Authorial Intention in the Middle Ages an Overview Based on *the Golden Legend* by Jacobus De Voragine

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Abstract- Until the first decades of the twentieth century, hagiography was seen with mistrust by historians. Its pious aims and fabulous content made us resistant to include them on the list of reliable documents. The methodological innovations that followed thereafter increased the confidence of historians in it and hagiography has become more and more integrated to the testimonies employed by historical analyses. However a problem about the status of the documentation persisted: the doubt concerning the recognition of the performance of authorial intention in the composition of unsigned narratives that originated themselves from relatively unknown writers or whose content seemed to repeat, without any originality, an earlier tradition. This problem was particularly significant in the treatment historians gave to the most widespread medieval hagiographical work, *The Golden Legend*. Written in the last third of the 13th century and based on ancient hagiographical material compiled by the Dominican Jacobus de Voragine, the work was an immediate and booming success – with about a thousand Latin manuscripts coming from various regions of Western Christendom. Here we intend to discuss the existence of authorial intention in its composition in a twofold manner.

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Abstract- Until the first decades of the twentieth century, hagiography was seen with mistrust by historians. Its pious aims and fabulous content made us resistant to include them on the list of reliable documents. The methodological innovations that followed thereafter increased the confidence of historians in it and hagiography has become more and more integrated to the testimonies employed by historical analyses. However a problem about the status of the documentation persisted: the doubt concerning the recognition of the performance of authorial intention in the composition of unsigned narratives that originated themselves from relatively unknown writers or whose content seemed to repeat, without any originality, an earlier tradition. This problem was particularly significant in the treatment historians gave to the most widespread medieval hagiographical work, *The Golden Legend*. Written in the last third of the 13th century and based on ancient hagiographical material compiled by the Dominican Jacobus de Voragine, the work was an immediate and booming success – with about a thousand Latin manuscripts coming from various regions of Western Christendom. Here we intend to discuss the existence of authorial intention in its composition in a twofold manner. First, we will criticize one of the historiographical trends that, between the 1960s and the 1990s, was most directly responsible for the dissolution of the notion of authorship in medieval documentation: the studies related to popular culture or folklore. Second, we will discuss how Jacobus de Voragine, despite using archaic material that he was mostly limited to copying, was capable of producing new meanings and functions proper to the interests of the then relatively young Order of preachers.

Keywords: medieval history, hagiography, authorship, historiography.

I. Introduction

Over the last three decades *The Golden Legend* has become the object of a growing number of studies and debates amongst specialists from all around the world. Many reasons justify the attention given to this collection of saints' Lives composed in the last third of the 13th century by the Dominican Jacobus de Voragine. We could point to the not insignificant role that it played as an instrument of social communication:

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an elevated expression of rhetoric of its time,[1] *The Golden Legend* was a powerful didactic tool both in the schools of novices and in the preaching to the lay people.[2]

Constituted by polyphony of themes, narratives and temporalities, *The Golden Legend* contains centuries of Christian tradition while at the same time bears witness to changes proper to its own time. It can be said that the 13th century bore the most palpable fruits of the passage from a civilization of liturgy to a civilization of norm. One of these fruits was the elaboration of large compilations of documents, amongst which *The Golden Legend* is included.[3] These works brought together and redirected the meanings of the previous Christian tradition and built up their own conception both of the Christian past and of its future. As a witness of past and present, the importance of *The Golden Legend* also projects itself to the future. It is not by chance that the work, which experienced a great success in the following centuries, has received still greater attention since the advent of the printing press, which is partly situated in the ramifications of the process of systematization from which it results. In the context of the ample organisation of the Christian tradition, *The Golden Legend* became the major source of hagiographic imagination, which locates it at the origin of the modern Western Christian imagination.

II. A Path Revisited

My work on *The Golden Legend* resulted in a doctoral thesis submitted to the University of São Paulo

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[1] In regard to the relationship between civic rhetoric and hagiography by the time of *The Golden Legend*, see Miatello (2013).

