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Saints, Narratives, and Hero(in)es

Scholarship, Definitions, and Concepts

Narratives

In the broadest terms, this book examines late antique and medieval hagiography — a modern umbrella term to which I return below — as narrative.[1] Historically speaking, this approach has only been established relatively recently in the field. For a long time after its emergence in the Counter-Reformation, scholarship on hagiography was driven both by a distinct interest in questions of authorship and authenticity, and by a tendency to mine texts for factually reliable data about persecutions, cults of saints, and liturgical practices.[2] This intellectual bias towards authenticity and historicity had profound consequences for the study of hagiography well into the twentieth century. The study of martyr accounts is a case in point. On the one hand, a disproportionate amount of attention has traditionally been paid to the earliest accounts,[3] which were written close to the time of the persecutions that they (purport to) describe (i.e. dating from the second, third, and early fourth centuries) and were therefore thought to provide fairly reliable historical documentation for them. On the other hand, later accounts (i.e. those written long after the persecutions) have typically received much less attention. Both their remoteness in time and the fact that they are more imaginative as well

1 I would like to thank Evelien Bracke, Jan Bremmer, Klazina Staat, and Julie Van Pelt for comments on an earlier draft of this chapter and/or editorial support. This chapter was written with the support of the European Research Council under the European Union's seventh framework programme (Starting Grant Agreement no. 337344) and the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Consolidator Grant Agreement no. 819459).

2 For example, *Fasti sanctorum*, ed. by Rosweyde. On this tendency, see e.g. Rapp, 'Epiphanius of Salamis', p. 181; and Walker, *The Legend of Mar Qardagh*, p. 115; Walker, 'Hagiography as History', pp. 31–32.

3 See Rebillard, *Greek and Latin Narratives about the Ancient Martyrs*, pp. 2–14 for a review of the history of collecting martyr acts.

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as more complex and elaborate in their narrative were reason enough for scholars to look at them with suspicion.[4] The state of scholarship on martyr acts, in other words, has been impacted significantly by scholars' traditional concern with 'separating the historical wheat from the fictional chaff', as two scholars put it eloquently in a recent study on hagiography.[5]

Nowhere is the systematic neglect of accounts that were felt to be too imaginative to be historically reliable more visible than in editorial practice: the Bollandists published no fewer than sixty-eight volumes of editions of late antique and medieval hagiographical texts in their 'Acta Sanctorum' between 1634 and 1940. (They also published a number of supporting series, such as 'Analecta Bollandiana' and 'Subsidia hagiographica'.) The subsequent identification of an ever-increasing number of these texts as 'not authentic' or 'spurious', however, prevented their inclusion in later editions.[6] Even when an influential Bollandist like Hippolyte Delehaye criticized the decision to include only historically reliable Lives in the 'Acta Sanctorum' and suggested that literary interests ('l'intérêt littéraire')[7] would be better served by a more inclusive approach,[8] the editors were slow to act.

Since the mid-twentieth century, although the quest for factual accuracy and authenticity no longer monopolizes scholarship, the historical interest has remained largely dominant in the field, and ample attention has been paid to hagiographical writings as sources for social history, theology, church history, and the history of gender and sexuality.[9] Less attention has been paid to narrative qualities of hagiography in their own right.[10] James Corke-Webster

4 See Delehaye, *Les passions des martyrs et les genres littéraires*, pp. 236–315 on the later, so-called 'epic' Passions as 'productions artificielles' (p. 236), in contrast to the earlier, historical ones; see also Ameling, 'Vorwort', pp. 11–12 on the literary character of post-Nicene (as opposed to pre-Nicene) martyr acts.

5 Corke-Webster and Gray, 'Introduction', p. 2. On the history of research specifically into martyr acts, see Praet, 'Legenda aut non legenda?', pp. 156–70. See Bowersock, Brown, and Grabar, eds, *Late Antiquity* for comparable observations on some Lives that have traditionally been perceived to be historically accurate (e.g. Athanasios's *Life of Antony* and Sulpicius Severus's *Life of Martin*) and have therefore been studied both more extensively and more systematically than other Lives.

6 See De Temmerman and Praet, 'Martyrs and Life-Writing in Late Antiquity', pp. 376–77 for an overview.

7 Delehaye, *À travers trois siècles*, pp. 92–93.

8 Delehaye, *À travers trois siècles*, pp. 92–96. This was also noted by Kitchen, *Saints' Lives and the Rhetoric of Gender*, pp. 8–9, with reference to the English translation of Delehaye, *À travers trois siècles*.

9 Kitchen, *Saints' Lives and the Rhetoric of Gender*, pp. 4–7; Efthymiadis, 'Introduction', pp. 1–14; Fialon, *Mens immobilis*, pp. 19–24, and Corke-Webster and Gray, 'Introduction', pp. 1–6 offer more or less detailed overviews of the history of scholarship on (certain branches of) hagiography.

