

## Fondazione Besso-Rome 28 April 2015

Conference by Adelaide Trezzini translated by Carol Collins

### ***La Via Francigena European cultural route: origins and development of an expanded Francigena network.***

Thanks go to the President of the Foundation, Prof. Gilda Bartoloni, who embraced the Via Francigena (VF) project when it was presented in 2013 for the 2nd time at the University La Sapienza, Rome. According to her wishes, attention will be focussed upon the **stages and especially the motivation** behind this long and absorbing adventure: the passion for European Culture.

Any achievement has a history: for the VF, I would cite Ms. Cesarina Misiani who, in Strasbourg in 1993 and on behalf of the Italian Ministry of Tourism, presented the cultural route planned for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. It was accepted unreservedly by the Council of Europe in 1994. Very quickly, though, the Director General of the Ministry shelved it, saying that the project had no tourist interest and therefore no future ...!).

My adventure began by chance in 1995 during an educational exhibition at the Chateau St. Angelo-Rome where the VF was presented with documents and a rough outline of the Canterbury to Rome route. As a Swiss woman with international education and resident in Rome since 1965, I was approached to promote the VF beyond the Italian borders: in Switzerland, France, and England, where I was totally unknown.

It was a **cultural-religious challenge**. Rome as a pilgrimage destination was equal to Santiago de Compostela, not east-west, but north-south; its history is proof of this even though it had been forgotten for three centuries. It needed to be revived at any cost and it deserved total commitment, but I never imagined it would take so long!

Two years of research on the ground and in monasteries opened up a whole new world to me, one of the ancient history under my feet. Since then, my view of the surrounding landscape (roads, paths that cross the hills or mountains, the streets of towns and cities like Paris or London) has changed to make room for my curiosity to discover the whys and wherefores of the existence of the Via until today.

The beginning of my research could be none other than the hospice of the Great St. Bernard (GSB) on the highest pass in the Alps (2,450m,) especially since I had spent my holidays in Verbier, just to the north of it, for 15 years.

We know all the stages mentioned by Sigeric on his return from Rome in 990, but let's not forget, for those who would like to create a new route, the equally tortuous and difficult stages that brought about the rebirth of the VF as summarized by Michel Thomas Penette (MTP), Director of the European Institute of Cultural Routes (CISI) in Luxembourg in the preface for the VF London to GSB Vademecum in 2002.

"... In 1994, the C of E chose the theme of the VF, along with that of Compostela, thus creating the large theme of historic pilgrimages in Europe ... During the first two years of implementation, the network functioned thanks to the support of the European Union (EU) while the Ministry of Tourism turned to other "tourist products", leaving the local authorities to act for themselves. The initiative to revive real cooperation across Europe fell to Mrs. Adelaide Trezzini who, several years ago, decided to set up an association to relaunch the historical study of the Via and provide pilgrims and tourists with information on the least well-known routes ...".

Following the presentation in Strasbourg in 1996 of the first project, "The Route of Sigeric from the Channel to the Alps", the succession of actions were dictated, in the absence of any experience, by an instinctive logic, but it had to be done quickly. As MTP said again in 2001, "the continuation of the VF is a miracle ..."

From the outset to the development achieved in about 2008, the road was littered with obstacles, some of which more than once drove me to the brink of SURRENDER, obstacles mainly related to the attitude of national and European institutions who took a dim view of this drive to realize the European route as rapidly as possible.

Innocuous but significant facts that emerged at the right time have given me impetus and courage. And, as always, obstacles force one to find solutions that are very often better; therefore welcomed!

**The VF from project to programme**  
firstly, the cultural context had to be confirmed.

1. The validity and **historical importance** of the goal. If Compostela, thanks to a thousand years of marketing, attracts millions of pilgrims with the presumed tomb of St. Jacques, then Rome, with the tombs of the princes of the Church,

has equal merit. The historical and cultural heritage of Rome, Italy and Europe are striking proof of this: linking the existing Roman-medieval remains with a cultural itinerary is something I insist upon.

2. An international scientific committee, chosen in our case by Prof. Franco Cardini in 2001 and associated with the Italian Institute for the Middle Ages in Rome.

3. The creation of an International VF Documentation Centre, which was constituted over the years (and is now waiting to find a suitable location for public consultation).

