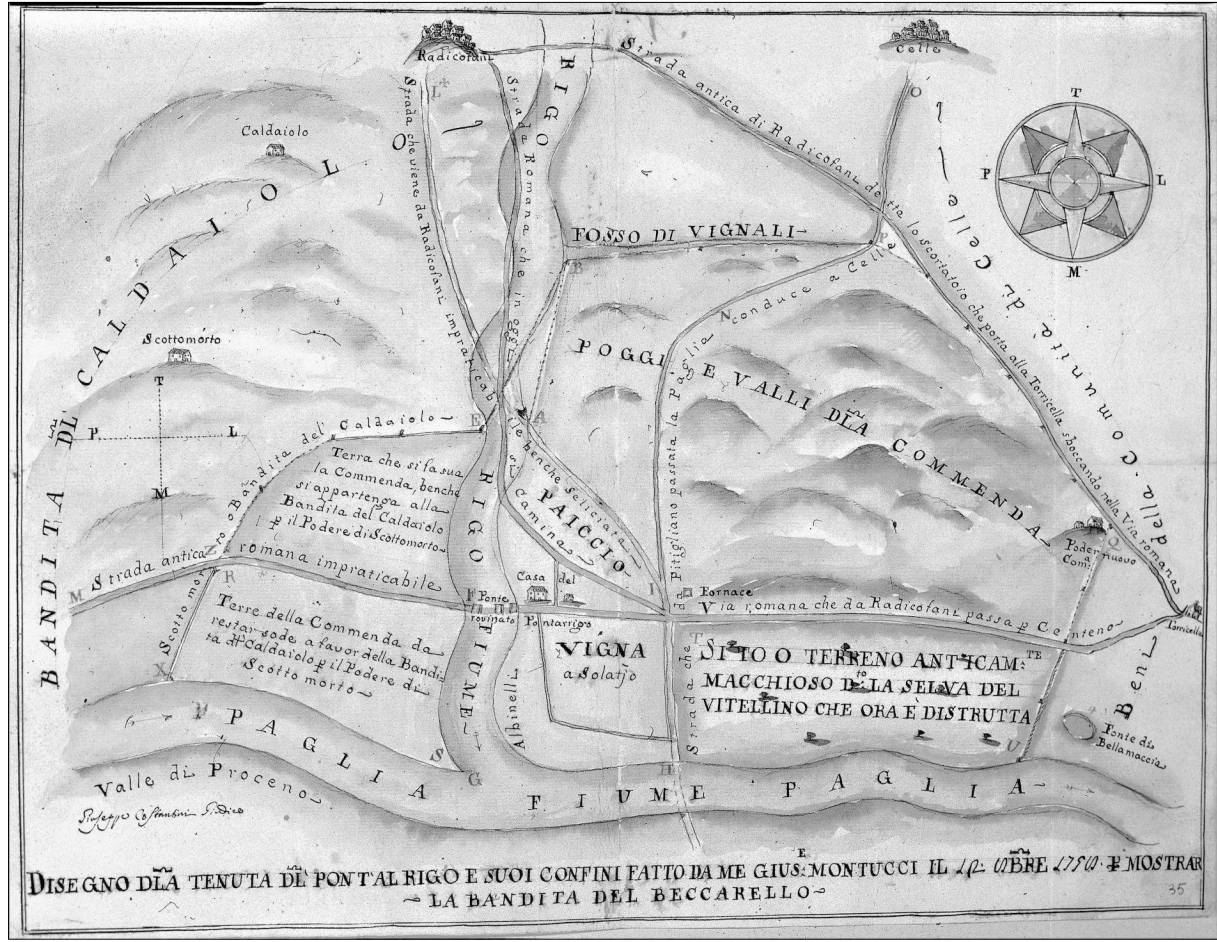

Fig. 5. 1758 map of the roads between Radicofani and Paglia Valley (Siena). It shows that the old Via Francigena along the River Paglia is impassable: «strada antica romana impraticabile».
Source: State Archive of Siena, archival collection *Quattro Conservatori 3052*, n. 35.

organisation of interdisciplinary exhibitions and conferences on medieval pilgrimage routes. Its magazine *De Strata Francigena* has published many articles on medieval pilgrimage since 1993. The value of detailed local research was shown by the publication of *L'Amiata nel Medioevo* (Ascheri and Kurze, 1989) which opened up discussions on the importance of the wide-ranging Francigena road network. This included questions of identity and nomenclature, such as whether to use «via» or «strata», «Francigena» or «Romea» (Szabò, 1989, p. 300), and specific research on the area between Val d'Orcia and Val di Paglia (Stopani and Mambrini, 1989). An area that has embraced further recent developments in the Francigena's studies (Mambrini, 2016; Porcelloni, 2017).

