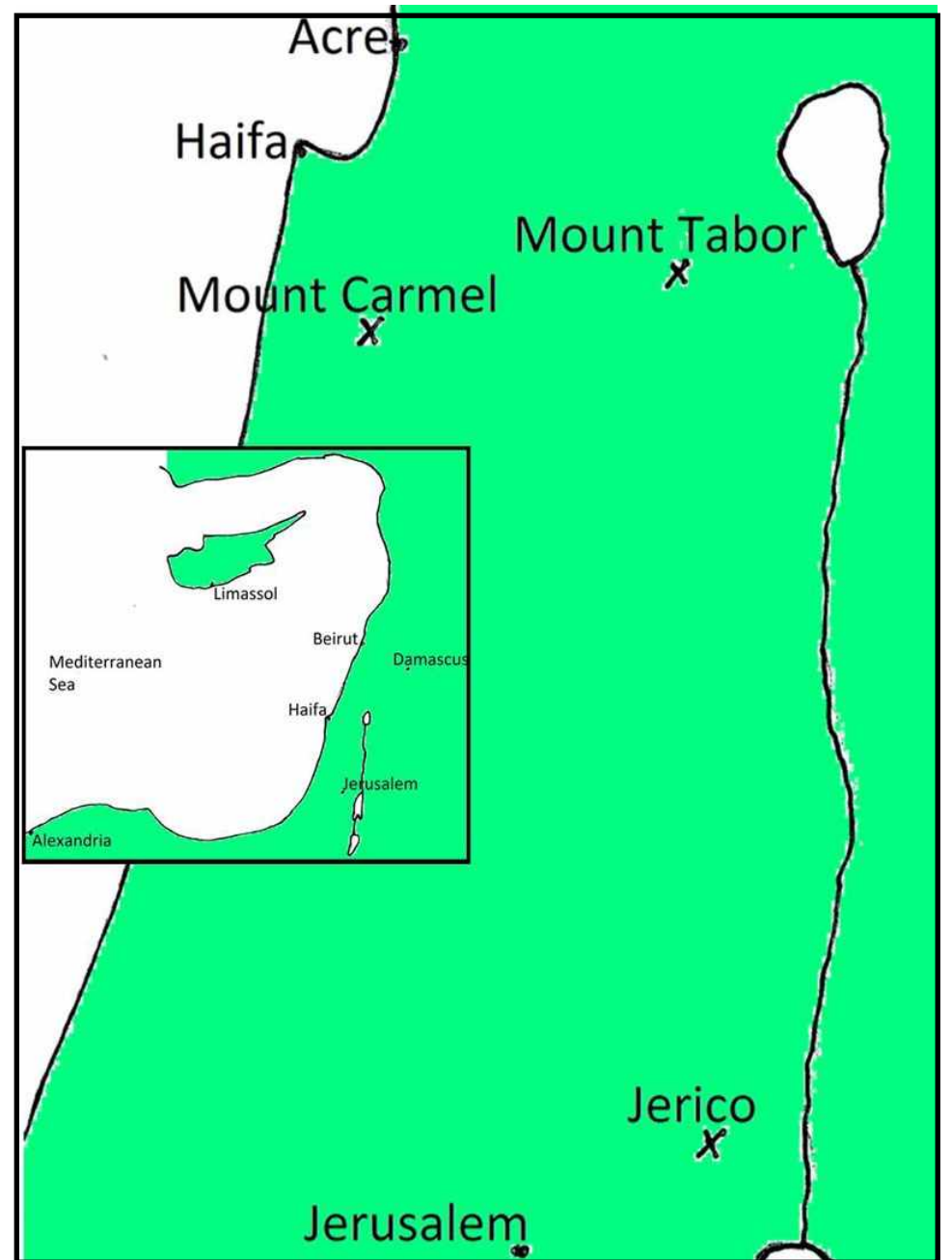


## 55. History of the Carmelite Church

The Church at Boppard from which the fabulous Boppard stained Glass windows came from, was built by the Carmelite Order in the first half of the 14th century and extended to the north between 1439 and 1444. It is therefore appropriate to take a short look at the history of the Carmelites, up to the building of the church at Boppard.

