

PATRIA HIEROSOLYMITANA

Conceptions of Heimat
in the ecclesiastical
institutions of the
Middle Ages



A Scholarly Blog
ed. by John Aspinwall and Nikolas Jaspert

What's in a name? The Carmelites'
presence on Mount Carmel in the
*Speculum de Institutione Ordinis pro
Veneratione Beatae Mariae*

Vera Peternek



UNIVERSITÄT
HEIDELBERG
ZUKUNFT
SEIT 1386



UNIVERSITÄTS
BIBLIOTHEK
HEIDELBERG

DFG

Funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) –
CRC 1671/1 – 517096657 / Gefördert durch die Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG)
– SFB 1671/1 – 517096657.



Dieses Werk ist unter der Creative-Commons-Lizenz CC BY-SA 4.0 veröffentlicht.
Die Umschlaggestaltung unterliegt der Creative-Commons-Lizenz CC BY-ND 4.0.

Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg 2025.

Die Online-Version dieser Publikation ist dauerhaft frei verfügbar (Open Access).

doi: <https://doi.org/10.11588/heidok.00037620>

Publiziert bei
Universität Heidelberg / Universitätsbibliothek

Grabengasse 1, 69117 Heidelberg
<https://www.uni-heidelberg.de/de/impressum>
Text © 2025, Vera Peternek

What's in a name? The Carmelite's presence on Mount Carmel in the *Speculum de Institutione Ordinis pro Veneratione Beatae Mariae*

Vera Peternek (University of Heidelberg)

<i>Speculum de Institutione Ordinis pro Veneratione Beatae Mariae</i> , John Baconsthorpe ¹	Modern English Translation (Vera Peternek)
<i>Generalis planctus prophetarum est, si Carmelus sit desertus habitatoribus, aut si eius honor ab eo auferatur [...]. Ergo in Spiritu Dei generaliter optant prophetae, quod post Eliam et Eliseum beata Maria a Carmelitis semper in Carmelo sibi dato honoretur. Quod verum est ratione tituli, licet recedere cogarentur, sicut patriarcha ierosolymitanus in ecclesia ierosolymitana semper sedem suam tenere censetur, licet compulsus alibi moram trahat.</i>	It is the general lament of the prophets, if Carmel was deserted by its inhabitants, or its honour was taken away from it [...]. Thus, the prophets generally desire, in the Spirit of God, that after Elijah and Elisha, the Blessed Mary be honoured eternally by the Carmelites on Mount Carmel, which was given to her [Mary]. This is true by virtue of the title, even if they are forced to recede, just like the patriarch of Jerusalem is believed to hold his seat forever in the church of Jerusalem, even though he is forced to reside elsewhere.

It seems to be a straightforward fact that the Carmelite order derives its name from Mount Carmel, the place where it originated as a community of hermits in the late 12th century. Their migration towards the West and the development into a mendicant order led to an estrangement from their native land and posed serious challenges to their identity, which aggravated after the fall of the Crusader Dominions in 1291. Soon, for the majority of the order's members *Carmel* was little more than a name. Forced by the need to defend their right of existence after the Second Council of Lyon, the Carmelites developed a foundational legend which traced their roots back to the prophet Elijah, who also served as an integrational figure for the order.² The critical link to the founder was an uninterrupted presence on Mount Carmel itself, which, according to the *rubrica prima* of

¹ The excerpt is based on the edition by Adrian Staring: John Baconsthorpe, *Speculum de Institutione Ordinis pro Veneratione Beatae Mariae*, in: Medieval Carmelite Heritage. Early Reflections on the Nature of the Order, ed. Adrian STARING (Textus et Studia Carmelitana 16), Rome 1989, pp. 184–193, here: c. I, p. 187.

² BOAGA, Emanuele, La storiografia carmelitana nei secoli xiii e xiv, in: The Land of Carmel. Essays in honor of Joachim Smet O.Carm., ed. Paul CHANDLER – Keith J. EGAN, Rome 1991, pp. 125–154; ELM, Kaspar, Elias, Paulus von Theben und Augustinus als Ordensgründer. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichtsschreibung und Geschichtsdeutung der Eremiten- und Bettelorden des 13. Jahrhunderts, in: Geschichtsschreibung und Geschichtsbewusstsein im späten Mittelalter, ed. Hans PATZE, Sigmaringen 1987, pp. 371–397; SMET, Joachim, The Carmelites. A History of the Brothers of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. vol. 1: ca. 1200 until the Council of Trent, Basingstoke 1975. For an overview of the Carmelites' history see: JOTISCHKY, Andrew, Carmelites and Antiquity. Mendicants and their Past in the Middle Ages, Oxford 2002, pp. 8–44.

