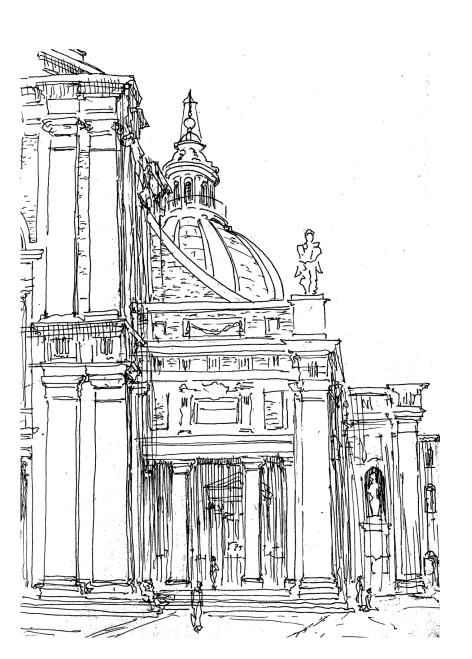
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# **Franciscan Landscapes**

Conservation, Protection and Use of Religious Cultural Heritage in the Digital Era vol. 2



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# **Franciscan Landscapes**

Conservation, Protection and Use of Religious Cultural Heritage in the Digital Era

vol. 2



This volume collects the papers presented at the concluding conference of the European project 'F-ATLAS: Franciscan Landscapes: The Observance between Italy, Portugal and Spain' that took place in Assisi, May 11-13, 2023.

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NEW CONTENTS ON THE CONVENTS OF THE FRANCISCAN OBSERVANCE IN UMBRIA (ITALY): EXAMPLES FROM AN ONGOING RESEARCH ON THE HISTORICAL ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTATION

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## **Abstract**

This essay sets out the results of research conducted in the main historical archives of Umbria, starting with that of San Francesco del Monte in Perugia (Monteripido) and especially the Historical Archive of the Patriarchal Basilica of Santa Maria degli Angeli in Assisi. The latter preserves, in addition to the papers of the Basilica and the Portiuncula, extensive documentation relating to a number of Franciscan Observance monasteries, including the Hermitage of Santa Maria delle Carceri in Assisi, the monasteries of Santissima Annunziata in Gualdo Tadino, Santissima Annunziata in Amelia, San Bartolomeo in Foligno, Monteluco, Sacro Speco in Narni and San Francesco in Stroncone. These documentary bodies - very fragmentary and incomplete, not always ordered and catalogued and therefore, often difficult to consult – consists of correspondence, minutes of sacred canonical visits, patrimonial and accounting notes, entries and exits, convent chronicles and memoirs, and concern various aspects of the history and life of the Osservanza convents. Among them, those considered most significant have been selected in order to document some fundamental episodes of the architectural complexes chosen as case studies (such as the construction, renovation and expansion works of the buildings), with the relations established, since their foundation, with the territory and the landscape in which they are set, regarding in particular the use of resources (mainly water and springs, woods and pastures, agrarian spaces), communication routes and urban settlements, in a period between the 17th and 20th centuries.

Keywords: Convents, Umbria, Historical Archives Documentation.

## 1. The historical archival documentation

The research, whose initial results are presented in this writing, was conducted in the main historical archives of Umbria, particularly in the Historical Archive of the Seraphic Province of the Franciscan Friars Minor of Umbria (located in Assisi at the provincial Curia attached to the Basilica of Santa Maria degli Angeli), where documentation from numerous convents has been gradually gathered over time.

