“Volebam tamen ut nomen michi esset Dyonisius”
–Fra Salimbene, Wine and Well-Being

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The title of this chapter comes from the words of Salimbene de Adam (1221–1288) himself. His wish to be called Dionysius did not have anything to do with the Greek God of wine, but with Saint Dionysius (fr. Saint Denis), on whose feast day Salimbene was born. However, one is left to wonder if Salimbene’s wish to be called Dionysius was a so-called Freudian slip. The reason for this is that Salimbene’s sole surviving work, the Cronica, is filled with passages discussing wine, and not always from the pastoral or preacher’s point of view.

This study analyses Salimbene’s writings on wine and drinking against the common thirteenth-century attitudes on alcohol and its dangers to physical and mental well-being and the soul. In modern society one is continuously exposed to information concerning the dangers of drinking and alcoholism. At the same time, however, there is no shortage of contrary messages; TV-shows, films, books, and articles promoting the idea of an intimate connection between good life and good wine. Could it be possible that such controversial messages on the effect of wine are already found in medieval sources? In fact, is it possible that wine drinking could have been perceived not only as a threat to mental health but also as a means of keeping one’s sanity and serenity?

The first chapter takes a look at the norms that regulated the Franciscan way of life. How was wine and drinking perceived by the Franciscan Order? The second chapter deals briefly with Salimbene’s impartial comments on wine and vineyards, that is, comments typical of any medieval chronicle. The third chapter deals with the passages where Salimbene demonstrates the extent

1 This study is dedicated to MA Simo Örmä who not only kindly read and commented the manuscript, but also introduced me to the fascinating world of Italian wines.
2 Salimbene de Adam, Cronica I. Tomus I, ed. Giuseppe Scalia. Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis 125 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998), 56. While Salimbene’s Cronica has been edited several times, I have chosen to use the Corpus Christianorum edition by Giuseppe Scalia since it is by far the most reliable edition of the work.
of his expertise on wine. It is the chapter about Salimbene the connoisseur. The fourth chapter deals with the moral issues connected with drinking. Here it is Salimbene the preacher who takes the floor.

Firstly, however, a few words about Salimbene and his *Cronica* need to be said. Salimbene’s *Cronica* has been studied out of any proportion to its contemporary relevance. There exist literally hundreds of books and articles. That is rather a lot for a work that survives in only one medieval manuscript – an autograph that quite likely did not enjoy any circulation whatsoever during the Middle Ages.

Salimbene’s lack of success during the Middle Ages can be explained with the same reasons that have made Salimbene so popular among modern historians, namely that his *Cronica* is an exceptional book compared to any other medieval chronicle. It is more individualistic and personal than any contemporary chronicle. Salimbene uses several folios of expensive parchment to reveal his personal history, opinions, and other issues that had precious little relevance for larger audiences.

This peculiarity does not make Salimbene less reliable than any other contemporary source, but it certainly makes a historian to ask how much value such a chronicle has as source material. If Salimbene was so exceptional a writer, can his personal opinions be generalized to other thirteenth-century Franciscan friars? To overcome this difficulty, one must compare Salimbene’s writings to other sources whenever possible to establish whether his views and opinions were totally alien to contemporary thinking, or if they were just expressed in a more colourful way.

First Mouthful – Normative Frameworks

Excessive drinking was a vice that was considered to be one of the subspecies of the seven capital sins – a scheme that goes back to the early days of monasticism and found its more or less canonized form in the writings of the Gregory

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