1281 General Chapter, had existed from the time of Elijah until the migration.³ Evidently, the undeniable absence from the mountain raised the question how this continuity could be maintained, but it was not until the beginning of the 14th century that Carmelite writers tried to overcome the physical distance to the mountain in a spiritual sense. The scholastic John Baconsthorpe was the first to address this issue in his *Speculum de Institutione Ordinis pro Veneratione Beatae Mariae*. This short article will demonstrate his role in portraying Mount Carmel as the spiritual home of the Carmelite order and explore his use of the name to bridge the distance to this home.

John Baconsthorpe was born in Norfolk in the late 13th century and belonged to a generation of Carmelites who had never set foot on Mount Carmel. During his tenure as prior of the English Carmelite province (1326–1333), he authored four treatises on Carmelite history and spirituality, in which he focused on the Marian devotion of his order.⁴ The first of these is the *Speculum de Institutione Ordinis pro Veneratione Beatae Mariae*. Its primary concern is the defence of the order's title, *Ordo Fratrum Beatae Virginis Mariae de Monte Carmelo*, and the Carmelites' claim to a superior standing in the Virgin's favour. The Carmelites were, of course, not the only order which cultivated a strong Marian devotion; it was necessary for them to justify by what right they claimed precedence in the Virgin's favour. Therefore, they had to find a unique feature, which would set them apart from orders like the Cistercians or the Teutonic Order.

John Baconsthorpe saw this unique feature in the place of their foundation. Although the location of Mount Carmel within the Holy Land was already honourable, it was insufficient to set the Carmelites apart from the Teutonic Order in their claim to a special relationship between themselves and Mary. In order to establish the necessary, but otherwise unknown, connection between Mary and Carmel, he develops a mystic argument: Mary was commended and honoured by the mountain itself and should therefore be venerated in this very place.⁵ To support his case, he interprets scriptural passages from Isaiah which praise Carmel, such as *Datus est ei decor Carmeli*⁶, as referring to Mary. This allows him to conclude that the prophet had announced that the Messiah would be born by a

³ Rubrica prima, in: Medieval Carmelite Heritage. Early Reflections on the Nature of the Order, ed. Adrian STARING (Textus et Studia Carmelitana 16), Rome 1989, pp. 40–43, esp. c. I, pp. 40–41.

⁴ STARING 1989, pp. 176–178.

⁵ *Et quia per Carmelum honoratur et commendatur, dignum est quod in Carmelo ei dato Carmelitas habeat eam specialiter venerantes* (John Baconsthorpe *Speculum*, c. I, p. 185).

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

virgin who possessed the splendour of Carmel.⁷ John even adds another layer to this by saying that Mount Carmel allegorically represented Mary.⁸ Thus, Mount Carmel becomes predestined for the adoration of Mary, which is sanctioned by the prophets. John Baconsthorpe shares the view that the order can be traced back to Elijah and his disciple Elisha and claims that they actively founded the order to continue the veneration which they had initiated: *Pro veneratione quoque beatae Mariae in eius Carmelo continuanda orta est fratrum de Carmelo religio.*⁹ The notion of the order's foundation in honour of Mary was not invented by Baconsthorpe.¹⁰ He was the first, however, to combine it with the idea of Elijah as legendary founder and to base it so firmly on a mystic relation between Mary and Mount Carmel.

Clearly, the local specification *in eius Carmelo*¹¹, which is reiterated in slightly varying versions whenever the Carmelites' reverence for the Virgin is addressed, plays a key role in the justification of their special relationship. The eternal veneration on the site becomes the *raison d'être* of the order: *Ergo in Spiritu Dei generaliter optant prophetae, quod post Eliam et Eliseum beata Maria a Carmelitis semper in Carmelo sibi dato honoretur.*¹² This requirement for eternity, however, together with the inextricable combination of place, purpose, and practice was obviously problematic for the Carmelites of the 14th century. Ever since the *rubrica prima* of the 1281 constitutions, Carmelite writers had used the alleged continuity on the site as a means to prove their descent from Elijah. In their narratives, the integrative force was transferred to the rule after its donation by Albert of Vercelli. Thereby the unity of the order could be ensured after the migration.¹³ Such a translation was no longer possible in John's works. Mount Carmel had become too central

⁷ Ibid., p. 184.