10 von Contzen, *The Scottish Legendary*, pp. 10–15 contextualizes this observation and rightly calls it 'remarkable' (p. 10), since narrative traditionally plays such a prominent role in Christian discourse. For more detail on the fundamental role of narrative in Christianity, see Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, pp. 89–119, and Rapp, 'Storytelling as Spiritual Communication' on concepts of narrative in hagiography in particular.

and Christa Gray sensibly look for an explanation for this tendency in the hagiographical texts themselves,[11] which generally are not only full of theological overtones, but also reveal their edifying purposes via a strongly moral and didactic agenda, all of which may be difficult to square with modern literary concerns. At the same time, another part of the explanation may lie in the traditional classifications of modern-day academia. Classicists and ancient historians, for example, have been studying the narrative qualities of texts for a long time, but until the 1970s those venturing into Late Antiquity mainly paid attention to pagan authors while leaving Christian literature from the same period largely to church historians and theologians.[12] Even though this situation has changed dramatically, especially since the publication of Peter Brown's 1971 work *The World of Late Antiquity: From Marcus Aurelius to Muhammad*, and even though Late Antiquity has long been studied in more integrated ways through pagan, Christian, and Jewish documents alike, this change has not always impacted research on hagiography, where some traditions continue to receive more attention than others, as I have observed above.

In this book we approach hagiographical accounts as narrative constructions meriting scholarly attention in their own right, thereby inscribing ourselves in, and contributing to, a growing body of relatively recent scholarship. Over time more scholars have realized that reading hagiographical accounts simply as repositories of historical facts may not be the most productive way forward, and have rightly suggested that historical accuracy may, in fact, not even have been the authors' primary concern.[13] Such insights have contributed to the development of a scholarly rationale which increasingly values imaginative and fictional aspects of hagiography, for example for answering broader questions about narrative creativity and ideology.[14]

Furthermore, scholars of Late Antiquity have emphasized that an investigation of textual and rhetorical qualities of discourse can enhance our understanding of texts and their contexts — an insight introduced into early

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11 Corke-Webster and Gray, 'Introduction', p. 4.

12 On this tendency, see also Bremmer and Formisano, eds, *Perpetua's Passions*, p. 120. See Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*, pp. 3–4 on the traditional division between patristics and (social) history.

13 See, for example, Gemeinhardt and Leemans, 'Christian Martyrdom in Late Antiquity', pp. 1–4 on the significant differences between versions of the martyrdom of Euphemia of Chalcedon and the fundamental questions they raise about the historical value of hagiographical texts, and Déroche, Ward-Perkins, and Wiśniewski, eds, *Culte des saints et littérature hagiographique* on interconnections between cults of saints and hagiographical literature.

14 Like the Bollandists, Elliot, *Roads to Paradise*, among others, is mainly concerned with sifting fact from fiction, but unlike the Bollandists, pays more attention to fiction than to fact. Burrus, *The Sex Lives of Saints* is another good example of an increased sensitivity with regard to imaginative aspects of hagiographical narrative constructions, specifically eroticism. Monge, San Chirico, and Smith, 'Introduction', p. 1 explicitly state that hagiographical accounts have been read increasingly as 'sophisticated narrative technologies'.

Christian studies by Averil Cameron[15] and picked up in this book, specifically in Part II, where individual chapters examine how hagiographical accounts mobilize and capitalize on both literary and rhetorical traditions. Even thirty years ago Cameron stated that the kind of post-structuralist analysis that had been common in the study of the gospels for some time (and in New Testament studies more generally) 'crie[d] out to be carried over into other early Christian literature'.[16] This insight has impacted the study of early Christian prose narrative of the second and third centuries, such as the apocryphal acts of the apostles, the Ps.-Clementines, and (some) early martyr acts to some degree.[17] Since both the gospels and the acts of the apostles (both canonical and apocryphal) provided models and motifs for later hagiography, it is not surprising that these texts and their scholarship have, in turn, proved inspirational for the study of hagiography.[18]

Even so, the apparatus of narratological analysis is only beginning to be introduced into the latter field.[19] Admittedly, there has been no shortage in recent decades of journal articles and book chapters that, in one way or another, examine the narrative qualities of individual hagiographical accounts for specific purposes.[20] There are even a few (edited) books dedicated to this broad approach, but none of these has our specific thematic focus, to which I return below. In one fine example, Arietta Papaconstantinou, Muriel Debié, and Hugh Kennedy map several textual and narrative qualities of hagiography in relation to historiography specifically and explore what the overlaps between the two genres can tell us about how authors reconstructed the past.[21] A recent volume edited by Christoph Brunhorn, Peter Gemeinhardt, and Maria Munkholt Christensen

15 Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*.

16 Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, p. 3.

17 See e.g. Perkins, *The Suffering Self*; Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride*, and Bremmer and Formisano, eds, *Perpetua's Passions*.

18 See e.g. Cooper, 'Of Romance and Mediocritas' on how the *Passio Anastasiae* recycles plot patterns from the apocryphal acts of the apostles, and Bossu, 'Quick-Witted Women' for a literary analysis of a selection of Latin post-Nicene martyr acts.

