



An Introductory Guide to Research in Medieval Hagiography

Thomas Head
Hunter College and the Graduate Center, CUNY

Unfortunately no adequate general guide to the history, study, and use of hagiography exists in English. The best introduction to research in hagiographic sources currently available is Jacques Dubois and Jean-Loup Lemaitre, *Sources et méthodes de l'hagiographie médiévale* [Sources and methods of medieval hagiography] (Paris, 1993), which includes an extensive, but largely Francophone, bibliography. René Aigrain, *L'hagiographie: ses sources, ses méthodes, son histoire* [Hagiography: its sources, its methods, its history] (Paris, 1953) remains useful, particularly on the history of hagiographic scholarship; a second edition recently issued by the Bollandists (*Subsidia hagiographica*, 80; Brussels, 2000) contains an extremely useful bibliography of works from the intervening half century. David Knowles, *Great Historical Enterprises* (London, 1962) and several of the chapters in *Medieval Scholarship: Biographical Studies on the Formation of a Discipline*, ed. Helen Damico and Joseph Zavadil (New York, 1995) provide much information on the early history of hagiographic scholarship.

A major scholarly enterprise under the direction of the Belgian scholar Guy Philippart is currently collecting a series of surveys of medieval hagiographic sources and the scholarly study of them; two of its volumes have already been published. When complete, it will be the most comprehensive guide to hagiographic scholarship: *Hagiographies. Histoire internationale de la littérature hagiographique latine et vernaculaire en Occident des origines à 1500* [Hagiographies: an international history of the Latin and vernacular literature of hagiography in the West from its origins to 1500], ed. Guy Philippart, 4 vols. (Turnhout, 1994-present). The individual articles are in English, French, German, and Italian. Philippart himself has written a thorough study of the etymology and development of the term "hagiography," see Guy Philippart, "Hagiographes et hagiographie, hagiologes et hagiologie; des mots et des concepts" [Hagiographers and hagiography, hagiologers and hagiology: concerning words and concepts], *Hagiographica* 1 (1994): 1-16.

For over three and one-half centuries, the Jesuit members of the *Société des Bollandistes* [Society of Bollandists], founded by Jean Bollandus (d. 1665), have been at the forefront of hagiographic scholarship. It is they who have edited the single most important collection of hagiographic sources, that is the *Acta Sanctorum* [Acts of the saints], the

first of whose sixty-eight immense folio volumes appeared in 1643. They continue their efforts to this day through the edition of the journal *Analecta Bollandiana* [Bollandist gleanings], which contains regular bibliographies and summaries of hagiographic scholarship. Their work is well documented at the site which they maintain on the World Wide Web: <http://www.kbr.be/~socboll>. Members of this group have compiled and regularly updated the standard guides to the primary sources of hagiography written in the clerical languages of Latin and Greek, as well as those of the Christian East: *Bibliotheca hagiographica latina antiquae et mediae aetatis*, 3 vols., Subsidia Hagiographica 6 and 70 (Brussels, 1898 and 1986); *Bibliotheca hagiographica graeca*, third edition (with supplement) by François Halkin, Subsidia Hagiographica 8 and 65 (Brussels, 1957 and 1984); *Bibliotheca hagiographica orientalis*, ed. Paul Peeters, Subsidia Hagiographica 10 (Brussels, 1910). In these reference works, each hagiographic source is provided a distinct number, and all extant editions of it (as well as important manuscripts in some cases) are listed. In the chapters which follows, every Latin or Greek primary source is identified by its number in the *Bibliotheca hagiographica latina* or the *Bibliotheca hagiographica graeca*.

An ambitious undertaking is underway to update and amplify the work of the Bollandists for hagiographic sources written in early medieval Gaul. *Sources hagiographiques narratives composées en Gaule avant l'an mil* is edited by François Dolbeau, Martin Heinzlmann, and Joseph-Claude Poulin. Joseph-Claude Poulin has described the project in "Les sources hagiographiques narratives composées en Gaule avant l'an mil (SHG). Inventaire, examen critique, datation (avec Annexe)," *Francia*, 15 (1987), pp. 701-31. The project is proceeding slowly. For examples of its intended results see Joseph-Claude Poulin, "Sources hagiographiques de la Gaule (SHG) II: Les dossiers de s. Magloire de Dol et de s. Malo d'Alet (Province de Bretagne)," *Francia*, 17 (1990), pp. 159-209.