4. A program to save and preserve the existing historical routes and monuments; in Martigny Switzerland, the AIVF struggled in vain to save the 13th C. St. Theodule hospice; and in Italy, after 20 years, the 10th C. Santa Maria di Foro Cassio in Vetralla has been the object of restoration. More consequential success has been achieved through petitions with Italia Nostra. For example, in 2013, Sigeric's route through Val de Paglia with its mansio di San Pietro in Paglia was added to the **FAI's Favourite Site list (Italian Environment Heritage)**, to avoid S. Gimignano, a tourist village on the VF, or bicycle lanes in the newly rediscovered town of Cesano

### Steps

1. **List and then create links** between all the various Italian institutions involved in the VF by 1998. 2. Collect, from Canterbury to Rome, all the necessary contact details of the religious authorities - Anglican, Protestant and Catholic (parishes, dioceses, monasteries) - and civil authorities interested in VF route (municipalities, counties, provinces, regions, cantons) and ALL the trekking associations (2 in England, 6 CDRP in France, 2 in Switzerland and 10 in Italy in 2001 (now many more) agreeing to work with us. Some institutions or associations refused, preferring to work by themselves.

3. To promote and publicise the VF project by creating the first Francigena website in June 1998, initially in 3, and then in 4, languages (the majority of pilgrims are foreign) and inform the local press in Switzerland and Italy, as well as the Vatican Philatelic Office: the first contact in 1999 proposed relic boxes for the series of postcards dedicated to the VF!

### Fortune of the VF

Conceived by the Ministry with scientific and cultural publications as a virtual route with only a few stretches to follow on foot in the province of Parma, the VF was meant to finish with the end of the Jubilee. The AIVF, however, saw its potential and worked towards **extending it beyond 2000**, imagining the satisfaction of being able to walk across France, Switzerland and Italy, a utopic vision.

According to the AIVF, to be reborn and have a future, the route had to be trodden by thousands of feet, as it is today with 3 or 4,000 pilgrims on the path (2014). To achieve this, it was essential **to determine in 2000 the pilgrims' practical necessities** (maps and lists of accommodation) and to fulfil them quickly, knowing that everything had to be created from scratch because the pilgrimage route to Rome had not existed for centuries.

In view of the fascinating history and culture of Europe, it was essential confer on the VIA a **European dimension**, without which it made no sense.

For practical reasons, it was necessary to divide Sigeric's VF into 2 sections of approx. 1000 km each, from Canterbury to the GSB and from the GSB to Rome.

### Pocket Publications

In 2002, to produce the first **VF Vademecum Guide from London to the Great St. Bernard**, I had to locate and plot a course that respected the network of historical venues and, as far as possible, use the old Roman roads mentioned on the 1:25000 scale map of France (e.g. the Roman road to Coole after Chalons-en-Champagne.). Sharing my hesitations just before publishing the first Vademecum and aware of its limitations, the French pilgrim Alain said to me, "*Nothing is ever perfect!*" and, to my surprise, it began to sell.

But, "Without a map, we do not have the courage to embark on the path," so we had to produce them. For Italy, the Military Geographic Institute (IGM) maps from 1945 posed the biggest problem for French pilgrims who put their faith in them. But they had to be jettisoned and thrown away, and, until 2007, 50% of French pilgrims gave up the course before the end and returned home disappointed. The AIVF tried to encourage them, because without these courageous pioneers, the VF could not be brought back into existence.

It was thanks to the generous assistance of 6 provincial police departments that the first **GSB to Rome Topofrancigena maps** were published in 2007 and it is still valid. But even that was not enough according to Henry from Dijon; "Your VF has no future because every day is a pilgrimage in search of accommodation for each of the 20-40 nights of the trip. This led to the creation of the AIVF **DORMIFRANCIGENA**, a leaflet containing about 250-

280 places to stay, which became a MUST for each pilgrim. It should be noted that from 2001, the Italian priests did not want more pilgrims as the Holy Year was over! A dedicated organization had to be created urgently, otherwise there was a serious risk of losing the VF, as in 1996.

The "*Nothing is ever perfect!*" saying has motivated us to publish 25 booklets, maps, guides and scientific research papers to date, particularly "*Saint Pilgrim - Between Myth and History in Europe*" in 2009 and "*The fortified town of Cesano on the VF*" in 2013.

Recalling his experience on the Camino de Santiago, Californian Brandon Wilson in 2000 expected to be received at the Basilica of St. Peter for having walked from Aosta to Rome: what an illusion!

We had to urgently create (it took 10 months!) **the credentials** and **the Testimonium**, as well as organize the **pilgrims' reception** in Rome.

Thus began the Vatican's involvement and the creation of the first pilgrim's credentials - the *Litterae patentes Peregrinatoris iter per viam francigenam facenti* - to be stamped each day. Moreover, the AIVF created and delivered the *Testimonium* to the rector of the Basilica. This parchment certifies the completion of the pilgrimage to the tomb of St. Peter, on the model of renowned Compostela pilgrimage. On 7th July 2001, Serge and Huguette Hamelin of Quebec were the first pilgrims to receive it after having walked from Canterbury to Rome, heroic pioneers! Not to lose the memory of their testimony, and of all those who follow, the AIVF keeps a **Register of VF pilgrims to the Basilica** in which, to date, are recorded the names of 6,000 pilgrims from around the world.