An initial investigation also involved exploring the inventories of National historical archives and some local archives in Umbria, which house documentary collections related to convents that came into their possession following the suppression of religious institutions during the Napoleonic and Unification eras. These include the diocesan archives of Assisi, Spoleto, and Nocera Umbra with Gualdo Tadino, the Municipal Historical Archive and the Augusta Municipal Library of Perugia. For example, the latter holds documentation related to suppressed convents in its Manuscripts section; the Diocesan Historical Archive of Assisi, in the Bishops' Curia section, contains documents about female (16<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries) and male (16<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries) monasteries and convents; in the *Archivio di Stato* di Perugia, Spoleto Section, in the Religious Corporations section, there are five registers related not to a convent but to the hermits of Monteluco, with documentation from 1631-1780. However, this research path yielded few positive results for the selected case studies, as the documentation remained at their respective locations and then gradually converged (at different times and in different ways) to Assisi in the Provincial Historical Archive.

As stated on the website of the Seraphic Province, already "in 1614, a section of the Santa Maria degli Angeli provincial archive was set up, consisting of documentation taken from the archives of the province's convents. Since then, and especially since the post-World War II period, this practice has been consolidated and strengthened, and currently, the historical archive of the Seraphic Province of Saint. Francis of Assisi is increasing its function as a centralised repository, also for the better safeguarding of the documentary heritage. In 2003, the Provincial Minister, with a letter sent to all guardians and heads of communities of the Province, requested the transfer to the provincial historical archive of all the documentation still scattered in religious houses and coming from closed convents" (https://www.assisiofm.it/).

The concentration of historical documents in a single central location has been a fundamentally important operation, allowing for preserving and enhancing the documentary heritage. It has facilitated its use by scholars and those interested in the history of convents, thus encouraging research paths and projects.

In recent times, users have been able to avail themselves of documentary research tools, thanks to the reorganisation and inventory project of all documentary collections that have flowed into the provincial archive, promoted since 2004 by the Provincial Minister and entrusted to the care of Andrea Maiarelli, with the collaboration of lay archivist personnel and religious experts — a project that is still to be completed.

The provincial archive houses extensive documentation related to some convents of the Franciscan Observance, including the Hermitage of Santa Maria delle Carceri and the Convent of San Damiano in Assisi, the convents of the SS. Annunziata of Gualdo Tadino, the SS. Annunziata of Amelia, San Bartolomeo of Foligno, Monteluco, the Sacro Speco of Narni, and San Francesco of Stroncone.

In the same location, there is also the Historical Archive of the Seraphic Province of Saint Francis of Assisi of the Friars Minor in Umbria, established in 1946 through the merger of the two previous Observance provinces of Umbria: that of Saint Francis and that of Saint Clare. The reorganisation work, also initiated in 2004, led to a printed inventory (Maiarelli, 2005). This archive includes the Closed Convents Section, "consisting of 49 archives, originating from just as many convents belonging to the observing provinces of Umbria, also located outside the current administrative boundaries of the region" (Maiarelli, 2005, p. XIV), which were concentrated in the provincial headquarters following the suppressions of religious orders and closures that took place during the 19th century. The documentation is extensive, covering a chronological span from 1230 to 2004, and within this section are the few documents related to the Hermitage of the Santissima Annunziata in Cesi.

Apart from the archives of the closed convents, only for the Basilica Patriarcale the detailed inventories with printed catalogues exist (Maiarelli, 2004; 2007); for all the others, at the moment, there are rather summarised and incomplete lists of contents, and it is only thanks to the availability of the friars that we have been able to consult the papers of our interest. Only the documentation of San Francesco del Monte of Perugia (Monteripido) has remained on-site and is preserved in the internal archive, reorganised, inventoried, and accessible through a printed catalogue from 2004, edited by Andrea Maiarelli himself. These documentary collections are, with few exceptions, quite fragmented and incomplete; some still need to be ordered and catalogued (such as those related to Monteluco and the Sacro Speco of Narni) and thus difficult to access. As Andrea Maiarelli writes (2005, p. XIV), "in most cases, we are indeed faced with modest documentary remnants of archives that were much more substantial, as clearly evidenced by the numerous ancient inventories found during the cataloguing process".

