



DOMINUS JOANNES DE AMELIA

BIOGRAPHY

In the first half of the 14th century Jean d'Amiel was a well-known figure in Italy and France, employed in various roles by the papal Curia and in close contact with the Pope in Avignon.

He was a generous patron in Montefalco, where he often lived, and he learned about the story of Chiara di Damiano thanks to Béranger Donadieu who had written a biography of her.

The pervasive mystical and tenacious figure of Clare so captivated Jean d'Amiel that in 1333 he commissioned frescoes for the oratory of the Holy Cross showing the *Stories of the Saint* and portraying himself no less than three times as their donor. The altar was originally covered with the dorsal portraying the *Crucifixion and the histories of St Blaise and St Catherine of Alexandria*, now in the Vatican collections and on display in the exhibition.

But Jean d'Amiel's involvement with Montefalco extended beyond Clare and the Augustinians. When the conventual church of St. Francis was erected within the walls of the town, Jean donated the great polyptych with the *Stories of the Passion* attributed to the Master of Fossa.

A leading character in the history of the fourteenth-century Church, Jean d'Amiel was born in Cahors in Provence, the birthplace of Pope John XXII (1316-1334). After being appointed Canon of Lichtfield, he was sent by the Pope to Italy in 1317 to be Treasurer of the Duchy of Spoleto.

Jean showed great skill in administering justice and in reorganizing the tax system (for which he provided the first archive). In 1323 he became Deputy Rector and then Rector of the Duchy of Spoleto, a post he held until 1332.

He intervened firmly to suppress the continual rebellions of the Umbrian cities, creating

many enemies for himself. In 1331 he defeated a conspiracy led by the Trinci family of Foligno. His zeal in reforming the clergy also provoked discontent and criticism.

At the instigation of his enemies he was put under investigation by John XXII who recalled him to Avignon. In the end, the old Pope absolved him and punished his detractors.

After being rehabilitated and sent on a secret mission to Sicily, Jean d'Amiel obtained the post of Cleric of the Chamber (1333), and it was in this capacity that he appears in the pictorial decoration which he commissioned on the walls of the Chapel of the Holy Cross, built in 1303 by Clare of Montefalco. The tonsure and the yoke on his shoulders allude to the burden and adversity borne by the Saint. In another portrait he wields a red shield bearing a white cross and the motto *Scutum Fidei*, as testimony to his integrity in action.

In 1336, Jean d'Amiel commissioned the Polyptych of the Passion for the high altar of the church of St. Francis in Montefalco. In France, in 1339, he was appointed as *Reformer General of the State of the Church in Italy*. On his return to Spoleto, he published the *Constitutions*.

In 1343, the new pontiff Clement VI (1342-352) entrusted him with the ultimately failed project of a new crusade, and three years later employed him to support the ascent to the imperial throne of Charles IV of Luxembourg.

Appointed Bishop of Trent (1348), Jean d'Amiel was translated the following year to the diocese of Spoleto, where he remained until death claimed him in 1371.