At the time of the crusades, Christian pilgrims flocked to the holy land, and after fulfilling their pilgrimage, some wanted to follow a life of prayerful solitude and service, and settled in different parts of the holy land, including the mountains around Jericho, the range of Mount Carmel by the Mediterranean sea, and Mount Tabor near Galilee, which is traditionally identified as the Mount of Transfiguration (so called because – according to the gospel of Matthew, chapter 17 – on this mount or hill Jesus was transfigured before his disciples: “... and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light...”).

Saladin was the first Sultan of Egypt and Syria and founder of the Ayyubid dynasty. In 1187, he had a great victory at the Battle of Hattin over the Crusader forces, where his Muslim armies inflicted a major defeat, effectively eliminating them as a fighting force and opening the way for the re-conquering of Jerusalem and several other Crusader-held cities. The only area now left to the Christian pilgrims to settle in was Acre and some areas along the med coast. The group who chose Mount Carmel were following the example of Elijah (also Elias), a holy man and a lover of solitude, who is described in the Book of Kings. They established themselves in small cells and followed the Eremitic (or hermit) lifestyle near to a spring known as Elijah's Fountain.



ELIJAH'S FOUNTAIN - [PAINTING BY PIETRO LORENZETTI – 1328-9  
FOR ALTARPIECE OF CARMELITE CHURCH IN SIENA, ITALY – NOW AT  
PINACOTECA IN SIENA]

lifestyle near to a spring known as Elijah's Fountain.

As independent hermits, this group had no founder, but after some years they decided to come together and become more formally organised. One of them, Brocard, sometime around 1209 and acting in a leadership role, contacted a priest of the Canons Regular and Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Albert of Vercilli (later to become St. Albert Avogadro) to write a 'rule of life' - a set of rules of consecrated life in the eremitic style. The result is the shortest rule of life in existence of the Roman Catholic spiritual tradition. The full pdf of these rules is available at <http://www.carmelite.org/documents/Spirituality/rsacodtranslation.pdf>.

The Carmelites took Mary, the Mother of Jesus, as their patroness, and they gradually became



known as the Brothers of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, and looked to the figures of Elijah and Mary for inspiration, and dedicated their first chapel to the Mother of God.

The Carmelites position on Mt Carmel was often under threat. They had been driven from Carmel but had managed to return and build a slightly larger church than the original, but eventually around 1238, the position of Christians in the area was so precarious that they had to leave. They spread out to other countries (often their countries of origin, as many of the monks would have been crusaders or pilgrims), such as Cyprus, Sicily and France (Marseilles). Eventually, in 1242, they reached England (Hulne, near Alnwick in Northumberland, Bradmer in Norfolk, Aylesford, and Newenden in Kent), accompanying the Barons de Vescy and Grey returning from the crusade of Richard, Earl of Cornwall (1241). No longer perusing an eremitic lifestyle, the Carmelites turned from being hermits to friars, assumed the mendicant tradition, forbidden to own property in common, working and go wherever they were needed. In 1291, the remaining hermits on Mount Carmel were put to the sword and their convent burnt down.

The original Carmelite order was approved by Honorius III in 1226, and by Gregory IX in 1229. Partly due to their new distribution out of the desert and into cities, fresh approval was sought and given by Pope Innocent IV in 1245. At the second council of Lyons in 1274, the Carmelite order was definitively approved.

In 1287 the Carmelites adopted a pure white woollen mantel, which caused them to be called Whitefriars. The mantle is an important monastic vestment, which covers the whole person with the exception of the head, and has much symbolic meaning. It is sometimes referred to as the Angelic vestment due to its flowing lines which allude to the wings of an angel, and its folds represent the all-embracing power of God as well as the strictness, piety and meekness of the monastic life. The absence of sleeves indicated that the hands and arms of a monk are not for worldly activities.

The scapular has been an important part of the Carmelite habit since the late 13th century. It is like a long piece of cloth, about chest width, with a head sized hole in the middle so that it hangs equals down the front and back of the body. The Carmelite Constitution of 1369 stipulates automatic excommunication for Carmelites who say Mass without a scapular, while the Constitutions of 1324 and 1294 consider it a serious fault to sleep without the scapular. In the Siegfried von Gelnhausen panel, although not a friar himself, he is seen wearing a blue scapular (Below).

