**St. Peter Martyr: An Introduction**

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Even if he was one of the most famous Dominican saints in late Medieval Italy, present day scholarship is not too fond of Peter of Verona, most often referred to as Peter Martyr. Until recently the most complete study of his life was an article by Antoine Dondaine, published in 1953,[[1]](#footnote-1) and it was only beninning in the 2000s that historians showed a newfound interest in Peter. Within a span of a few years an article by Christine Caldwell (2000),[[2]](#footnote-2) the proceedings of a conference held in Milan in 2005,[[3]](#footnote-3) and a book by Donald Prudlo (2008) appeared.[[4]](#footnote-4) However art historical studies remain infrequent, and they normally deal with a few significant artworks – Titian’s destroyed altarpiece from San Zanipolo in Venice, for example –, without defining the wider context of petrine imagery, or the problems it engendered.

Peter Martyr was actually a very interesting saint. As his nickname implies he was a martyr, an inquisitor who was killed on April 6 1252 in an ambush in Barlassina, and his death marked a moment of change in the Dominican attitude concerning both the arts and the cult of their saints.[[5]](#footnote-5) Previously the cult of the only Dominican saint, the founder Dominic of Guzmàn (1170-1221) himself, was not developed and the friars apparently tried to suppress popular forms of devotion. Such disinterest changed after Peter’s canonization, and in the second half of the *Duecento* the friars started collecting writings on the early period of their Order, and recommending that images of Dominic and Peter were to be painted “in appropriate places”.

As its title says, the present paper is an introduction to Peter and aims to clarify who he was and his primary saintly characteristics. It will be thus structured in two parts. I will start by presenting what we know about friar Peter of Verona and St. Peter Martyr, trying to separate historical data from hagiography. After knowing who Peter was, I will proceed focusing on the themes attached to the saint’s persona, and I will conclude by presenting my research.

1. Antoine Dondaine O.P., *Saint Pierre Martyr. Études*, in «Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum», 23, 1953, pp. 66-162. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Christine Caldwell, *Peter Martyr: The Inquisitor as Saint*, in «Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies», 31, 1, 2000, pp. 137-174. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The proceedings were published as *Martire per la fede. San Pietro da Verona domenicano e inquisitore*, a cura di Gianni Festa O.P., Bologna, 2007. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Donald Prudlo, *The Martyred Inquisitor: The Life and Cult of St. Peter of Verona († 1252)*, Aldershot, 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For the early reactions of Dominicans to images and art see Bernard Montagnes, *L'attitude des prêcheurs à l'égard des oeuvres d'art*, in *La naissance et l'essor du gothique méridional au XII siècle*, Toulouse, 1974, pp. 87-100; Joanna Cannon, *Dominican patronage of the arts in Central Italy: the Provincia Romana, c. 1220 – c. 1320*, Ph.D. dissertation, London, 1980, pp. 74-108; Fabio Bisogni, *Gli inizi dell’iconografia domenicana*, in *Domenico di Caleruega e la nascita dell’ordine dei Frati Predicatori*, atti del XLI convegno storico internazionale del Centro Italiano di Studi sul Basso Medioevo (Todi, 10-12 ottobre 2004), Spoleto, 2005, pp. 613-638. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)