19 Just as Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, p. 3 does for early Christian literature, Brunhorn, Gemeinhardt, and Munkholt Christensen, 'Von der Erschliessung spätantiker Text-Welten', p. 5 adduce New Testament studies as a *comparans e contrario* to highlight the absence of narratology- and intertextuality-based research from studies of hagiography. See also Gemeinhardt, 'Christian Hagiography and Narratology', who notes the same lacuna, and Conermann and Rheingans, 'Narrative Patterns and Genre in Hagiographic Life Writing', p. 7, who characterize narratological exploration of hagiography as still being in its infancy.

20 See e.g. Guidorizzi, 'Motivi fiabeschi nell'agiografia bizantina'; Kazhdan, *History of Byzantine Literature*, pp. 154–61, 284–85, 300–01; Nilsson, 'Desire and God have Always been Around'; Jazdzewska, 'Hagiographic Invention and Imitation'; Hägg, 'The "Life of St Antony" Between Biography and Hagiography'; Leemans, 'The Martyrdom of Sabas the Goth'; Gemeinhardt, 'Christian Hagiography and Narratology'; Morgan, 'The Monk's Story'; and Vuković, 'The Early Christian Martyrdom Narratives', pp. 288–91.

21 Papaconstantinou, Debié, and Kennedy, eds, *Writing 'True Stories'*.

is comparable to the previous in that it also examines hagiographical accounts as literary rather than historical texts ('als *literarische* Texte', italics original) and asks which intertextual and narrative strategies are used to tell stories about saints.[22] It is significant that the contributions to the latter book are presented metaphorically as 'exploratory drills for oil' ('Probebohrungen'),[23] a metaphor aptly capturing the notion of hagiography as a vast reservoir of material waiting to be unearthed and explored in detail. The common focus of both the work of Papaconstantinou, Debié, and Kennedy and that of Brunhorn, Gemeinhardt, and Munkholt Christensen, namely the questions of how stories are told and how story-worlds are (re)constructed,[24] is shared by this present volume, but unlike the volumes mentioned, this book explores these questions specifically to address the narrative (re)construction of characters.

Another rich, solid, and recent book-length treatment of narrativity, textuality, and discursivity in late antique hagiography is the collection of articles edited by Christa Gray and James Corke-Webster.[25] Like Brunhorn, Gemeinhardt, and Munkholt Christensen (and like the present book), they explore 'the decisions that authors of successive hagiographical works made about writing, selecting, arranging, and presenting their material' and analyse 'the forms and structures chosen to shape and reshape the material presented'.[26] Whereas Corke-Webster and Gray aim to trace a 'process of evolution' underlying hagiographical discourses and thus see their book as 'a study of development' that largely encompasses not just saints, but also authors and audiences,[27] we focus more strictly on narrative constructions of saints within individual texts.

Hagiography

Before clarifying the thematic approach of this volume, it is necessary to introduce the corpus of texts that we address, particularly the notoriously vague concept of hagiography. Whereas scholars agree that it is important to understand saints in the study of Late Antiquity,[28] opinions differ on what

22 Brunhorn, Gemeinhardt, and Munkholt Christensen, *Narratologie und Intertextualität* (citation from pp. 1-2).

23 Brunhorn, Gemeinhardt, and Munkholt Christensen, 'Von der Erschliessung spätantiker Text-Welten', p. 18.

24 Papaconstantinou, Debié, and Kennedy, eds, *Writing 'True Stories'*; Brunhorn, Gemeinhardt, and Munkholt Christensen, eds, *Narratologie und Intertextualität*.

25 Gray and Corke-Webster, eds, *The Hagiographical Experiment*.

26 Corke-Webster and Gray, 'Introduction', p. 13.

27 Corke-Webster and Gray, 'Introduction', p. 9.

28 Corke-Webster and Gray, 'Introduction', p. 2 note both rightly and eloquently that, since Peter Brown's work on the holy man has been so influential in the study of Late Antiquity, 'it is not an exaggeration to claim that late antiquity as an area of study stands upon the shoulders of saints'.

exactly hagiography is. The Greek term *hagios* (like the Latin *sanctus*) has been widespread since the fourth century,[29] but our modern English compound (with its literal meaning of either 'holy writing' or 'writing (about) holiness/holy people') dates to the seventeenth century[30] and has since been used to denote a wide variety of textual material. While Delehaye, for example, defines hagiography as a corpus of texts inspired by or aimed at the propagation of a cult, others have noted, correctly, that much of the extant material does not fit this definition.[31] Today, most scholars use a fairly loose, inclusive definition of hagiography. Brunhorn, Gemeinhardt, and Munkholt Christensen, for example, read the term in the widest sense according to its etymology as describing phenomena that thematize holiness ('das [Be-]Schreiben von Phänomenen […] in denen "Heiligkeit" thematisiert wird') and explain that, in this sense, holiness is not so much an external quality ('etwas an und für sich Bestehendes') as a predicate attributed to a person by the texts themselves ('als Resultat einer Zuschreibung').[32]