The value of medieval pilgrimage routes as part of the cultural heritage received a great boost in 1987 when the Council of Europe introduced the denomination Cultural Route of the Council of Europe with the Santiago de Compostella Declaration (Caucci von Saucken and Asolan, 2009). The enormous popularity of the Santiago de Compostella pilgrimage certainly stimulated interest locally and internationally in Via Francigena, and in 1994 the «Via Francigena»[3] was certified. In anticipation the anthropologist Caselli published in 1990 a guide following in the footsteps of Sigeric, on the thousandth anniversary of his journey (990-1990) (Caselli, 1990). The International Association Via Francigena (AIVF) was set up in 1997, followed in 2001 by the European Association of the Via Francigena ways (EAVF), that was accepted in 2007 by the Council of Europe as institutional representative.

The revival, invention and popularity of pilgrimage routes was complemented by historical studies of medieval pilgrim routes. Franco Cardini (1971) showed how pilgrims were protected and looked after by the church which also supported road construction, maintenance and restoration of ancient routes; more recently about the Christian value of pilgrimage (Cardini and Russo, 2019). Further studies emphasised connections between pilgrimage and hospitality (Peyer, 1990) and linked pilgrimages and the crusades from an anthropological point of view (Dupront, 1987). In addition, studies of individual journeys, especially Ortenberg's (1990) analysis of archbishop Sigeric's journey from Canterbury to Rome in 990, allowed the precise identification of different stages along medieval routes.

Renato Stopani rapidly extended the reach of his research to the national and international level (1992, 1998 and 2000) and explored the early medieval development of the route and the other main medieval arteries, which he saw as a bundle of «new itineraries, born from the ruins of the Roman road system, which were the result of a history of collage between sections of ancient Roman consular and sections of pre-existing local routes» (Stopani, 2000, p. 8). Interestingly, he thought that the very success and popularity of «Via Francigena» had cast a shadow over the study of other communication routes such as the via Teutonic (Stopani 2010), but he continues to research alternative routes of Via Francigena, for example, in Lucania (Stopani, 2019). Indeed, research on the Francigena network from Rome to Apulia is taking hold, and Dalena (1995 and 2017) has explored the links between Via Francigena and the Holy Land retracing the main journeys and the itinerary from Rome to the South.

Over the last decade, there has been a growing interest in Italian cultural routes, large-scale investment (in terms of finance and public policies) and a proliferation of new cultural trails (Beltramo, 2015, p. 355). The «Via Francigena» has become a very valuable tourist product. According to the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS, 2008, p. 2) «Cultural Routes represent interactive, dynamic, and evolving processes of human intercultural links that reflect the rich diversity of the contributions of different peoples to cultural heritage». Le Goff argued that the Via Francigena is a clear manifestation of the cohesion and diversity of Europe (Le Goff, 1996). This is because it brought pilgrims from northern Europe to Rome, as portrayed in one of the first documentary films on the Francigena[4].

Cultural Routes are seen as providing an opportunity for collaborative research and practical projects in the field of landscape architecture as well as other disciplines (Berti, 2015, pp. 26-27). They can become a way of guiding the sustainable development of territories (Berti, 2013, p. 2). To an extent the routes provide a new way of seeing and understanding landscapes. Thus, the routes become a privileged means of reading the landscape: «movement through the landscape helps us to understand its distinctive features, to better compare sensations, to attribute values» (Morelli, 2007, p. VII). Roads and road landscapes are investigated through specific frameworks to analyse and determine the complex system of heritage values. This approach is relevant both to modern roads and to historical pilgrimage routes, it can promote local tourism and landscape planning (Serenelli and others, 2017). This literature, which places the road at the centre of studies, allows us

to identify a new tradition of «roadscape» studies. This is a multidisciplinary approach (including architecture, ecology, engineering and anthropology) that starts from guidelines laid down by the Council of Europe and develops, around «Via Francigena», strategies for the protection, governance and use of the path jointly with the landscape, as in the work of the Instituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia (Bettini, Marotta and Tosi, 2011). On the other hand, this planning focus has encouraged a shift of attention from the complex medieval reality to the Sigeric's individual itinerary. Cardini, with respect to the historical approach, has strongly contested the identification of the Via Francigena with the Canterbury-Rome route. Indeed, he felt, this link was the outcome of a successful 1980s BBC documentary on the Sigeric's pilgrimage (speech given on the 20th November 2013 and reported in Francini, 2015, p. 17).