The documentation that has primarily attracted our attention consists of correspondences, minutes of sacred canonical visits (required by the general norms of the Order and conducted periodically by both a General Visitor and a Provincial Minister), asset records, administrative and financial documents, income and expenditures, chronicles, and conventual memories (notations about the most important events that occurred in a year, usually presented chronologically), and construction works. Consequently, the most significant papers were selected to document some events related to the architectural complexes, such as construction, renovation, and expansion works of the buildings, property states, relationships established by the convents with the environment and territory in which they are situated, particularly regarding the use of modest property resources (mainly water sources, forests and pastures, agricultural spaces), communication routes, and urban settlements. The aim is to bring new insights into the history and life of the Observance convents chosen as case studies<sup>1</sup>, spanning from the 17th to the 20th century.

This contribution will present only a few examples that will be the subject of more extensive discourse in subsequent work by the research group.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> This research has taken into consideration: the Hermitage of Santa Maria delle Carceri in Assisi, the convents of San Francesco del Monte of Perugia (Monteripido), of the SS. Annunziata in Gualdo Tadino, of the SS. Annunziata of Amelia, San Bartolomeo in Foligno, S. Francesco di Monteluco in Spoleto, Sacro Speco of Narni, San Francesco of Stroncone and the Hermitage of the SS. Annunziata in Cesi.

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# 2. The convents and their landscapes in the archival documentation: some examples

Since their foundation, the convents have contributed to the management and evolution of the landscape with their assets — albeit modest, considering the rules of the Order — consisting of forests, small plots of land, vegetable gardens, and sometimes farms: for example, with reforestation efforts or more frequently with the planting of fruit trees, especially vines and olive trees. In the meagre real estate assets of the religious structures under consideration, there are also some peasant houses and hospices, as we will see with some examples later.

It is known that the convents establish privileged relationships with the physical characteristics of the spaces in which they are founded, giving rise to that particular process that semioticians call 'signification', that is, the attribution of specific meanings to the physical environment, hydrography, geological features, and aspects of vegetation. Historiography (and the archival documents consulted confirm this) has highlighted in numerous studies the close connection between convents and environments and landscapes, particularly with water sources and watercourses and forests. This connection is established from the very beginning when the first hermits choose places for their retreats. For example, in 1977, Luigi Pellegrini reflected on the location of the first Umbrian settlements in the hermitic experience of Francis and his followers: precisely concerning the forest and the centuries-old presence of oak and coppice forest for wood and animal grazing; or about high pastures (once much more extensive than today), which sometimes extended to the hermitages; or in relation to springs and natural shelters for humans and animals. The location of hermit and convent sites is also important, including both primary and secondary roads, such as the roads and paths that connected forests and pastures to inhabited centres, especially in pastoral hill areas towards neighbouring regions.

Examples include the Sacro Speco of Narni, located on a path that connects Poggio Bustone to high pastures and descends towards La Leonessa; Greccio, which gravitates towards Stroncone and Terni; Monteluco on the way to Valnerina; the Fonte Colombo area connecting Rieti with the farms and villages of the higher agricultural and pastoral zone (Pellegrini, 1977, pp. 307-309).

From the consulted documentation (though extremely fragmentary and discontinuous), it emerges that many convents owned or could use forested areas during the period under consideration. All had one or more vegetable gardens, almost always enclosed spaces, equipped with wells or cisterns for water, which provided a significant portion of the friars' sustenance throughout the year, thanks to the seasonal cultivation of vegetables and the presence of fruit trees.

Let's now delve into some significant examples.

From a report by Friar Bonaventura from Perugia in 1650 (preserved in the convent's archives), it is learned that around the convent of San Francesco del Monte in Perugia, there was the enclosure wall which included a very large space, including, in addition to the church, a forest of oaks and cypresses, and terraced vegetable gardens; a third cloister (now known as San Giacomo della Marca's) enclosed another area used as a vegetable garden at the time (Giacometti, 2014, pp. 89-90).