[2] Boureau (1984), p.24 was the first that, breaking with the Bolandist tradition of attributing the collection of legends with a merely private function, stated that *The Golden Legend* was written to serve as a manual for preachers, especially Dominicans, in the elaboration of sermons.

[3] *The Golden Legend* is one amongst many other hagiographical collections in the period, living alongside other kinds of collections. Their composition involved compilation, systematic organisation and rewriting of the material in question. This movement was particularly notable with regard to normative compilations, whose best known example is certainly Gratian's *Decretum*.

in 1998.[4] There I attempted to understand a central problem of the work: Jacobus de Voragine's option to focus on martyrial sainthood. This predilection led him to fill the text with the lives of ancient saints at a time when not only the context of the Persecutions rested on a very remote past but also the reformed Roman Church – where the election of the saints had taken place since the previous century – demonstrated larger interest on saints who had distinguished themselves by the use of their intellectual weapons. This seemed to me contradictory to the choice made by Jacobus de Voragine. As will be seen below, this contradiction is just apparent.

By that time, academic research on medieval History was going through a transition from the "History of Mentalities" to Cultural History. So the problem of the relationship between levels of culture became much more significant. In such context, I became a constant reader of studies that debated folkloric culture, popular culture and popular religion during the Middle Ages.[5] My approach to *The Golden Legend* was thus impelled by the conviction, shared by this historiographical trend, that hagiography was a privileged witness to the relationship between folkloric and learned culture.

My interest in the document therefore was mediated by a very specific theoretical orientation that was based in some important presuppositions, the most comprehensive of which was the direct and objective reading of the documentary evidence. The mediation between the document and its interpretation was of a purely theoretical kind. One could identify an element of folkloric origin by the strangeness it could provoke in the modern reader or by its similarities to themes recurrent in the collections gathered by folklorists in the 19th and 20th centuries in rural and traditional communities in Europe and in other parts of the world. Once identified, these elements were read in isolation or they were put in contrast to the contents of the 'learned' work in which they resided, as evidence of a specific cultural reality. Thus one went on with the cultural and sociological classification of the evidence based on the identification of contents (learned/folkloric) and forms of specific transmission (written/oral). This way of conceiving the plurality of the evidence found in the documents was related to two other ideas: that the 'written culture' during the Middle Ages was generally more permeable to the 'oral culture', and that the period did not actually recognise the role of the author, since every work was conceived as being primarily the result of a collective production both from its resort to authoritative texts and

to the more or less spontaneous absorption of information from different cultural sources. In short, this kind of approach consisted in an interpretative system that framed new temporal and sociological distinctions by adopting as references an extreme *longue durée*[6] and great cultural blocks, pushing into the background the specific time of production and diffusion of the text and its limited local and social insertion.

This kind of approach was preferred partly also because there had been no satisfactory critical edition of the manuscripts of *The Golden Legend* until then. This only came about in 1998 with the publication of the text established by Giovanni Paolo Maggioni.[7] My research was thus carried out based on The Golden Legend edited by Theodor Grässe. Since its appearance in 1846, this edition had become a reference for all subsequent studies of the text of Jacobus de Voragine.[8] However, the success of the Grässe edition for about a century and a half helped to overshadow *The Golden Legend's* rich and complex manuscript tradition.[9] Furthermore, it contained several other problems, the most serious being the lack of historical criteria for choosing which branch of the textual tradition (composed of more than a thousand Latin manuscripts) should be best regarded.

The appearance of the Maggioni edition broke up with this tradition and gave significant prominence to a historical approach to *The Golden Legend*. With regard to the Latin tradition, it broke with the exclusive resort to Grässe's edition by calling attention to the historical dimension of each manuscript or group of manuscripts. By means of the study of the oldest manuscript tradition, Maggioni renewed the possibilities for a historical approach to the documentary tradition. In relation to the vernacular editions, the work of Maggioni allowed textual interest to go beyond the devotional and the taste for the marvellous. The intervention of the writers, who for centuries introduced additions and amendments to the material chosen by Jacobus de

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[6] Furthermore, the strong conservatism attributed to folkloric culture allowed the interpretation of the evidence by comparison between documents produced in very different periods, usually separated by long spans of time, as we have shown above.

