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Franca of Piacenza

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Franca of Piacenza (* 1175 – † 25 Apr 1218)

1. Name variants: F. of Vitalta

2. Places: San Siro, Piacenza, Montelana, Vallera, Pittoli

3. Biography: F. was born into a noble family and showed interest in joining a monastery very early in life. At the age of 14, she took perpetual vows as a nun in the Benedictine monastery of San Siro in Piacenza, where she was later elected abbess (1199 at the earliest). She observed the rule strictly. In 1210 or 1212, F. met Carentia Visconti who became one of her followers and helped her found a Cistercian monastery in Montelana. In 1214 or 1216, F. became the founding abbess at Montelana, which moved first to Vallera and later to Pittoli. Pope Gregory X is said to have canonized F. in 1273, but no evidence verifies the claim. Following F.'s death, several monasteries were founded and staffed with nuns from Pittoli. Kolb called her the "spiritual mother of all Cistercian nunneries in Lombardy" (KOLB, 182).

4. Cultus:

a. Relics: Remains are kept in S. Raimondo in Piacenza.

b. Liturgical commemoration: 25 Apr; 28 Aug (Translatio, still a local tradition, KOLB, 180).

c. Patronage: Monasteries and several chapels; against nightmares and eye diseases (DOYÉ 1, 396).

d. Attributes: Praying in front of an altar, abbess with veil held by an angel

5. Fontes: AS Aprilis 3, Parisiis et Romae 1866, 384–407; P. M. CAMPI, Vita di S. F. vergine e badessa dell'Ordine cistercense, Piacenza 1618. Further references in DBI.

6. Literature: DBI 49, 588-590; Doyé 1, 396; LThK 3rd ed. 4, 1; C. KOLB, Die hl. Franca, Äbtissin O. Cist., in: CistC 8 (1896), 97–102, 137–143, 175–187.

7. Illustrations: Engraving attributed to Gatti Oliviero (http://www.lombardiabeniculturali.it/stampe/schede/H0080-02233/); painting by Robert de Longe, Madonna con Gesú Bambino appare a Santa Franca, early 18th century, S. Pietro, Piacenza (https://www.parrocchiapontenure.it/robert-de-longe-madonna-con-gesu-bambino-appare-a-santa-franca-inzio-sec-xviii-piacenza-chiesa-di-san-pietro/);
painting by Robert De Longe, Dipinto con la Madonna del Rosario fra due santi, 1705 (https://www.beweb.chiesacattolica.it/benistorici/bene/5926493/De+Longe+R.+%281705%29%2C+Dipinto+con+la+Madonna+del+Rosario+fra+due+santi).

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