A document from the same year about the state of the Convent of San Francesco di Stroncone stated that the religious had no property, "except for the church, a cloister, vegetable gardens, and the woods" (San Francesco di Stroncone, Carteggio, 5, c.n.n.). In some documents from 1620, it is learned that the water supply for the vegetable garden was provided by a concession from the Municipality "of ancient use and possession of water" from two springs. One — it is written — flows from a spring "and flows through a hole in the ground and falls into a certain pool to go to San Francesco through the conduits that can be seen and appear up to the convent and vegetable gardens of the same Fathers, where the preserve and fishpond are for watering salads and herbs in the summer"; the second "is the one that flows through the earth in the rains, passes through the Square of Stroncone towards the Archive under which there is the house of Antonio di Placido, where at the bottom there is a sewer, or washroom", further on, it passed by other houses and other "washrooms". Given the Community's intention to sell the spring, the friars requested and obtained permission to maintain ownership (Convento di San Francesco di Stroncone, Carteggio, 11, c.n.n.).

The large vegetable garden of Santa Maria delle Carceri also provides information, at least in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, on the numerous and substantial

work for the construction and maintenance of the enclosing wall, which also served, in one section, as support for the road that still connects the city to the sanctuary. For example, on May 8, 1822, the master mason Bernardino Barili from Assisi, appointed by the guardian Friar Andrea from Spello, carried out an appraisal of the work done on the vegetable garden walls, with surveying, measurement, and detailed expense calculations, also planning the enlargement and some restorations to the cistern (bottom and side walls, walls with vault and roof) (Archivio dell'Eremo di Santa Maria delle Carceri in Assisi, Carteggio, 7, c. 8).

During the twentieth century, efforts were made several times to repair or rebuild the enclosing wall of the convent vegetable garden: for example, in 1927, at the expense of the Directorate of Monuments of Umbria; in 1931 and 1948, when a section of the enclosing wall was demolished, and an internal road was built that crossed it all to reach the heart of the convent; in 1949, a door was opened from the vegetable garden to the lower part of the convent, and a 'cistern' (a water reservoir) was built next to the new road, where 'vines and fruit trees' had been planted; in 1953-1954, to increase the cultivable area, stones were removed from part of the pavement and replaced – it reads – "with earth from the Mountain that will allow planting"; in 1956-1957, the chronicler wrote: "With much regret, the 70 vines of the vegetable garden were removed. Their yield was zero, and the very few clusters did not ripen"; finally, in 1971 (the year in which the convent served as a set for Franco Zeffirelli's documentary *Fratello Sole Sorella Luna*), repairs were made to the vegetable garden road (Archivio dell'Eremo di Santa Maria delle Carceri in Assisi, Cronache, 1).

In a Memoir from the Convent of the SS. Annunziata of Amelia, undated but dating back to the first half of the twentieth century, the typical landscape context of sharecropping is well described, in which the structure is located, consisting of hills covered with crops, with the distinctive mixture of fields of cereals, olives, fruit trees, and married vines; a landscape that stands out from the Apennines, visible to the north and northwest, and from the flat Roman countryside, open to the south. Outside the enclosure extends a dense thicket belonging to the Convent, donated in previous centuries by various individuals and the Municipality of Amelia.

The anonymous document reads: "The convent is surrounded by fertile hills cultivated in a special way, as fruit cultivation is unique [...]; rows of vines and trees with vines wrapped around them, and this is common, but what is unique here is seeing olives and all sorts of fruit, especially figs, growing in great abundance without order, so closely spaced that one almost touches the other. Nevertheless, the land yields and the tenants are much

opposite page Fig. 1 Project of the walls to establish the exact ownership of Santa Maria delle Carceri convent, with a request for a portion of land adjacent to the neighbouring owner, by Lorenzo Carpinelli, 1841 (Archivio dell'Eremo di Santa Maria delle Carceri in Assisi. Carteggio, 11, c. 14).

better off here than in other parts of Italy". The description then states that "from the convent, at an altitude of 500 meters, there is a view over the vast plain of the Roman countryside, while to the east and north the landscape is made up of hills and ridges of the Apennines, which continue towards Lazio; to the west, there is Mount Cimino, at the foot of which is the village of Surigno and Viterbo can be seen; beyond, there is a vast plain that extends to the sea" (Archivio SS. Annunziata di Amelia, Memorie diverse, 4).