[7] Iacopo da Varazze (1998). See also Maggioni (1995).

[8] Jacobi a Voragine (1969). Grässe's edition was based on the Ebert edition of 1472.

[9] As Maggioni (1998), p.XIV showed, Jacobus de Voragine altered his text a couple of times. Moreover, between the first and the final versions, the text was already being transformed by means of its public circulation and the subsequent intervention of several copyists. "Il lavoro di questa ricerca, qui ha riguardato I settanta codici più antichi, ha dimostrato l'esistenza di almeno due differenti stadi redazionali (qui indicati come LA1 e LA2) e ha permesso l'identificazione di due testimoni dell'ultima redazione che, essendo stati prodotti in luoghi corrispondenti per spazio e tempo con le diverse fasi della biografia di Iacopo da Varazze, attestano l'autenticità della redazione stessa." In this last case, the manuscripts were produced in Bologna between 1272 and 1276 and in Genoa between 1292 and 1299.

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[4] Almeida (1998). Up to the time of writing, this text is still the only doctoral thesis of History written in Brazil dedicated to the study of *The Golden Legend*.

[5] See Le Goff (1967), Schmitt (1976), Schmitt (1981), Schmitt (1984), and Boglioni (2012).

Voragine, was valued as a product of a historical process. In order to define the history of the successive versions of the work established both by Jacobus de Voragine and by those that first altered it, Maggioni's edition advanced in the knowledge of the intention of the author and in the recognition of questions of his own time at *The Golden Legend*. Therefore Maggioni's edition became a hallmark to the historical studies of *The Golden Legend*.[10]

Between the mid-1970s and the mid-1990s, when hagiography received a definitive place among the documents worthy of the attention of historians thanks to several advances both in theoretical and in methodological fields, this genre immediately established itself as a privileged witness to the relationship between learned and folkloric culture due to its peculiarity as an object of the faith of the common people.[11] It was then conceived that this relationship was developed by means of conflicts between different systems of meanings that were supposed to be characteristic of the history of both society and Christianity throughout the middle Ages.

Although less vigorously, such approaches to the hagiographical genre continue up to now. This is clearly shown by the 2010 congress held in Verona, whose acts (appeared in November 2012) would become a posthumous homage to one of its most illustrious participants, Pietro Boglioni, professor of the Université de Montréal and famous scholar of "popular culture", who died in 2011. The subject of the meeting – the connection between hagiography and popular culture – attracted researchers like Paolo Golinelli, Gábor Klaniczay, Edna Bozoky and Didier Lett.[12]

Despite the dynamism attested by the group that met in Verona, such studies lost the prominence they had had between the 1970s and the 1990s.[13] This waning first came about due to the internal criticism arising from the very evolution of cultural studies. Second, it also came about from outside by means of a series of methodological questions raised[14] about the way such folkloric elements could be identified in the documents. How can one distinguish the use made by

Christian writers of literary *topoi*[15] from the description of evidence of folkloric origin? How can one prove that evidence scattered throughout our sources that don't seem to fit to the (in our view) expected thinking of medieval clergymen are part of a common cultural system? Taken that is possible, one still needs to prove the sociological nature of this system, demonstrating if, and how, the distinctions are linked to conflicts or to dissonant social identities. How can we effectively sustain that what seems eccentric to us in these texts was so regarded by those who wrote them? In sum, if it is not possible to claim for the medieval period a homogenous cultural landscape and a society devoid of conflicts, then there is doubt if the place where folkloric culture studies locate the social and cultural divisions is at all pertinent.