Few equivalent standard references yet exist for hagiography written in the vernacular languages, although several important projects to catalog such vernacular literature are currently in process. An exception is Ole Widding, Hans Bekker-Nielsen, and Laurence Shook, "The Lives of the Saints in Old Norse Prose: A Handlist," *Mediaeval Studies* 25 (1963): 294-337. Documentation of other projects may be found in the articles of Philippart's *Hagiographies* and in recent numbers of the journal *Hagiographica*. The problems faced in one such project are well described by E. Gordon Whatley in "An Introduction to the Study of English Prose Hagiography: Sources and Resources," in *Holy Men and Holy Women: Old English Prose Saints' Lives and Their Contexts*, ed. Paul Szarmach (Albany, NY, 1996), pp. 3-32. On the same problem, also see Michael Lapidge, "The Saintly Life in Anglo-Saxon England," in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, eds. Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 243-63.

Two useful dictionaries providing information about specific saints are available in English: Donald Attwater, *The Penguin Dictionary of Saints* (Harmondsworth, 1965) and David Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, revised edition (Oxford, 1992). Anglophone readers might also consult the volumes of the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*. Unfortunately the well-known work by Alban Butler entitled *The Lives of the Saints*

(revised edition by Herbert Thurston and Donald Attwater [London, 1926-38; reprint, New York, 1956]) is largely based on secondary sources and is often unreliable. A new revision of Butler's work currently being undertaken by David Farmer promises more accurate information. For those beginning to undertake serious research into hagiographic sources, further references and bibliography may be found in: *Bibliotheca Sanctorum* [Library of the saints], eds. Iosepho Vizzini et al., 13 vols. (1961-69); *Vies des saints et des bienheureux par les reverends pères bénédictins de Paris* [Lives of the saints and of the blessed by the Reverend Benedictine priests of Paris], eds. Jules Baudot, Paul Antin, and Jacques Dubois, 13 vols. (1935-59); *Histoire des saints et de la sainteté chrétienne* [History of Christian saints and sanctity], eds. André Mandouze, André Vauchez, et al., 11 vols. (Paris, 1986-88). The best guide to the iconography of symbols associated with the saints available in English is *The Bible and the Saints*, ed. Gaston Duchet-Suchaux and Michel Pastoureau, trans. David Howell (Paris, 1994). Much more complete is Gertrud Schiller, *Ikongraphie der christlichen Kunst* [Iconography of Christian art], 5 vols. (Gütersloh, 1966-91). For a useful bibliography of works on pilgrimage, consult Linda Kay Davidson and Maryjane Dunn-Wood, *Pilgrimage in the Middle Ages: A Research Guide* (New York, 1993).

In the decades around 1900, a Bollandist named Hippolyte Delehaye laid the foundations for modern hagiographic scholarship. Although Delehaye wrote in French, his seminal essay on hagiographic method has appeared in two separate English translations, see *Legends of the Saints*, trans. V.M. Crawford (from the first French edition; London, 1907; reprint, Notre Dame, IN, 1961) and trans. Donald Attwater (from the fourth French edition; New York, 1962). Also available in English is Delehaye's history of the Bollandist enterprise, see *The Work of the Bollandists Through Three Centuries, 1615-1915* (Princeton, 1922). Approaches to the history of medieval Christianity have changed greatly since the time of Delehaye, who was concerned to provide a Catholic response to positivist historicism. One of the most influential works in the development of medieval religious history has recently been translated into English; see Herbert Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages*, trans. Steven Rowan (German original, 1935; Notre Dame, IN, 1995). For an interesting, but controversial, study of these historiographical developments, see John Van Engen, "The Christian Middle Ages as an Historiographical Problem," *American Historical Review* 91 (1986): 519-52.

Sources:

1. The major hagiographic collections.

Sanctuarium, seu Vitae sanctorum, ed. Boninus Mombritius (Bonino Mombrizio), 2 vols. (Milan, ca. 1477; reprint edition, Paris, 1910).

De probatis sanctorum historiis, ed. Laurentius Surius (Laurence Suhr), 6 vols. and index (first edition, Cologne, 1570-75; second edition, 1576-1581; third edition, Venice, 1581). Fourth edition: *De probatis sanctorum vitis*, 12 volumes (Cologne, 1618). Fifth edition: *Historiae seu Vitae sanctorum . . .*, 13 vols. (Marieta, 1875-1880). (Organized by liturgical calendar.)

Acta Sanctorum ordinis Sancti Benedicti, eds. Luc d'Achéry and Jean Mabillon 6 vols. in 9 parts (first edition, Paris, 1668-1701; second edition, Venice, 1733-1740; partial reprint edition, Brussels, 1935). (Organized, loosely, by century of the "Benedictine order," that is from the sixth to the eleventh.)

