

HAGIOGRAPHY AND ITS IMPACT ON MEDIEVAL EUROPEAN THOUGHT

Lille, ESPOL

20/11/2013

I. Hagiography: dawn and features

1. Definition

- gr. ἅγιος (hagios) "saint"
- gr. γράφειν (graphein) "to write"

> descriptions of the memorable acts of the saints.

I. Hagiography: dawn and features

2. Hagiography : a literary genre ?

- Different kinds of texts : vitae, passions, miracle collections, translations
- But one horizon of expectations created by formal and pragmatic aspects and aspects related to the contents

I. Hagiography: dawn and features

3. Elements favouring the emergence of hagiography

- Non Christian traditions
- Christian traditions

I. Hagiography: dawn and features

3.1. Non Christian traditions

- Philo of Alexandria (= after 40 AD), *Lives of the Patriarchs*
- Diogenes Laertius (3th c.), *Lives of the Philosophers*
- Suetonius (= after 122 AD), *Lives of the Caesars*

I. Hagiography: dawn and features

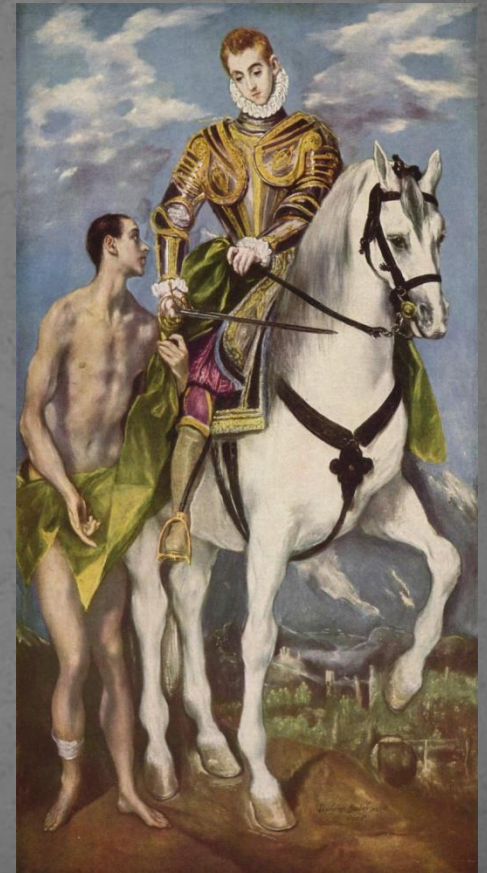
3.2. Christian traditions

- *Acts of the Apostles* (orthodox or apocryphal)
- *Acts of the Martyrs*

I. Hagiography: dawn and features

4. First crystallization of the new genre

- Sulpicius Severus
(= after 420), *Vita Martini*



I. Hagiography: dawn and features

5. Further evolution : early middle ages

- most important literary production
- social “in-between”

I. Hagiography: dawn and features

5.1. Functions

1. actualize celestial power
2. edify the masses
3. self-glorification of the clergy

I. Hagiography: dawn and features

5.2. Features

- Contents
- Language

I. Hagiography: dawn and features

5.2.1. Contents

- Historicity vs divine truth
- Stylization
 - Dualist backdrop
 - Securizing message
 - (Vitae) Structure with fixed stages :
 - origins, birth, childhood, education, piety, glorious death, invention, translation + miracles
 - Recurrent themes :
 - noble origins, physical beauty, virtues : ascese, renunciation, humility, charity.

I. Hagiography: dawn and features

5.2.2. language

- Hyperbolical
- Repetitive
- Intermediate

II. Hagiography and its impact

1. The Apocalyptic vision of the world

- Life on earth as a test
- The danger of heresies

II. Hagiography and its impact

2. Christianity facing Islam

- Islam as a heresy
- Islam as a sign of the imminent Apocalypse
 - In the East : *The Apocalypse of Pseudo-Méthodius* (7th c.)
 - In Spain : Paulus Alvarus' *Indiculus luminosus* (9th c.)
- Islam as the enemy occupying the Holy Land

II. Hagiography and its impact

2. Christianity describing Muhammad

- Life descriptions in many different types of text
- Striking uniformity

> “Muhammad legend”

II. Hagiography and its impact

2.1. The moulding of the Christian “Muhammad legend”

- Historical and Muslim elements and their distorted Christian interpretation
- Anti-hagiography

II. Hagiography and its impact

2.2. Chrystallization of the Muhammad anti-hagiography

- Embrico of Mainz, *Vita Mahumeti* (about 1064)
- Guibert of Nogent, *Gesta Dei per Francos* (=±1124)

II. Hagiography and its impact

2.2. Chrystallization of the Muhammad anti-hagiography : specific accents

- Sexual impiety
- False miracles/ trickery
- Unglorious death

II. Hagiography and its impact

2.3. Lasting impact of the Muhammad anti-hagiography

- Petrus Venerabilis Cf. N. Daniel
- Guillaume Postel

II. Hagiography and its impact

2.4. The anti-hagiography undone

- Victor Hugo, *La légende des siècles*, 1855-1876.