Pietro Boglioni believed that *The Golden Legend* compiled an unparalleled number of episodes of folkloric origin.[16] In fact it is possible to find in the text sparse elements and episodes that seem to be out of place in comparison to the reverence and doctrine that we expect to see applied to the domain of sainthood. During my doctoral studies, these elements attracted my attention, as also did what seemed to me to be a tendency of the miracle towards magic.[17] I asked myself if the representation of sanctity in *The Golden Legend* – deeply rooted in the material exuberance of the body of the saints, that endured the unbearable, and of the body of the devotees, whose intercession had the power to re-establish them –was deploying elements from a competitor cultural system for the sake of preaching in

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[10] Evidently we cannot forget the role played by the Université de Montréal Symposium of 1983 in this process (whose acts were published by Dunn-Lardeau (1986)) which put researchers from different linguistic branches of the tradition face to face. Despite the presence of some historians, literary studies dominated the meeting.

[11] Particularly in terms of *The Golden Legend*, at least two examples are worth mentioning: the position that the theme occupies in the important work of Boureau (1984) and its presence at the congress dedicated to Jacobus de Voragine held in 1998. See Bertini Guidetti (2001), especially the contributions from Vauchez (2001) and Boglioni (2001).

[12] Golinelli (2012).

[13] Situation recognized and lamented by Boglioni (2001), p.115-116.

[14] Künzel (1992) remains a pungent criticism of the methodology that allowed the identification of the evidence for folkloric culture in medieval documents.

[15] These elements, attributed to the living of a folkloric nature in a Christian context, are from diverse provenances: biblical 'magic' (such as the flowering of sticks), cult of the Roman gods, episodes of undocumented origin related to 'magic' and animistic 'cults'.

[16] Thinking specifically about the folkloric tale, Boglioni (2001), p.130 stated that "*The Golden Legend* undoubtedly stands out as the largest repertoire of tales, fables, legends, romance, and narrative times produced by the West and perhaps by the whole of world literature."

[17] I distinguished magic from miracle on the basis of the subject of belief. In the case of the miracle, the actions of the subject qualify the event as a consequence of the exercise of the will of a creator. In the case of magic, the actions of the subject qualify the event as part of the nature of things and their relationship. Between these two poles, I qualified the narratives of *The Golden Legend* from the standpoint of a group of texts which marked the 1990s. Amongst these Thomas (1991), p.35 stood out, stating that, with the beginning of Christianity, the Church put itself as the wielder of the "most powerful magic" and took the realization of miracles as the most efficient form of demonstrating its monopoly on the truth. It became permissive towards magic as long as it was maintained under its control (Thomas (1991), p.52-53). The same relationship between the combat of effectiveness, permissiveness and Christian magic is highlighted by Cardini (1982), p.20, 22-23. During the early Middle Ages the Church showed itself to be little concerned with the ongoing pagan resistance to conversion, considering magical beliefs as harmless, which permitted the continuity of the therapeutic chantings and divinatory practices (Cardini (1982), p.27). Today it seems to me fundamental to reassess this point of view by considering, for example, the profusion of miracles at a distance that take place in *The Golden Legend*. They lead us to a different kind of event which seems to me to refer to the field of the miracle proper.

order to attract and keep the attention of the listeners. Would martyrdom be thus represented in such a privileged position due to the demands of popular religion?

By that time I was inclined towards the magical and folkloric interpretation of the document. Nevertheless, I later started asking myself to what extent episodes regarded as "of little learning" could be effectively taken as being related to a folkloric origin. This question derived naturally from my conviction that the treatment given by Jacobus de Voragine to the legends he compiled should be read as an authorial exercise, even though this interference obeyed different criteria than those that characterise authorship in the modern world. I also asked whether the text revealed antagonisms of a cultural kind, such as "materialism versus spiritualism" and "magic versus miracle", bearing in mind the possibility of a deliberate option made by Jacobus de Voragine for a text in which the narrative tension rested upon a sequence of fantastic events. The essential element communicated by *The Golden Legend*, and which guaranteed its power of attraction, rested upon its most immediately apprehensible, descriptive level of what was being told?