One recent authoritative dictionary of Late Antiquity is more specific and defines hagiography as 'a broad designation encompassing a variety of literary forms in both prose and verse that take the life and/or the actions of a holy person as their subject'.[33] This definition takes 'hagiography' as an umbrella term that covers a vast number of types of texts. Scholars commonly divide these into subgenres such as saints' Lives, miracle collections, collections of sayings, edifying tales, acts of apostles, and martyr acts.[34] But such a classification gives an impression of the material that is much tidier than the material itself, with its staggering variety in terms of length, style, form, and narrative layout.[35] Even within individual 'subgenres' there is no general formal unity.[36] It is not surprising, then, that it has been a matter of debate in

29 Brunhorn, Gemeinhardt, and Munkholt Christensen, 'Von der Erschliessung spätantiker Text-Welten', p. 3.

30 See *Oxford English Dictionary* (www.oed.com) s.v. hagiography. Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*, pp. 5–6 makes reference to Dionysius the Areopagite (sixth century), for whom the adjective *hagiographos* describes not the Lives of saints but the divinely inspired scriptures.

31 Delehaye, *Les légendes hagiographiques*, p. 2. See e.g. Wiśniewski, 'Relate and Retell', p. 64 on fourth- and fifth-century Lives in general, and the Lives of Antony, Paul of Thebes, and Malchus in particular, as texts not written as cultic texts (even if they were used as such at a later stage).

32 Brunhorn, Gemeinhardt, and Munkholt Christensen, 'Von der Erschliessung spätantiker Text-Welten', p. 3.

33 *ODLA*, s.v. 'saints' Lives', pp. 1320–22 (Insley).

34 Praet, 'Legenda aut non legenda?', pp. 152–53 similary defines hagiography as a collective noun for all writings on the saints (both martyrs and non-martyrs), including several subgenres. Conermann and Rheingans, 'Narrative Patterns and Genre in Hagiographic Life Writing', p. 7, for their part, would prefer to see a closer text-based definition.

35 Some texts are in prose, others in verse; some are first-person narratives, others take the form of letters, some are orations, and yet others are presented as eyewitness reports. On the (variety of) formal characteristics of hagiography, see Praet, 'Holy Men', pp. 370–72.

36 On martyr acts, for example, see De Temmerman and Praet, 'Martyrs and Life-Writing in Late Antiquity', pp. 375–76.

the study of hagiography for some time now how one should conceptualize late antique accounts of saints and their lives in connection with other types of narrative. The most straightforward conceptualization of hagiography as a genre alongside other genres dates back as far as Theodoret of Cyrrhus who, towards the middle of the fifth century, saw a place for Lives of saints among the classic genres of the epic, history, tragedy, and comedy.[37] Naturally, given hagiography's focus on the lives, actions, and words of saints, scholars have long noted (and built upon) its similarities with ancient biography, and indeed, have conceptualized saints' Lives as a genre originating in the fourth century with Athanasios of Alexandria's *Life of Antony*.[38]

But since ancient biography, like hagiography, does not seem to exhibit any formal characteristics that lend themselves to a straightforward definition,[39] this association has not necessarily resulted in greater conceptual clarity. In fact, in order to come to terms with the uncertainties surrounding the concepts of both biography and hagiography, scholars have been devising creative metaphors. Tomas Hägg, for example, rightly warns against drawing borders between different types of ancient and late antique Life-writing 'where the authors themselves so obviously moved over mapless terrain'.[40] Danny Praet agrees with this and suggests replacing the metaphor of space with one of music, 'where certain themes are repeated but with new material and variations on old themes, played with different instruments, sampled and remastered, and so on'.[41] James Corke-Webster and Christa Gray allow for similar flexibility when they conceive of hagiography as a system of family resemblances: 'works about "saints" — subjects considered holy in some sense by their authors — need have no one shared feature, but rather are all part of a family that each share some features with each other'.[42] Some scholars have gone even further and suggested that the very notion of genre is not ideal

37 Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Religious History*, Prologue 2. Cf. Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*, p. 6; pp. 196–97.

38 Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*, pp. 5–7 provides a useful discussion of hagiography as a genre and its history, also attending to its forms' and structures' indebtedness to modes of Graeco-Roman biography. See Priessnig, 'Die biographischen Formen der griechischen Heiligenlegenden' on hagiography and biographical forms. De Temmerman, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Biography* is a survey of ancient (and late antique) biography that deals with hagiography as one of the forms of Life-writing.