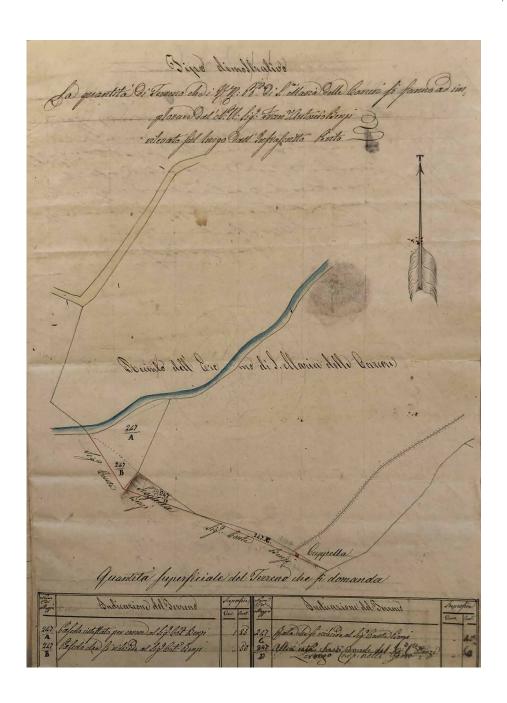
Numerous documents from the convents reveal the problematic relationship with the shepherds who passed through (for autumn and spring transhumance or summer mountain grazing) on the roads, fields, and woods belonging to the religious, causing damage to the structures and vegetable gardens, cutting vegetation, etc.

For example, at the Sacro Speco of Narni, in a note from 1746, it is learned that the convent had a large wooded area granted by the Popolo of San Volano: "all the thicket or large forest" located near the road leading to Narni, including "that little corner or patch of thicket that remains below the road that leads to San Volano", of which the exact boundaries needed to be recognised. In the document, the friars appeal to the Community to grant them the maintenance of this possession, especially "to escape the troubles with the shepherds of Vasciano who continually damage the forest with their herds, reducing it to a thornbush, not content with grazing, but if there is any tree, they have no scruples about cutting it down", to the point that the forest around the convent was practically bare and the friars without firewood (Sacro Speco di Narni, Archivio non inventariato, Inserto 1700, c.n.n.).

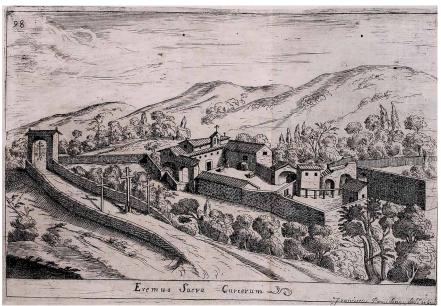
In 1755, in a letter sent to the superiors, the guardian and the friars once again complained of frequent damage to their vegetable gardens by shepherds and livestock from nearby areas passing through and grazing, as there was no wall protecting the convent's properties (Sacro Speco di Narni, Archivio non inventariato, Inserto 1700, c.n.n.).

The forest of the Sacro Speco of Nami also became the subject of disputes in the next century, as revealed in a series of documents produced in the mid-nineteenth century: the first is an appraisal signed by Dioniso Ridolfi in 1835, which talks about the need to mark the boundaries of the wooded area due to a dispute over a piece of land below the minor road, or 'Morrone', contested between the friars and Messrs. Battistelli; the expert advised the friars not to engage in a lengthy and risky lawsuit and not to insist on the ownership of this disputed area, but to be satisfied with certain and provable possession.