Acta Sanctorum quotquot toto orbe coluntur, eds. Jean Bolland, et al, (first edition, Antwerp and Brussels, 1643-present; second edition [Jan. I to Sept. V], Venice, 1734-1770; third edition [Jan. I to Oct. X], Venice, 1863-1869). (Organized by liturgical calendar.)

2. Some other relevant handbooks and repertories:

Michael Lapidge and Richard Sharp, *A Bibliography of Celtic-Latin Literature, 400-1200* (Dublin, 1965).

Manuel Diaz y Diaz, *Index Scriptorum Latinorum Medii Aevi Hispanorum*, 2 vols. (Salamanca, 1958-59).

Léopold Genicot and Paul Tombeur (eds.), *Index Scriptorum Operumque Latino-Belgicorum Medii Aevi*, 5 vols. (Brussels, 1973-79).

Eligius Dekkers, "Vitae Sanctorum," *Clavis Patrum Latinorum (Sacris Erudiri*, 3; Bruges and The Hague, 1951), pp. 357-84. (Organized geographically; covers roughly from the Acts of the Martyrs to Bede; based largely on the *BHL*.)

Ferdinand Lot, et al., "Index Scriptorum Operumque Latino-Gallicorum Medii Aevi (500-1000)," *Archivum latinitatis medii aevi*, 14 (1939), pp. 113-230 (including supplement entitled "Vitae, Passiones, Miracula, Translationes sanctorum Galliae (500-1000)" on pp. 183-225); Ferdinand Lot, et al., "Index Scriptorum Operumque Latino-Gallicorum Medii Aevi, saeculum XI (1000-1108)," *Archivum latinitatis medii aevi*, 16 (1941), pp. 5-59; Ferdinand Lot, et al., "Supplementum: Vitae, Passiones, Miracula, Translationes sanctorum Galliae necnon alia opera hagiographica saeculum XI in Gallia exarata (a. 1000-1108)," *Archivum latinitatis medii aevi*, 18 (1943), pp. 5-39. (The indices are organized alphabetically by author; the hagiographica supplements are organized alphabetically by saint.)

Henri Fros, "Liste des translations et inventions de l'époque carolingienne," *Analecta Bollandiana*, 104 (1986), pp. 427-9. (Organized alphabetically by saint.)

Patrick Geary, "Handlist of Relic Thefts (ca. 800-ca. 1100)," in *Furta Sacra. Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1978; second edition 1990), pp. 149-56. (Organized alphabetically by saint.)

"Biographies spirituelles," *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, (Paris, 1937-present), 1:1646-78. (List of saints with significant *vitae*; organized by century.)

André Vauchez, "Les procès de canonisation," in *La sainteté en occident aux derniers siècles du moyen âge d'après les procès de canonisation et les documents hagiographiques* (Rome, 1981), pp. 655-65. (Organized first by sub-genre and then chronologically.)

3. Relevant volumes of the *Typologie des sources*.

Guy Philippart, *Les légendiers latins et autres manuscrits hagiographiques* (Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental, 24-25; Turnhout, 1977).

Jacques Dubois, *Les martyrologes du moyen âge latin* (Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental, 26; Turnhout, 1978).

Martin Heinzelmann, *Translationsberichte und andere quellen des Reliquienkultes* (Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental, 33; Turnhout, 1979).

Michel Sot, *Gesta episcoporum, Gesta abbatum* (Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental, 37; Turnhout, 1981).

J. Richard, *Les récits de voyages et de pèlerinages* (Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental, 38; Turnhout, 1981).

C. Bremond, Jacques Le Goff, Jean-Claude Schmitt, *L'exemplum* (Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental, 40; Turnhout, 1982).

4. Some other useful reference sources:

Bibliotheca Sanctorum, 13 vols. (Rome, 1961-1969). (Organized alphabetically.)

Vies des saints et des bienheureux par les reverends pères bénédictins de Paris, eds. Jules Baudot, Paul Antin, and Jacques Dubois, 13 vols. (Paris, 1935-1959). (Organized by liturgical calendar.)

Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques, eds. Alfred Baudrillart, et al., 17 vols (Paris, 1912-present). (Note: complete to H.)

Lexicon des Mittelalters (Munich: Artemis Verlag, 1980-present). (Note: complete to L.)

Repertorium fontium historiae medii aevi, 5 vols. (Rome, 1962-present).

Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie, vols. 5-8: *Ikonographie der Heiligen* (Freiburg, 1973-1976).

Copyright ©1999, Thomas Head. This file may be copied on the condition that the entire contents, including the header and this copyright notice, remain intact. The contents of ORB are copyright © 1995-1999 Laura V. Blanchard and Carolyn Schriber except as otherwise indicated herein.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20150518164833/http://the-orb.net/encyclop/religion/hagiography/guide1.htm>