39 On definitions of ancient biography, see De Temmerman, 'Writing (About) Ancient Lives'.

40 Hägg, *The Art of Biography in Antiquity*, p. xi.

41 Praet, 'Holy Men', p. 370.

42 Corke-Webster and Gray, 'Introduction', pp. 6–7. The same metaphor has also shaped scholarship on ancient biography. Burridge, *What Are The Gospels?*, p. 38 draws on Wittgenstein's theory of family resemblance to conceptualize different types of biographical writing — in his view, gospels would have been recognized by ancient readers as (belonging to the family of) *bioi* because they have a number of characteristics in common with other works labelled as *bioi*. Williams, *Authorised Lives*, p. 5 sees Christian and non-Christian biography as 'siblings', and Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, p. 24 uses the same metaphor to distinguish Christian biography from acts of the Christian martyrs.

for capturing the complexities of hagiographical narrative.[43] Most famously perhaps, Marc Van Uytfanghe sees hagiography not as a genre but rather as a type of discourse ('discours hagiographique') that pervades several genres, such as biography, novels, and panegyric.[44]

Clearly, given the variety of the extant material, it is difficult to make general claims about hagiographical narrative. Instead, it is one of the aims of this book to offer a detailed analysis of specific texts, to allow for differentiated scholarly appreciation.[45] More specifically, this volume pays attention primarily to Lives and martyr acts (and, to a lesser extent, edifying tales) because these subgenres (if we can call them that) offer the most relevant material in terms of narrative analysis in general and our thematic approach, to which I turn below, in particular. As for their time of composition, most of them date from between the fourth and eighth centuries, although we have also included later texts, and a small number of earlier ones, where thematically appropriate. In order to achieve some balance between breadth and depth, the book offers chapters that aim to trace patterns across entire corpora or subcorpora (e.g. Chapters 2, 3, and 6) as well as chapters that focus on one or two individual texts (e.g. Chapter 5) or groups of texts dealing with the same saints (e.g. Chapters 7 and 8).

Hero(in)es

As the title of this book suggests, our thematic focus is on heroes and heroines. This focus addresses an essential aspect of the narrative construction of hagiographical accounts, as illustrated by Van Uytfanghe's notion of the 'discours hagiographique'. Drawing inspiration from Michel de Certeau,[46] Van Uytfanghe identifies one essential quality of hagiographic discourse as the presence of a hero or heroine who has specific exemplary Christian values and norms, and on whom the story is based. This book, in other words, is not a contribution to the work of the so-called 'religionsgeschichtliche Schule', which asks whether and how we can conceptualize Christian

43 For similar criticism of the concept of genre for an approach towards ancient biography, see *OCD*, s.v. 'biography, Greek', p. 232 (Pelling).

44 Van Uytfanghe, 'Heiligenverehrung II'. The concept is vaguely comparable to that of 'the biographic', which Edwards and Swain, eds, *Portraits* suggest for studying ancient biography — not so much a strictly delineated genre as a broader category, a trait, or a set of traits present not just in biographies, but also in a variety of other texts (Swain, 'Biography and Biographic', p. 1). Gemeinhardt, 'Christian Hagiography and Narratology', p. 23 agrees that hagiography is not at all a fixed genre.

45 See also Corke-Webster and Gray, 'Introduction', p. 11 for a sensible warning against blanket judgements, given the 'extraordinary variety of material'.

46 de Certeau, 'Hagiographie'; de Certeau, 'Une variante'.

saints as successors of pagan heroes.[47] Rather, its title is a play on two other important meanings of the word 'hero(ine)'. First, given our interest in hagiography as narrative, we adopt the term 'hero(ine)' as a concept referring quite simply to the main character in a story.[48] Indeed, Stephanos Efthymiadis (Chapter 2) explores the dynamics between protagonists and minor characters in a wide variety of Byzantine hagiography and examines how Lives appropriate earlier accounts to construct these dynamics. He demonstrates not only that in this interplay the characterization of protagonists often intersects with doxological issues, but also that minor characters are sometimes semantically invested to the extent that they become so-called 'secondary heroes' in hagiographical narratives otherwise centred around a single hero.

The second definition of the English term 'hero(ine)' is also relevant to our purposes, namely an extraordinary character exhibiting both exemplary behaviour and a set of specific qualities that distinguish them from others.[49] As it happens, from a modern, religious point of view, this notion of heroism is intimately linked with that of sainthood. The *Corpus iuris canonici*, for example, which dates from the first half of the eighteenth century, explicitly states that one of the crucial questions to be addressed in canonization procedures is whether a person possessed both the theological and the cardinal Christian virtues 'to a heroic degree' ('in gradu heroico').[50] Moreover, the close connection between sainthood and the essential aspects of what we refer to as heroism today is also borne out by the late antique and medieval texts with which we are concerned in this book. Indeed, what characterizes many hagiographical stories is their portrayal of saints as individuals who distinguish themselves from others specifically through their devotion to God and their embodiment of essential Christian values, and who exhibit these values in extraordinary ways (for example by performing miracles,[51] inspiring followers, undergoing physical torture, or embracing asceticism)[52]

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47 Bremmer, 'From Heroes to Saints' gives a detailed and balanced survey of differences and similarities between Greek heroes and Christian saints; Fialon, *Mens immobilis*, pp. 25–29 surveys scholarship on questions of continuity between Graeco-Roman cultic models and Christian saints. On the meaning of the Greek term *hērōs* (including its divine associations), see Bremmer, 'From Heroes to Saints', pp. 37–38.

