A Brief Guide to Scholarship on Western Hagiography

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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.

The formative work in applying these new methodologies in religious history to the subject matter of medieval hagiography was written, ironically enough, by a Czech Marxist. František Graus, Volk, Herrscher und Heiliger im Reich der Merowinger. Studien zur Hagiographie der Merovingerzeit [People, lords, and saints in the kingdom of the Franks: studies on the hagiography of the Merovingian period] (Prague, 1965) remains one of the most innovative and important studies of medieval history written in the second half of the twentieth century, although it has lamentably never been translated into English. In essence Graus challenged historians to use the then relatively neglected genres of hagiography to serve as sources for the social history of Western Christianity. That challenge has been taken up explicitly or implicitly by a wide variety of scholars of medieval religion, society, literature, and art over the course of the last three decades.

Recent studies of medieval hagiography, however, would be almost literally inconceivable were it not for the pioneering work of three magisterial scholars--Peter Brown, André Vauchez, and Caroline Bynum--published initially over the course of the 1970s and 1980s. Peter Brown investigated the function of sanctity as a form of social or political power in the later Roman Empire. He first explored the role of living ascetic...

Much innovative scholarship has appeared on saints and their cults since the 1980s. the following paragraphs survey some of the more important works by working chronologically through the subject matter of medieval hagiography. (Please note that the early middle ages is better treated than the later middle ages.) For more detailed guides to studies, see the bibliographies available through the main page of the "Hagiography" section of ORB.

Clare Stancliffe provides a thorough examination of the work of Sulpicius Severus in *Saint Martin and His Hagiographer: History and Miracle in Sulpicius Severus* (Oxford, 1983). Aline Rousselle, *Croire et guérir. La foi en Gaule dans l'Antiquité tardive* (Paris, 1990) presents a sensitive and provocative reading of the transition from Roman to


On Europe after the collapse of the Carolingian empire, see Jean-Pierre Poly and Eric Bournazel, *The Feudal Transformation, 900-1200*, trans. Caroline Higgitt (New York, 1991) and Heinrich Fichtenau, *Living in the Tenth Century: Mentalities and Social Orders*, trans. Patrick Geary (Chicago, 1991). Both have perceptive comments about saints and their cults; the former also has an excellent bibliography. A study of the cult of saints which spans the Carolingian and post-Carolingian periods in one important region may be found in Thomas Head, *Hagiography and the Cult of Saints. The Diocese of*
Orléans, 800-1200 (Cambridge, 1990). Little is available in English on Ottonian hagiography, but see Patrick Corbet, Les saints ottoniens. Sainteté dynastique, sainteté royale et sainteté féminine autour de l'an mil (Sigmaringen, 1986).

This essay will be continued for the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries in the near future.

No adequate general guide to the history, study, and use of hagiography exists in English. See instead René Aigrain, L'hagiographie: ses sources, ses méthodes, son histoire (Paris, 1953); Réginald Grégoire, Manuale di Agiologia. Introduzione alla Letteratura Agiografica (Fabriano, 1987); and Jacques Dubois and Jean-Loup Lemaitre, Sources et méthodes de l'hagiographie médiévale (Paris, 1993). For further introduction to hagiographic sources, see An Introductory Guide to Research in the Medieval Hagiography.