Apparently, the religious did not follow the expert's advice but continued the lawsuit,







eventually leading to a trial in 1855, so that by 1859 the issue still needed to be solved<sup>2</sup>. The difficult relationship with the shepherds also emerges at Santa Maria delle Carceri in Assisi. In an appraisal of September 15, 1824, preserved in the convent's correspondence, the damages caused by shepherds who passed with oxen, sheep, and pigs near the sanctuary were noted; to remedy these inconveniences, it was established that shepherds should pass along the upper road leading to Mount Subasio, thus prohibiting access to livestock near the convent and prohibiting the cutting of the sanctuary's forest by shepherds and the rest of the population (Archivio dell'Eremo di Santa Maria delle Carceri in Assisi, Carteggio, 7, c. 7).

In 1841, as the problems persisted, a project was drawn up by surveyor Lorenzo Carpinelli to surround the convent's thicket with walls to establish its exact ownership, with a request for a portion of land adjacent to the neighbouring owner, Mr. Francesco Antonio Bensi, to make the boundary line regular (as indicated on an attached map) (Archivio dell'Eremo di Santa Maria delle Carceri in Assisi, Carteggio, 11, c. 14) (Fig. 1).

The thicket of the Carceri was apparently frequently visited by the locals, even for festivals and entertainment, as a century later, in 1924, the mayor of Assisi was forced to issue

opposite page
Fig. 3
The convent
of Santa Maria
delle Carceri with
the thick wood
around it, today.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> The insert contains other documents on the disputed spot, including a report with a plan from 1836 (Sacro Speco di Nami, archivio non inventariato, Inserto 1800, c.n.n.).



a 'manifesto' against obscene language and revelry in the Carceri thicket threatening to close the enclosure and prevent public access (Archivio dell'Eremo di Santa Maria delle Carceri in Assisi, Cronache, 1, "Cronaca di S. Maria delle Carceri dal 1909 al 1971").

Among the papers of the Carceri convent, interesting notes are also found about the reforestation of Mount Subasio, carried out during the years of the First World War by Austro-Hungarian prisoners of Czechoslovak and Hungarian nationality. These were the first reforestation efforts using black pine alternated with broad-leaved trees (Regione Umbria, 2015). The chronicler reports that from May 9, 1916, until 1919, the prisoners stayed in the sanctuary itself, initially "in the thicket below the Carpenter's Chapel" and then directly in the convent, completely invading it, much to the annoyance of the friars, who were forced to retreat to four rooms that had to be separated from the rest of the building by a wooden gate. During this period, the prisoners also performed other work for the convent, such as the road from the city to the Sanctuary, a new roof, and a wooden floor in the shed under the guesthouse. In 1919, the reforestation continued by workers who also stayed in the convent (Archivio dell'Eremo di Santa Maria delle Carceri in Assisi, Cronache, 1) (Figg. 2- 3).

As previously mentioned, the hospices are among the few real estate assets owned by the Observant Franciscan friars. These modest buildings constituted "the centre of a Search,

a well-defined territory in which the searching friar, the holder of the hospice", would go during specific periods of the year, exercising the right of begging (the goods begged by the friars generally consisted of cereals, cheese, wool, hemp, legumes, oil, must, and eggs). Most of these buildings were, for the most part, if not entirely, abandoned after the suppressions of the 1860s and, unlike the convents, were not "repurchased or restored" (Maiarelli, 2004, pp. 57-58).

For example, the religious of the SS. Annunziata of Amelia owned four hospices: one in Porchiano, received as a gift in 1559; one in Penna; one in Melezzole, obtained in 1807; and one in the city of Amelia, obtained in 1613, which was later sold to purchase another one near the hospital, so that it could serve as an infirmary (Archivio SS. Annunziata di Amelia, Memorie diverse, 4, 'Storia del Santo Ritiro della Santissima Annunziata di Amelia', authorless – but attributed to Padre Bernardino Pacifici – and dateless).

In the documentation of the San Francesco del Monte Convent in Perugia, eleven hospices are listed in 1723<sup>3</sup>, all dependent on the structure and located in the diocese of Perugia (Archivio Storico di S. Francesco del Monte in Perugia, Processi verbali delle Sacre Visite Canoniche, n. 1).