⁸ In the *Speculum*, he interprets Mary as the bride of Solomon's Song of Songs: *Quam pulchra es et quam decora, carissima: caput tuum ut Carmelus* (STARING 1989, p. 185). John elaborates the similarity between Mary and Carmel in of four etymologies of Carmel, which he treats in his *Laus religionis Carmelitanae*: John Baconsthorpe, *Laus religionis Carmelitanae*, in: Medieval Carmelite Heritage. Early Reflections on the Nature of the Order, ed. Adrian STARING (Textus et Studia Carmelitana 16), Rome 1989, pp. 218–253, esp. lib. I, c. I–XI, pp. 218–228.

⁹ John Baconsthorpe *Speculum*, c. I, p. 186.

¹⁰ See for example: The Letter of Pierre Millau to King Edward I, in: Medieval Carmelite Heritage. Early Reflections on the Nature of the Order, ed. by Adrian STARING (Textus et Studia Carmelitana 16), Rome 1989, pp. 46–47.

¹¹ John Baconsthorpe *Speculum*, c. I, p. 186.

¹² John Baconsthorpe *Speculum*, c. I, p. 187.

¹³ This remains implicit in the *rubricae primae* and the anonymous chronicle *De Inceptione Ordinis* (STARING 1989, pp. 40–41; *De Inceptione Ordinis Beatae Mariae Virginis de Monte Carmeli*, in: Medieval Carmelite Heritage. Early Reflections on the Nature of the Order, ed. Adrian STARING (Textus et Studia Carmelitana 16), Rome 1989, pp. 100–105).

for his ideal of Carmelite identity and truly served as spiritual home. Once the place could no longer serve as a link, a link had to be established to the place.

For John Baconsthorpe, this purpose was fulfilled by the name of the order: *Quod verum est ratione tituli, licet recedere cogerentur, sicut patriarcha Ierosolymitanus in ecclesia Ierosolymitana semper sedem suam tenere censemur, licet compulsus alibi moram trahat.*¹⁴ The justification of the order's name, and especially the Marian part, is very prominent in the Carmelites' historical writings.¹⁵ In his *Speculum*, John provides a threefold explanation of the title's origins. First, he points out that it was common for religious orders to be named after their place of foundation or its patron saint. Their habitation on Mount Carmel allowed Elijah and his disciple Elisha, and by extension their successors on Mount Carmel, to bear the name Carmelites: *Quia igitur isti prophetae in Carmelo, venerationi beatae Mariae intitulato, habitabant, recte Carmelitae beatae Mariae intitulandi erant.*¹⁶ The second aspect is the church of their ministry. In the case of the Carmelites this was their chapel on Mount Carmel, which they had built in honour of the Virgin.¹⁷ The last reason is the rule, which John interprets as an allegorical imitation of the Virgin's life.¹⁸ For each of these aspects, he establishes an analogy to a religious or military order: the Hospitallers, who receive their name from the Hospital of Saint John in Jerusalem,¹⁹ the Templars, who derive theirs from the Temple of Solomon,²⁰ and the Benedictine monks, who follow the rule of Benedict.²¹ John's choice of examples is striking. Although he doesn't mention the historic past of the Carmelite order in the Holy

¹⁴ John Baconsthorpe, *Speculum*, c. I, p. 187.

¹⁵ The *rubrica prima* of 1324 adds this to the list of questions to which it provides an answer: *Qualiter respondendum sit quaerentibus qualiter ordo noster sumpserit exordium et quare dicamur fratres ordinis beatae Mariae de monte Carmeli.* (STARING 1989, p. 41). Jean de Cheminot treats the question of the Marian title in the fourth chapter of his *Speculum* (STARING 1989, pp. 126–128).

¹⁶ John Baconsthorpe *Speculum*, c. II, p. 189; see also *ibid.*, c. III, p. 190.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 190. The idea that the rule of the Carmelite order imitated Mary is elaborated by John Baconsthorpe in his *Tractatus Super Regulam Ordinis Carmelitanum*: John Baconsthorpe, *Tractatus Super Regulam Ordinis Carmelitanum*, in: Medieval Carmelite Heritage. Early Reflections on the Nature of the Order, ed. Adrian STARING (Textus et Studia Carmelitana 16), Rome 1989, pp. 193–199.

¹⁹ *Ex loco enim et sancto, cui locus intitulatus est, religiosi intitulatur, sicut Hospitalii ab Hospitali sancti Ioannis.* (John Baconsthorpe *Speculum*, c. II, p. 189).

²⁰ *Ex ecclesia enim cuius sunt ministri, intitulantur religiosi, ut a Templo Templarii.* (*ibid.*, c. III, p. 190).

