

Hagiography. Here the term will be to mean the historical discipline whose object is the study of the saints and of sanctity, specially from the point of view of the critical analysis of sources bearing on the lives of saints and on their cult. It is essential to clarify the ambiguity of the term, which is also used for edifying reading about the saints. Thus some have suggested, without much success, that the term 'Hagiology' should be used for the historical discipline. [...] As for the word 'hagiographer' in the sense of an expert in the study of the lives of the saints, hagiography, the first person to be so designated was the Jesuit Daniel Papebroch, in the memorial of him in the *Acta Sanctorum* (1715). Even if a certain elements of hagiography are not unknown in the literature of the Hellenistic period, these common traits cannot contribute much to our understanding to our understanding of the birth of Christian hagiography. Its distinctive character is marked from the beginning by a its clear distinction between God and the saints, who are different from pagan heroes with their semi-divine character; the Bible is always present, as an explicit background (citations and echoes, types and the imitation of biblical models) or implicit (like the history of salvation); the saint is an example to follow, set in a liturgical or at least in a commemorative context; finally, the virtues practiced by the saint imply the peculiarly Christian virtues of humility, charity and mercy, from the fact that the saints life attempts to imitate that of Christ. Hagiography as literature enjoyed extraordinary success in late Antiquity and throughout the Middle Ages. It is estimated that there are some 12,000 Latin hagiographical texts composed before 1500 (one should add to this texts in Greek and in Oriental languages, as well as writing in the vernacular). For some periods, such as the Merovingian age, they constitute the greater part of the body of historical sources available. To the Acts and Passions of the Martyrs (which were the first hagiographical texts chronologically), and to lives of the holy Confessors, one must add fictional narratives (those which are reworkings or borrowings from other sources), accounts of translation of relics, collections of miracles, liturgical offices and hymns, and canonisation processes. In every period ancient texts are reworked in a contemporary style, and new texts appear. A corpus of verse hagiography develops in parallel with prose hagiography. The majority of these texts are transmitted by legendaries, which are often large-format manuscripts, capable of containing hundreds of lives of saints and numerous works. In the thirteenth century, to meet the needs of the itinerant preaching of the new orders of Friars, the ancient legendaries were boiled down to provide in one manageable volume a large number of notes on the saints. The most famous of these compendia is the *Golden Legend* of the Dominican Jacopa da Varazze.

Hagiography as a genre has for a long time had a bad reputation among historians. The narratives to which a certain degree of historical credibility can be attributed are in a minority. And even the most famous of these (the life of Anthony attributed to St Athanasius, the Life of Martin of Tours by Sulpicious Severus), are not free from certain genre traits such as exaggerated praise or concentration on wonders. It cannot escape notice that certain *topoi* (regarding the death of the saint for example) recur in the literature of edification up to our own times. Thus hagiographical source, like any other kind of source, require the application of historical criticism of the appropriately specific sort.

The birth of critical hagiography is associated with the name of Héribert Rosweyde (born Utrecht, 1569, died Anvers, 1629), and above all with the publication of his *Fasti sanctorum quorum vitae in Belgicis bibliothecis manuscriptae* (Anversa, 1607). Distancing himself from the collections, apologetic in characet, published by Luigi Lippomano (8 vol. 1551-60) and Surius (6 vol., 1570-75), Rosweyde intended to publish in eight volumes the lives of the saints 'of every period, sex and nation'; with this desire to be exhaustive he combined a new kind of philological rigour: the publication of texts in their entirety without suppressing

passages or making stylistic corrections, on the basis of manuscripts, which had to be chosen according systematically and with critical judgement. At first encouraged by his superiors, but subsequently held back, Rosweyde did not bring his project to fruition, even though his critical edition of the *Vitae Patrum*, a volume of more than 1100 pages in-folio, can be regarded as the first stone of the building. After the death of Rosweyde the project was activated by another Jesuit, Jean Bolland (1596-1665), assisted before long by his *confrère* Godfried Henskens (Henschenius). In 1643 the first two volumes of the *Acta Sanctorum quotquot toto orbe coluntur vel a catholicis scriptoribus celebrantur quae ex Latinis & Graecis aliarumque gentium antiquis monumentis ... servata primigenia scriptorum phrasi*, on the saints of the month of January. This time, all the saints were included, and not only those known through a *Vita* or a *Passio*. Each saint was the subject of a historical study dealing with the life, the cult and the sources relating to him or her, these last being published one after the other, on the basis of one or more manuscripts, so that the collection constituted the 'hagiographical repertorium of the saint'.

The *Introductio generalis* of Bolland was the first systematic treatise of critical hagiography. The successors of Bolland, known later as Bollandists, would bring to a conclusion a work which would turn out to be the greatest editorial and scholarly enterprise of the Ancien Régime (53 volumes published between 1643 and 1794, 1 between 1845 and 1940). Alongside the *Acta Sanctorum*, other initiatives, critical to a greater or lesser degree, saw the light throughout Europe. The most important are the *Acta Sanctorum Hiberniae* (2 vols., 1645-1647), produced by the Irish Franciscans at Louvain, and the *Acta Sanctorum Ordinis Sancti Benedicti* (9 vols., 1668-1701), the work of the Maurist Benedictines Luc d'Achery and Jean Mabillon.

From 1880, methodological advances lead the Bollandists to adopt new initiatives: systematic listing of hagiographical manuscripts with the preparation of catalogues of the holdings of the great libraries, and the preparation of exhaustive repertoria of Greek, Latin and Oriental hagiographical texts. The launching of the review *Analecta Bollandiana* in 1882 made it possible to stay more up to date with scholarly progress, and avoid the calendar straitjacket imposed by the *Acta Sanctorum*. In this context the figure of Hippolyte Delehaye (1859-1941) stands out: he was the author of historical syntheses and methodologically innovative studies (*Sanctus, Les légendes hagiographiques, Les origines du Culte des martyrs, Cinq leçons sur la méthode hagiographique*), and an outstanding specialist in the fields of Greek hagiography and martyrologies (it is to whom that we owe the editions of the *Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae* historical commentaries on Jerome's martyrology and [as predominant author] on the Roman martyrology).

Since the end of the 1970s, hagiographical scholarship has made great strides. New journals (*Hagiographica* [1994], *Sanctorum* [1996]) and collections bear witness to this, as do associations of researchers interested in this discipline. Thanks to the labours of G. Philippart, Fr. Dolbeau, and J.-Cl. Poulin, manuscripts containing hagiographical text are now better known. The online database *BHLms* make available all the hagiographical manuscripts analysed by the Bollandists. The dating of texts has been the object of specialised initiatives on a high technical level (hagiographical sources for Gaul before the year 1000). The editing of martyrologies is progressing (editions of the martyrologies of Ado and of Usuard by J. Dubois, the Irish martyrology by P. Ó Riain, as is the edition of liturgies (M. Lapidge, A. Krüger). There is a history of Latin and Vernacular Hagiography under the direction of G. Philippart: it sets out not to celebrate saints but to analyse a genre of literature, with its authors, its tendencies, and its evolution. There is renewed interest in vernacular literature –

witness the compilation of a *Biblioteca agiografica italiana* (2003). The editing of hagiography, especially in collections relating to nations, regions or religious orders, has been studied by a team led by S. Boesch Gajano. Hagiographical sources are known used by historians to illustrate the widest variety of historical themes: from political history and economic and social history to the study of culture and mentalities.

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