The friars of the Sacro Speco of Narni also used a house as a hospice in the city of Narni, which was also intended as a shelter for sick and convalescing religious and laypeople. In a letter from 1755, they asked their superiors for permission to sell the building to find a better situation, lamenting the position and the unhealthy and damp air due to the proximity of the tanneries and the public washhouse. It seems they were soon granted their request, as another document from 1784 speaks of a new hospice, apparently located "in the area of Monte or Piazza delle Grazie" (Sacro Speco di Narni, archivio non inventariato, Inserto 1700, c.n.n.).

The fathers of the Hermitage of the SS. Annunziata in Cesi in 1731-32 received as a gift from the Community of Terni (with certain unspecified conditions of use) the Hermitage of San Onofrio<sup>4</sup>, a hospice with some 'adjacencies' consisting of a piece of olive land with a small house in a place called *Le Ficare* or *Canapine*, near the public road; five other working and olive-growing plots in places like Campomaggiore, San

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Canneto, Castel del Piano, Castel Rigone, Magione, Mantignana, Mugnano, Papiano, Pian di Renzano, Pieve di Campo, Ponte Valleceppi e San Martino in Campo; a quali si aggiungono, citati in altri documenti, Campiglione, Monte Melino, Ponte Pattoli, Ponte San Giovanni, Prepo e Rancolfo o San Sugaro (Maiarelli, a cura di, 2004, pp. 57-59).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> It could be the complex located above the town of Cesi, surrounded by woods that dominate from above the entire historic centre of Cesi and the whole Terni valley: it is located on an ancient hermit site of the fourteenth century and consists of a seventeenth-century church and an annexe building with the function of a hermitage, currently in a state of neglect (https://www.iluoghidelsilenzio.it/).

Martino, Le Canapine, and Le Valli, and other fields whose use is not specified (Archivio Storico della Provincia Serafica di San Francesco d'Assisi dei Frati Minori in Umbria, Sezione Conventi Chiusi, Eremita della SS. Annunziata in Cesi, Carteggio, 2 e 4).

## 3. Conclusions

After various events connected to the pontificate of Martin V, who approved the new 'Martinian' constitutions drafted and proclaimed by John of Capestrano, which prohibited the use of money and established renunciation of property, it was mostly his successor, Eugene IV, an admirer of the Observance movements, who confirmed the concessions granted thus far, albeit not without a certain degree of uncertainty and wavering. He appointed Bernardino of Siena as Vicar General and Commissioner to the Minister General for the Italian Observants. In 1446, he issued the bull *Ut sacra Ordinis Minorum religio* which removed the reformed friars from the Provincials' jurisdiction and restricted the Minister General's authority over them to matters concerning their way of life and correction. He entrusted the governance of the new community to two Vicars, each overseeing the Cismontane family and the Ultramontane family of common obedience. The examination of, albeit fragmentary and incomplete, archival documentation – of which a few examples are provided and will be subject to a more extensive discussion – offers us further interesting details about the relationships between the convents and the environments in which they are situated, particularly, as we have seen, regarding the use of forests and land for agriculture.

The management of water resources is another focus on which our attention has been directed: watercourses, but above all springs and sources, important locators for human settlement and especially for sacred sites (dating back to pagan rites and cults) chosen by hermits for their retreats and later for monastic establishments. This water use sometimes generates conflicts between the convents and the local communities, as evident from certain documents in the archives of San Bartolomeo of Marano di Foligno or San Francesco of Stroncone.

Another theme that has been sought out in historical-archival documentation concerns architectural transformations, works, restorations, and enlargements of the conventual structures, interesting pieces of information that allow for an absolutely episodic reconstruction but at the same time functional when integrated with survey and on-site investigation data.

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Integrating historical research with technological progress opens exciting possibilities to create comprehensive digital archives, virtual reconstructions, and immersive experiences that can bridge the gap between the past and the present.

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