48 See *COED*, s.v. 'hero' (4): 'the chief […] personage in a […] story'.

49 See, for example, *COED*, s.v. 'hero' (2), 'heroine' (2), 'heroism'.

50 Canon 2104, as discussed by Mulder-Bakker, 'The Invention of Saintliness', p. 4.

51 On the performance of miracles as an advertisement of the individuals' holiness, see Humphries, 'Saints and Hagiography', p. 504. On miracles as a rhetorical trope in Christian discourse that allows the articulation of the relation between the human and the divine worlds, see Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, pp. 60–61.

52 On martyrs and ascetics as two types of heroes of the faith, see Humphries, 'Saints and Hagiography', pp. 503–07. On asceticism as bloodless martyrdom, see Baumeister, 'Heiligenverehrung I', pp. 136–39.

in order to defend and propagate the faith.[53] At the same time, hagiographical accounts clearly construct saints as examples of Christians who inspire imitation and devotion in others, be it characters within the text or audiences who read or hear it.[54]

When we conceive of saints as heroic figures in this sense, as scholars often do,[55] we can identify a number of markers — prominent to different degrees in different traditions and subcorpora — that single them out as extraordinary characters, for example a noble death,[56] or the exhibition of moral virtues,[57] including the rejection of marriage and cultivation of chastity and virginity (especially for female saints).[58] Hagiographical accounts also typically mobilize paradigms from the Old Testament,[59] the New Testament,[60]

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53 See Gemeinhardt, 'Christian Hagiography and Narratology' on the declaration of values attributable to a special individual as inherent to both martyr acts and Lives, and Corke-Webster and Gray, 'Introduction', p. 1 on the consideration of saints as extraordinary because of their devotion to God.

54 See Cooper, 'Of Romance and Mediocritas', pp. 107–08 on martyr acts constructing 'appealing' Christian exempla, whose struggle to preserve their bodily and spiritual purity 'was meant to afford morally elevating contemplation to an audience less exemplary than themselves'; see Van Uytfanghe, 'La biographie classique et l'hagiographie chrétienne antique tardive', p. 234 on 'exemplifier un ethos' as one of the markers of hagiographical discourse, and Mulder-Bakker, 'The Invention of Saintliness', pp. 8–12 on the quality of exemplarity in medieval hagiography in general.

55 See e.g. Van Uytfanghe, 'La formation du langage hagiographique en Occident latin' on different types of hagiographical discourse and the heroes' place in them; Krajewski, *Archetypal Narratives*, pp. 18–20 on hagiography as 'heroic biography'; Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, pp. 354–55 on the hero as saint, and Fialon, *Mens immobilis*, pp. 315–54 on 'l'héroïsation des martyrs'.

56 See van Henten, 'The Martyrs as Heroes of the Christian People' on noble death as a marker of heroism and martyrdom, and on the similarities and differences between the Christian and Jewish traditions; Bremmer, 'Imitation of Christ' on martyrs and their *imitatio Christi*, and Fialon, *Mens immobilis*, p. 4 on the glorious death of martyrs as an inversion of pagan heroism.

57 See Fialon, *Mens immobilis*, pp. 263–354 on hagiography as a discourse of virtue specifically in the acts of African martyrs, and on the Stoic background of some of their moral virtues. See Brown, *Power and Persuasion*, p. 65 on *kartēria* towards the powerful as a philosophical virtue and its links with Christian martyrs.

58 See Consolino, 'Modelli di santità femminile' and Praet, 'Meliore cupiditate detentus' on the rejection of marriage in early martyr acts; Bossu, 'Quick-Witted Women' on virginity as Agnes' defining characteristic; Traulsen, 'Virginität und Lebensform' on virginity as a choice of life, and Burrus, 'Life after Death' and Scourfield, 'Violence and the Christian Heroine' on eroticization strategies used in the depiction of women in Gregory of Nazianzus and Jerome.

59 See e.g. van Henten, 'The Martyrs as Heroes of the Christian People' on the notion of exemplariness in conceptualizing heroism in II and IV Maccabees and the Christian tradition.