The Golden Legend was written based on liturgical, biblical, hagiographical, doctrinal, and historical texts hailing from different periods and regions. The resort to such diverse sources explains by itself the formal differences between the legends and the tone of each narrative that can be more or less reverential, according to its source, author and aims. So the variations that cause us estrangement can be attributed to the diversity of the sources employed. Finally, this diversity does not exist in an autonomous way, drawing its meaning from the alternation between martyrdom and miracle that unifies the stories. By means of these two types of events the didactic exposition of the high values that the work wishes to highlight (renunciation, obedience and poverty) is realised.

Alain Boureau helps us to reconsider this point when, as he criticizes the approach to the Christian legend as a literary genre, he states that the legend itself does not consist of its form. On the contrary,

"The reality of the form comes in fact from the content that was surreptitiously introduced (holiness, virtues, canonisation, exemplarity). […] There is then a considerable difference between a genre, a simple form and a functional norm institutionally formulated, applied globally to forms, contents and uses. […] We would not know therefore how to dissociate the legend its content: sainthood. It seems thus necessary to speak about a diffuse and mobile collection of legends rather than about distinct genre and species. […] The true field of the legend is made up of the ensemble of accounts produced in a religious context and intended for a religious interpretation […] the medieval religious legend is not a simple form, but a convergent bundle of complex narrative modes. It seems arbitrary to separate the narratives of the religious men from the lay ones. […] But it is nevertheless necessary to maintain this occasionally weak boundary in order to reaffirm that the medieval religious legend proceeds from a pious act of interpretation prepared for the practice of biblical reading, the lectio divina." (Boureau, 2004, p.16-19)

Despite Alain Boureau's more specific concerns, his idea that the unity of the "diffuse and transitory collection of legends" rests on its contents allows us to affirm that the divergent elements are subordinated to a common logic, defined by the dynamic of salvation/condemnation. Thus the divergent, disruptive or unexpected evidence does not necessarily indicate the existence of competing cultural systems. It would preferably act as a means of identification among the text, the author/narrator and the reader/listener, who would unite themselves in the respect for the doctrine and in the rejection of elements that, according to a secular tradition, diverge from it and are regarded thus as worthy of contempt, derision or condemnation.

The ability to produce identity, to integrate within a community of values might be more efficient than the dispersion provoked by a focus on recrimination or by strategies of persuasion. Repeating in a sermon a recognised ancient reproach for the worship of ancient gods like Apollo may not have had any moral effect due to the absence of the object of cult, but it might have had the sociological effect of cementing a common conscience, of strengthening and of producing identification. Denying the existence of these so-called folkloric elements would undoubtedly be an error. However, their profusion needs to be explained by returning to the author and to the overall sense of the work in which they appear. After all, the logic of the conflict upon which the text was composed might emerge from specific needs required by the audience of the sermon. Hence the actual time of the composition of *The Golden Legend* and the choices of its author[18] must

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[18] "So what does an author do? He composes, he deals with, he assembles, he combines, he writes down, he puts in order, he splits, he forges, he weaves, he interlaces, he compresses. But above all he speaks and he writes. Or rather, he takes up the pen, he scribbles, he works the page. He can lie if he is a pagan author, to whom everything is permitted. He invents little, he never creates. And evidently, he also never authorizes, a concept that would be better to be sought in the *doctor/docere* family. The verbs related to the notion of author are focused on the production of the work, with a deployment of handcrafted metaphors which remind the scholar that his act belongs to the dominion of labour and of the well-done work." (Bourgain, 2001, p.374). In the specific case of *The Golden Legend*, Maggioni (1998), p.XX wrote: "The legendary of Jacobus de Voragine is actually a work of compilation mostly made up through the reworking or through epitomes of previous works […] Take for example the case of the quotation from Daniel 11:31-32 in Advent 98 where all of our testimonies attest "*et desolationem templi*": it is basically a corruption of the text of the *Vulgata* "*in desolationem et impii*", but the way Jacobus de Voragine employs the quotation seems to presuppose

be taken into account, at least in part, when considering this evidence regarded as disparate.