²¹ *Et a regula a sancto sumpta intitulantur religiosi, sicut monachi sancti Benedicti.* (*ibid.*). A similar explanation is provided in the preface to John's *Tractatus Super Regulam*: *Cuiuslibet religionis titulus ortum habet a loco vel a sancto. A loco quidem, ut a Cistercio Cistercienses. Quo modo ordo noster a loco Carmeli est intitulatus. A sancto, ut cum successores vitam et regulam sibi eligunt observandam, quam aliquis sanctorum sibi elegit; prout Canonici Nigri dicuntur de ordine sancti Augustini. Et isto modo 'Fratres ordinis beatae Mariae' in bullis apostolicis sumus nominati.* (John Baconsthorpe, *Tractatus Super Regulam*, p. 193).

Land, the comparison with the Patriarch of Jerusalem, the Hospitallers, and the Templars evokes the mental frame of the Latin Church of the East and places the Carmelites firmly within this context.

From the early 14th century onwards, Carmelite authors increasingly reflected on Mount Carmel not only as their geographical origin but more importantly as spiritual home. For John Baconsthorpe, the special relation between Mary and the Carmelites was manifest in the mountain, which served as proof of their precedence among the orders who shared the Carmelites' aspirations. In spite of continuing efforts to explain the order's name, his way of justifying a lasting presence on Mount Carmel remained unique.

What was in the Carmelites' name, then? Quite contrary to Juliet's sceptical attitude, John Baconsthorpe did not understand the name of his order as an exchangeable label. Instead, it evoked its spiritual essence, that is its mystic reverence for the Virgin Mary: *venerationi beatae Mariae intitulato*²², served as a vessel for the place itself, and made it present in every convent. It was the name which preserved the Carmelite presence on the mountain and allowed the Carmelites to fulfil their duty to praise the Virgin Mary on the site. Thus, every friar, whether he lived in Blakeney, Avignon, Peralada, or Limassol would be on Mount Carmel.

Bibliography

Sources

- John Baconsthorpe, *Speculum de Institutione Ordinis pro Veneratione Beatae Mariae*, in: Medieval Carmelite Heritage. Early Reflections on the Nature of the Order, ed. Adrian STARING (Textus et Studia Carmelitana 16), Rome 1989, pp. 184–193.
- *Rubrica prima*, in: Medieval Carmelite Heritage. Early Reflections on the Nature of the Order, ed. Adrian STARING (Textus et Studia Carmelitana 16), Rome 1989, pp. 40–43.
- John Baconsthorpe, *Laus religionis Carmelitanae*, in: Medieval Carmelite Heritage. Early Reflections on the Nature of the Order, ed. Adrian STARING (Textus et Studia Carmelitana 16), Rome 1989, pp. 218–253.

²² John Baconsthorpe *Speculum*, c. II, p. 189. See also the etymologies in the *Laus religionis Carmelitanae* (John Baconsthorpe *Laus religionis*, lib. I, c. I–XI, pp. 218–228).

- The Letter of Pierre Millau to King Edward I, in: Medieval Carmelite Heritage. Early Reflections on the Nature of the Order, ed. by Adrian STARING (Textus et Studia Carmelitana 16), Rome 1989, pp. 46–47.
- De Inceptione Ordinis Beatae Mariae Virginis de Monte Carmeli, in: Medieval Carmelite Heritage. Early Reflections on the Nature of the Order, ed. Adrian STARING (Textus et Studia Carmelitana 16), Rome 1989, pp. 100–105.
- John Baconsthorpe, Tractatus Super Regulam Ordinis Carmelitanum, in: Medieval Carmelite Heritage. Early Reflections on the Nature of the Order, ed. Adrian STARING (Textus et Studia Carmelitana 16), Rome 1989, pp. 193–199.

Literature

- BOAGA, Emanuele, La storiografia carmelitana nei secoli xiii e xiv, in: The Land of Carmel. Essays in honor of Joachim Smet O.Carm., ed. Paul CHANDLER – Keith J. EGAN, Rome 1991, pp. 125–154.
- ELM, Kaspar, Elias, Paulus von Theben und Augustinus als Ordensgründer. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichtsschreibung und Geschichtsdeutung der Eremiten- und Bettelorden des 13. Jahrhunderts, in: Geschichtsschreibung und Geschichtsbewusstsein im späten Mittelalter, ed. Hans PATZE, Sigmaringen 1987, pp. 371–397.
- JOTISCHKY, Andrew, Carmelites and Antiquity. Mendicants and their Past in the Middle Ages, Oxford 2002, pp. 8–44.
- SMET, Joachim, The Carmelites. A History of the Brothers of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. vol. 1: ca. 1200 until the Council of Trent, Basingstoke 1975.