60 See Löhr, 'Paulus als Vorbild des Sterbens' on Paul as a model in early Christianity (in apocryphal acts and, to a lesser extent, martyr literature); Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*, pp. 15–62 on biblical narrative, biblical composition, and biblical models in construction of authority; Wiśniewski, 'Relate and Retell', pp. 76–81 on Sulpicius Severus's attribution of sayings and doings taken from stories about Egyptian fathers to Martin.

or non-biblical traditions to invest their characters with meaning.[61] They also typically characterize saints by using a fixed set of metaphors, for instance describing believers and martyrs as 'slaves of Christ',[62] and ascetics as martyrs.[63]

In this book we take these general observations into two directions. First, we ask how exactly — that is, with which narrative techniques — saints are depicted as heroes.[64] Unlike fictional heroes, saints and martyrs also exist in various cultural registers outside the texts that depict them; they have existed, or are believed to have existed, as historical persons and are often commemorated in religious culture and liturgy. Therefore, it can be proposed that hagiographers do not construct their heroes purely from their imagination (as authors of fiction do) but reconstruct them from legendary or historical material.[65] Four chapters of this book survey some of the narrative complexities behind these processes by exploring how such reconstructions draw upon various traditions.[66] Chapters 3 and 4 analyse how hagiographers marshal different literary and rhetorical traditions in the constructions of their heroes. In a study of African Lives and Passions ranging from the second to the fourth centuries, Sabine Fialon (Chapter 3) demonstrates that the narrative texture underlying depictions of the saints as models of sanctity is intimately connected with specific rhetorical concepts, especially those originating in epideictic rhetoric.[67] At the same time, the construction of these saints is shown to be more polyphonic in that they are also defined by models of heroism drawn from other traditions, such as the Stoic sage and the epic hero. Anne Alwis (Chapter 4) also essentially builds on the importance of rhetoric for the characterization of saints. She examines how two female martyrs, Ia and Tatiana, were rewritten as orators in Byzantium (in the middle and late

61 See e.g. Fialon, *Mens immobilis*, pp. 315–54 on Sulpicius Severus presenting Martin as a third type of hero alongside Hector (an epic hero) and Socrates (a philosophical hero); see Fialon, 'L'imprégnation virgilienne' on Virgilian echoes in two African Passions; Consolino, 'La santità femminile' on different types of exempla in hagiographical constructions of female virtue, and Cooper, 'Of Romance and Mediocritas' on fictional models in the *Passio Anastasiae*.

62 See Bremmer, 'God and Christ in the Earlier Martyr Acts', pp. 242–43 on this trope in early martyr acts.

63 See Gemeinhardt, '"Vita Antonii" oder "Passio Antonii?"', pp. 88–99 on the martyrium terminology used in the *Life of Antony* to characterize Antony.

64 See Kazhdan, *History of Byzantine Literature*, pp. 400–03 on the importance of this question.

65 See Cohn, *The Distinction of Fiction*, pp. 18–37 on this distinction between fictional and non-fictional characters in theory, and De Temmerman, 'Ancient Biography and Formalities of Fiction', pp. 7–12 on its relevance for the study of ancient Life-writing.

66 See Boyer, 'An Attempt to Define the Typology of Medieval Hagiography', pp. 29–31 for an early discussion of the hagiographical hero as incorporating epic, tragic, and dramatic traditions.

67 On rhetoric providing a narrative toolkit for the construction of characters, see also De Temmerman, 'Ancient Rhetoric as a Hermeneutical Tool'. On the vitality of ancient rhetoric in literary production throughout Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, see Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and its Christian and Secular Tradition*; Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, and specifically for Near Eastern cultures, Watt, 'Eastward and Westward Transmission of Classical Rhetoric'.

Byzantine periods respectively), how these acts of rewriting have resulted in the paring down of more traditional aspects of their characterization, such as their physical beauty, and how they became an inextricable part of Byzantium's literate, performative, and argumentative society.

As Stephanos Efthymiadis (Chapter 2) reminds us, a well-established technique from the hagiographical toolbox is for hagiographers to associate themselves with subjects, for example by presenting their stories as eyewitness accounts or by claiming other types of affinity.[68] In Chapter 5, Piet Gerbrandy focuses on a text from the ninth or early tenth century in which that general principle has been developed creatively along metanarrative lines. He explores how the authors of the *Life of St Gallus* associated their own writing process with the adventures of their protagonist, and how this affects both the depiction of their hero and the presentation of their own activities as biographers. Finally, Markéta Kulhánková (Chapter 6) examines how the construction of characters is defined and moulded by generic considerations and formats. She turns to edifying tales in three distinct corpora and demonstrates that, even if these are typically organized around character types, an investigation of specific characterization techniques can reveal a differentiated picture that takes into account the protagonists' spiritual transformation.

All these chapters encourage us to be open to the idea that (many) hagiographers were perhaps more skilful than is often acknowledged. Mark Humphries rightly notes that hagiography has long been regarded as 'little more than a whimsical devotional literature that served to instruct the docile faithful in tales of the heroic age of the church'.[69] Even if hagiographical texts have been subjected to a more critical approach since the scholarship of Delehaye and Brown, it is fair to add, as I have clarified above and as Humphries also notes, that to date much of this critical rehabilitation has addressed primarily historical questions. Our book, then, aims to contribute to this debate with a focus on narrative.