St. Peter's Basilica receives millions of tourists a year, while Santiago mainly receives pilgrims; here lies the main difference.

Thinking back to a prediction made by Patricia Briel, a journalist with "*Le Temps*" (the largest newspaper in French-speaking Switzerland) in August 2001 and summarized in the subtitle: "Thanks to the efforts of a Geneva resident in Rome, the Via Francigena is becoming a serious rival to the Camino de Santiago", what then seemed impossible is now happening.

### Official recognition

In **1998**, the new EICR in Luxembourg signed a partnership agreement with AIVF, renewed until 2003.

In 2001, the VF project made giant strides; it received the **patronage of 4 states** (Holy See, Italy, Switzerland and France). What was needed was a strong and meaningful logo - like the shell of St. Jacques, which is the universal symbol for Santiago. The AIVF **designed a logo and registered it with WIPO** (World Intellectual Property Organisation). The silhouette of a 15th century pilgrim is placed at the centre of the Peutingerian Map along with the saying, "All roads lead to Rome." This trademark was recognized that same year by the C. of E., and updated in 2007. Also in 2001, the AIVF was awarded the IX Premio S. Benedicti by Rotary International for its contribution to European culture. In **2004**, in Wroclaw Poland, the AIVF and the EAVF were jointly awarded the Major Cultural Route diploma for the C. of E.'s VF.

### Development of the VF Program

After the first signs of revival of the VF, with the first pilgrims following the route, Massimo Tedeschi of the *The Association of Communes on the VF* changed its name several times to adapt to changing realities, finally settling on *The European Vie Francigena Association (EAVF)*.

With massive media coverage from 2005, and the increase in VF events, the spread of VIA Francigena exceeded all expectations, even concerning the marking and maintenance of the paths and routes, the accommodation structures, etc. A centralized organization (religious or secular) is now needed to coordinate and manage the flow of pilgrims and maintain its inherent spiritual value.

**Since 2007**, the **AIEVF** became the VF's **official reference for the C.of E.** by taking on all the diplomatic, political and marketing engagements that are beyond our competence.

The **AIVF** has the great satisfaction of having **been able, as a pioneer, to bring the VF from Canterbury to Rome back to life** (with the hope that it will be remembered for the role it played in the history of the VF).

We are strongly committed to **the revival of historic routes** that are documented but not yet officially recognized although they are feasible and of great interest for both their monuments and landscape. We want to provide some examples, and started in France with the English Way, the Leulène in the Pas-de-Calais, the Jougue Pass over the

Jura, and the Celtic-Roman road called "Italian Route" until the nineteenth century, as proposed in our latest guide, "Sigeric's VF from Pontarlier to the GSB", published in 2013.

For Italy, there are the Roman-Medieval route Ivrea-Santhià south of Lake Viverone, Sarzana - Bocca della Magra (site of the ancient port of St-Maurice) - Luni, the ancient via della Casellona S. Quirico d'Orcia, Abbadia S. Salvatore, the mansio di S. Pietr'in Paglia and even the Etruscan-Roman Monterosi - Cesano - La Storta; our hope rests in arousing the interest of the communities concerned.

These variants represent a cultural-historical and landscape PLUS for the VF, for the enjoyment of tourists and pilgrims.

With this in mind, we produced the **3-APP DorMi-ToPo-francigena** that is now online and offers a free choice between the official VF and some historical variants of the GSB to Rome route updated in 2015.

The map of **pilgrimage routes in Europe**, published in 2009 on our website, highlights the development of the EUROPEAN VF network and shows where they intersect with, or share the same path as, the well-known Camino de Santiago, the **Nikulas di Munkthvera** route (in 1154 from Iceland, along the Rhine, Basel, Strasbourg and Vevey on Lake Geneva, redefined in 2010 with Topo and Dormi), the extension of Via de Sigeric to Bari and Jerusalem, called the **South VF** (recently recognized by C. of E.), the Albert von Stade **Germano-Romieuse** route (1250) crossing the Brenner Pass and through Verona to join the the VF at Montefiascone.

The extraordinary VF adventure began in 1995 and, shared with thousands of pilgrims from 27 nations, continues with the revitalization of the route of emperors, the Via Francigena-Francisca Lukmanier via Lake Constance, St. Gallen and Chur to Pavia, Milan, and then Rome. May the spirit behind this joint effort to revive this immense network forever remain the AIVF motto:

#### **GET TO KNOW THE EUROPE OF YESTERDAY TO UNDERSTAND BETTER THE EUROPE OF TODAY**

not only as an historical and cultural awareness, but above all as human understanding and tolerance.

The International Via Francigena Association, an entirely volunteer organisation under Swiss private law **created to promote cultural and tourist awareness of the pilgrim routes to Rome**, has more or less accomplished this. Thank you.