

## Editorial – COVID-19 pandemic outbreak and the Latin rule of Bernard de Clairvaux. Have we forgotten the past?

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Coronavirus-19 (COVID-19) has recently made its appearance, causing a pandemic outbreak and it is still among us. Hospitals and Intensive Care Units (ICU) overcrowding as well as a forced and revisited diagnostic organization were all consequences of this new virus, with tragic experiences all over the world. In the Italian Region Lombardia, it caused more deaths than the entire Second World War, while the same situation was reported in Wuhan, where COVID-19 infection seems to be initiated<sup>1,2</sup>.

There are two main theories about the origin of COVID-19. Based on the first, the virus was accidentally released in the environment, but no official data are available in order to confirm this hypothesis. The second and most accredited one considers COVID-19 as acquired from a bat, as recently demonstrated by Zhou et al<sup>3</sup>, who showed that COVID-19 is 96% identical at the whole-genome level to a bat coronavirus and very similar to the 2003 SARS-CoV.

Pandemic outbreaks accompany humans from the beginning of their history time, from 1347 to 1351 BC the black death or plague, the most fatal pandemic of the human history, resulted in the loss of about one third of the European population. Nobody at that time knew that the cause was the infectious agent *Yersinia pestis*, transmitted by rat fleas and firstly isolated by Alexandre Yersin in Hong Kong in 1894, while only in the first half of 15<sup>th</sup> century Venetians launched the first model of plague prophylaxis, by isolating infected patients in a separate island called Lazzaretto<sup>4</sup>.

What we can learn from those stories is that dealing with wild animals, as more frequently happens in some countries, increases the risk of acquiring known or unknown infectious agents. Remarkably, someone in ancient times, such as Templars, seemed to perfectly know this concept. Templar order was a special institution of military-monastic knights, launched by Hugues de Payens in 1119 and officially accepted by Catholic Church in 1129 and created to protect European pilgrims traveling to Holy Sites of Christianity from attempted aggressions. Templar' life followed precepts of the "Latin Rule", personally written by Bernard de Clairvaux. Surprisingly, among all clauses, there was one specifically dedicated on the relationship between Templars and wild animals. In fact, it reports the following passages: *no brother may presume to go particularly with a man who hunts one bird with another. Rather it is fitting for every religious man to go simply and humbly without laughing or talking too much, but reasonably and without raising his voice and for this reason we command especially all brothers not to go in the woods with longbow or crossbow to hunt animals or to accompany anyone who would do so, except out of love to save him from faithless pagans. Nor should you go after dogs, nor shout or chatter, nor spur on a horse out of a desire to capture a wild beast*<sup>5</sup>.

One of the main characteristics of Templars was their proverbial longevity. In a previous report, we hypothesized that this was achieved through a maniacal control of hygiene and food supplying with a specific and positive effect on gut microbiota<sup>6</sup>.

Looking back to this story, may we hypothesize that Templars sensed that contact with wild animal increases the risk of acquiring infectious diseases? Nobody could never answer to this question, but we like to think so. Maybe, if everybody had stopped handling wild animals, COVID-19 would never have been our worst nightmare.

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### Conflict of Interest

The Authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.

### References

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