Therefore seems necessary now to consider the lives of the saints assembled by Jacobus de Voragine from a different viewpoint from that of the logic of the relationship between levels of culture. Any approach to the legends must firstly take into account that their appearance as a "pious act" produced a fundamental unity to the global comprehension of the text and of its constituent elements. Accordingly the diverse aspects of the martyrdom in *The Golden Legend* have to be approached bearing in mind three general aspects of the saintly register: the remote past of martyrdom and its place in the Christian tradition, the approach of this tradition by the Dominican order and its textual expression.

III. Unity and Universalism Updated

Established in Late Antiquity, the theology of the Christian martyrdom changed little in the following centuries. The most significant change in its history was the identification between martyrdom and the ascetic life that took place since the end of the third century, significantly when the Persecutions were already waning.[19] Of the 153 chapters of *The Golden Legend* exclusively dedicated to saints' lives, 91 end with the ordeal of the saint, turning the martyr into the largest sub-category of sainthood in the work.[20] Nevertheless, if we consider the legends in which sanctity is built on the basis of the ascetic profile of the saint, we can affirm that all of them foster the "martyrological" sainthood whether it be from its bloody or ascetic character. From this point of view, we can clearly see the author's intention acting on the establishment of the unity of the work. What remains to be understood is the reasoning behind this choice.

The impact that the martyrs had on late antique Christian communities was soon amplified by the effect of the learned texts that, by pondering upon them, were responsible for the appearance of a real theology about the subject. The martyrs allowed members of the Christian community to be seen as successors or those continuing the essential acts of Christ and of his disciples – preaching and complete submission to God that culminated in a bloody death.[21] Thus the martyrs offered tangible support to the idea that history had a

Christian meaning.[22] If we consider that in these centuries the Christian communities did not possess firm bases for an identity (whether it be of an ethnic, political, linguistic or doctrinal nature) capable of producing a single community, the election of the memory of the martyrs' ascetic renunciation proposed to the Christians then the possibility of unity based on a history and in a way of life.[23] As we hope to show, it is in the ancient sense of martyrdom as an element of representation of Christian unity that rested Jacobus de

[22] This evidently situates the Bible both as a historical narrative and as a source for the interpretation of History. It is significant that the legends of the saints were further developments of a peculiar form of care with the martyrs' memory. The founding gesture of the legends is the election of the martyrs' day of death as the date in which they should be read in public. Jacobus de Voragine is particularly careful with the exactitude of the dates, always exposing a doubt or a contradiction when necessary, whether due to uncertainties in the sources or due to liturgical praxis.

[23] The prominence given to the martyrs still had other cohesive virtues. It favoured the dialogue with the Jewish tradition by incorporating the teleology of suffering and the idea of expiatory death developed in the books of the Maccabees and the logic of the opposition between punishment and reward presented in the book of Daniel. It also allowed a dialogue with the Greek tradition by developing a heroic type imbued with a way of life similar to that of the ascetic philosophers (Hadot (1999), p.333-380) and by affirming the idea of the eternity of the spirit. For the Greco-Latin and Old Testament heritages which converged to the Christian martyrdom, see Baumeister (1991), p.XI-XXVI. Evidently this approximation demanded some additional efforts. For example, Auerbach (2007), p.19 showed that Christianity was capable of adopting the normative principles of ancient rhetoric at the same time that it subverted them. Thus humility, a low element in the eyes of ancient traditional rhetoric, became integrated into the sublime style. This change of content of the elevated speech corresponded therefore to a significant change of the value system, demonstrating a real transformation of the ancient world. It is not our aim here to explain how this took place. But it is important to note that the greatest example of humility in this conception proceeded from the martyrs, who surrendered themselves entirely to God's love by submitting themselves to the slanderous death and resisting injustice. So the *gloria passionis* integrated the most elevated forms of ancient culture: "*In the Fathers of the Church, the conception of a simultaneously humble and sublime style, embodied in the Sacred Scriptures, is not constituted in a theoretical way: it imposes itself, so to speak, due to the circumstances, to the situation in which it found itself. The conception took shape during the course of the polemic with learned pagans that laughed at the Christian books' defective Greek and low realism; in part also, due to the discomfort that the reading of these books caused in those Christians well educated in the schools of rhetoric*". Evidently the rhetorical praise of the martyrdom does not explain by itself the components of the hagiographical narrative; it only bears witness to the process of the emergence of new values that was conceived in a learned milieu that elevated the martyrdom to the sphere of the sublime, without the need to appeal to notions of folkloric origin. Hence the *gloria passionis* is related to an internal dialogue within this learned milieu in the course of the apologetical debate and of the Persecutions.