Religious journeys are an increasingly important aspect of international tourism (De Salvo, 2015). There has been research on establishing the «Via Francigena» as a «homogenous product» that combines marketing, the experience of walking the route and the landscapes traversed (Vanni, 2006; Polci, 2006; Dallari, 2009; Rizzi and Onorato, 2011). The first International Conference on Pilgrimage Routes, held in Florence, focussed on local development and tourist attractions along «Via Francigena» in Tuscany (Bambi and Barbari, 2015). Moreover a series of cultural and artistic celebrations, exhibitions and popular events have spurred interest in «Via Francigena»[5]. At the Italian political level the *Consulta degli itinerari storici culturali religiosi* was established in 2007 and a «Year of the Paths» was proclaimed in 2016. The «Atlas of Paths through Italy» aimed to «enhance the heritage of the historic, natural, cultural and religious network of paths throughout the country, from north to south» to encourage slow tourism (MiBACT)[6]. Since 2017 «Via Francigena» has been in the process of obtaining UNESCO candidacy in connection to MiBACT, Italian regions and the EAVF[7]. The «Via Francigena of the South», stretching from Rome to Apulia, was approved in 2019 by the members of the EAVF[8]

6. Conclusion: an open debate over the itinerary's identity

The great popularity of «Via Francigena» as a modern pilgrimage and tourist phenomenon with important social, economic and cultural implications has engendered considerable criticism and scepticism. Moretti argued that in 1977 he could never have imagined that the «Via Francigena» could receive so much attention «sometimes excessive and distorted, as often happens when the media are involved» and that the historical truth become so modified (Moretti, 2011, p. 13). When the «Via Francigena» was proclaimed a European Cultural Route in 1994, concern was expressed that institutions, government representatives and regional administrators would insist on updating the ancient road to maximise economic, tourist and employment prospects. This would leave uncertainties concerning the ancient route «shrouded in mist» (Centro Studi Romei, 1995, pp. 7-8). More recently, Cardini argued that «Via Francigena» «is an expression that has been abused» and its commodification has affected the publishing industry (Cardini, 2016, p. 7). Ascheri (2015) has stressed the need to correct historical inaccuracies encouraged by the enthusiasm for «Via Francigena». Following the recent criticisms, there has been a sort of contextual rearrangement between the academic reality, that values geo-historical complexity, and the institutional requirement for a simpler, clearer route.

This paper has identified the evolution of studies on Via Francigena from the first few mentions in the early eighteenth century to the rich and diverse multidisciplinary research we have today. There have been many shifts in approach and changes in interpretation of evidence over the last 320 years. Crucially, while the «idea» of Via Francigena has become more dominant, its historical «materiality» has often remained nebulous and fragmentary. Some debates remain constant: some of the earliest authors identified the «adjectival» and plural value of the term Via Francigena; the form of the precise relationship between Roman roads and medieval routes remains contested. On a methodological level, we have shown how the road can be a privileged means for studying social interactions with the natural environment: almost, to use Bertolotti's phrase «the thermometer of the peoples' civilisation» (Bertolotti, 1834, p. 192). We have shown how since 1700 historians and geographers invented and debated the idea of Via Francigena. Much scholarship was based on fragmentary medieval evidence but more recently, this has been combined with archaeological, art historical, architectural and anthropological approaches which strengthen and refine understandings of this important medieval route and the way that it interacts with landscape and culture.

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Notes

[1] The European Association of the Via Francigena ways (EAVF) was founded under the name «Francigene» to embody the plurality of the Francigena road network («Francigena ways»).

[2] Interest in medieval travel sources began already in the second half of the nineteenth century. For instance: Walter Farquhar Hook (1860), *Lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury*, Vol. I. London, R. Bentley; Konrad Miller (1895), *Mappaemundi: die ältesten Weltkarten*, Stuttgart, J. Roth; William Stubbs (1874), *Memorials of Saint Dunstan, archbishop of Canterbury*, London, Longman & co.

[3] We use Via Francigena to denote the historical route and «Via Francigena» for the institutional product.

[4] https://fidenza-luoghi.blogspot.com/p/cronacario-elettorale.html (last accessed: 16.VIII.2023).

[5] See the «Via Francigena Collective Project» (since 2011) patronised by the EAVF; «Comuni in Cammino» Forum, organised by the EAVF annually since 2014 at Monteriggioni; «Walking Francigena Ultramarathon» (since 2017). An exhibition was held in 2018 in Abbadia S. S. which showed a facsimile of the 876 A.D. parchment (21 July 2018 at the «Museo dell'Abbazia S.S.»). The BBC celebrities pilgrimage along the Via Francigena. The work of the artist Jannina Veit Teuten, whose «La Via Francigena Project» since the early Nineties has produced 150 paintings along the Via Francigena. The Great Jubilee in 2000, one of the major events in the Roman Catholic Church.

[6] https://camminiditalia.cultura.gov.it/home-cammini-ditalia/atlante-dei-cammini/ (last accessed: 16.VIII.2023).

[7] https://www.viefrancigene.org/en/UNESCO/ (last accessed: 16.VIII.2023).

[8] https://www.viefrancigene.org/it/via-francigena-of-the-south-is-ratified-by-the-eavf-general-assembly-to-be-an-official-path-of-the-via-francigena-from-rome-to-santa-maria-di-leuca/ (last accessed: 16.VIII.2023).