In addition, this book takes narrative (re)constructions of saints into another direction. We aim to add complexity to one of the most prominent statements in scholarship about the characterization of saints in hagiography, the statement that hagiographical accounts are virtually always about the simple glorification of saints who cannot be described further beyond their stereotypical moral perfection. Indeed, this idea is rooted so deeply in our culture that the term 'hagiography' itself has become a figure of speech to denote it.[70] Certainly, much

68 See e.g. Humphries, 'Saints and Hagiography', p. 510. On hagiographical writing as an ascetic act of devotion in itself, see Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*.

69 Humphries, 'Saints and Hagiography', p. 502.

70 See e.g. Smith, 'Devotion, Critique, and the Reading of Christian Saints' Lives', p. 23 on the pejorative connotations of that term in vernacular discourse (supposedly being 'thoughtlessly affective', lacking 'intellectual rigor', noting 'a paucity of truth, and an excess of emotion', and 'creating images that are false in their perfection').

hagiography does invite such appreciations.[71] Chapters 7 and 8 of this book, by contrast, suggest that this may not be the full picture. This insight resonates once more with recent scholarship which has argued, for example, that none other than Jerome was interested in exploring morally complex characterization in his depiction of Malchus, including aspects of failure and transgressive behaviour.[72] Less known authors or redactors also probed into more ambivalent aspects of saints: the author of the Latin *Passio of Agnes*, for example, characterizes the saint as cunning and manipulative;[73] the Latin *Passio of Caecilia* revolves more around complex characterization than it does around typification;[74] and in the Greek *Life of Mary of Egypt* the central character Zosimas becomes complacent and proud.[75] As Corke-Webster and Gray remark more generally, '[i]n the extant hagiographical corpus the cleancut saint of popular imagination rubs shoulders with cavorting, incompetent, petulant, and even murderous saints'.[76]

Occasionally some chapters in our book point in the same direction,[77] but the final two chapters have a more dedicated interest in depictions of variously complex saints in common. For example, some hagiographers raise ethical issues about saints rather than simply and straightforwardly proclaiming and celebrating their moral perfection. Whereas Sabine Fialon (Chapter 3) explores how the hagiographer's art essentially revolves around the notion of praise, Christian Høgel (Chapter 7) thematizes moral complexity in his reading of Byzantine Lives of so-called doctor saints. While hagiography often eschews material concerns and is explicitly not interested in material advantages, the depictions of doctor saints, Høgel argues, are quite different in that they raise ethical questions about the spending of money, which in turn relates to contemporary debates about poverty and power. He also proposes that the Lives of doctor saints are ambiguous and paradoxical in

71 See e.g. Boyer, 'An Attempt to Define the Typology of Medieval Hagiography', pp. 29–31 on 'the hero' in medieval hagiography as being 'very weakly individualized […] the cop[y] of a common prototype'; see Van Uytfanghe, 'Heiligenverehrung II', p. 156 on the idealization of saints as a function of hagiographical discourse; Gemeinhardt, 'Christian Hagiography and Narratology', p. 35 on hagiographers' lack of interest in the saint's intellectual, emotional, or mental development as being conducive to typification, and Fialon, *Mens immobilis*, pp. 263–313 on African martyrs exhibiting all characteristics of perfection.

72 See Gray, 'The Monk and the Ridiculous', pp. 115–21; Gray, 'How to Persuade a Saint', p. 242 on the Latin version, and Staat, Van Pelt, and De Temmerman, 'The Greek Vita Malchi', pp. 101–05 on its (anonymous) Greek retelling.

73 Bossu, 'Quick-Witted Women', pp. 99–114.

74 Bossu, De Temmerman, and Praet, 'The Saint as an Astute Heroine'.

75 Andreou, 'Many Faces, a Single Pair', p. 110; p. 114.

76 Corke-Webster and Gray, 'Introduction', p. 11. See also van't Spijker, 'Saints and Despair' on vanity, doubts, and despair complicating the flawlessness of the saint (in western hagiography), and Franco, 'Psychological Introspection and the Image of Sanctity' on the psychological characterization of both martyrs and persecutors in Byzantine *passiones*.

77 See e.g. Efthymiadis (Chapter 2) on Niketas David Paphlagon's depiction of Ignatios the Patriarch as not straightforwardly ideal, and Kulhánková (Chapter 6) on the suboptimal quality of haughtiness in edifying tales, and on spiritual transformation.

the sense that those who deal with the so-called *anargyroi* (the moneyless) focus on these issues the most.

Whereas Høgel addresses Christian re-evaluations of wealth and poverty, Virginia Burrus (Chapter 8) takes the idea of less-than-ideal character to another level in her analysis of Lives of the fourth-century saint Constantina, whose rhetorical abilities and educational background are reminiscent of the virgin martyrs discussed by Anne Alwis (Chapter 4). Not only may this saint present behaviour that is not to be directly imitated, and thereby challenge the generic protocols so often said to be at work in hagiography, but the textual tradition itself also raises fundamental questions about who the saint really is in the first place: since there is no single, stable Life, there is no single, stable heroine, but rather 'a kaleidoscopic array of shifting portraits' — an observation that fundamentally challenges any assumption that hagiography typically deals with saintly saints.

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