that the corrupted reading of the Vulgata is the authentic reading of *The Golden Legend*".

[19] *The Golden Legend* reproduces this identification in an exemplary manner. In the midst of the constellation of narrative forms and types of saints from which it is constituted, we can clearly distinguish the similarities between the lives of saints and the lives of the ascetics. On the comprehension of the ascetic – and consequently monastic – life as martyrdom, Baumeister (1991) evokes two central texts from the Christian hagiographic tradition, *The Life of Anthony* by Athanasius of Alexandria and the *Life of Martin* by Sulpicius Severus.

[20] Vauchez (1988), p. 112.

[21] See Markus (1990).

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Voragine's primary interest in the martyrological ideal.[24] The lives of martyr saints preserve the memory of Christian unity both in history – when the scene of martyrdom synthesises earthly conflicts opposing saints and tyrants and points, despite the death of the saint, towards the forthcoming Christian hegemony – and in eternity – manifested in miraculous events, which were conceived as irruptions of the hereafter.

In the final third of the thirteenth century, the record of this ancient function of the lives of the martyrs and the ascetics suffered small alterations resulting from the general situation of the Dominicans and the direct action of the author Jacobus de Voragine. The idea that there existed an authorial intention guiding the selection of hagiographical material is reinforced by one of the episodes of the legend of the founding saint of the order to which Jacobus de Voragine belonged. In this legend, Saint Dominic emerges as a curious mixture of martyr and ascetic. The importance of the profile of the martyr to the Dominicans becomes evident in the saint's desire for martyrdom, even if disguised by his declaration of unworthiness for such an honour. Without avoiding the road where he exposes himself to get in touch with his heretical adversaries, Saint Dominic answers to their questioning on what he would do if they captured him with the intention of murdering him:

"I would ask you not to take me from this life at a stroke, but little by little, cutting off my limbs one by one, in small pieces, and after I am mutilated in front of my own eyes, that you tear out my eyes and leave me abandoned in some solitary place where no-one can help me, so that without succour, my agony would be prolonged; and, if you do not want to comply with this request, then I ask you to kill me in the manner it best suits you."[25]

This imaginary martyrdom, proof of abnegation and profound humility, certainly helped compose the prestige of a character whose limited projection in life created problems to the establishment of the profile of a founder of an Order with great responsibilities and powers such as the Dominican order was. The example shows the effectiveness of the martyrological model for precisely locating where the Dominican authority lied then.

The legends of Saint Francis and Saint Dominic are clear in attributing to the advent of these two saints the character of a truly historical inflection. Their births are prophesied and will make way to a welcome restoration that will lead mankind to a renewed age, one that is superior in the history of the Christian faith. This new age, however should take place in the recovery of the records (both textual and spiritual) of fullness of the past.[26] If the legend of Saint Francis does not translate into words the intensity of the saint's interior desire for martyrdom, as it happens with Saint Dominic, it certainly does that in the palpable form of the stigmata.

It has already been noted that Jacobus de Voragine almost completely ignored the saints that appeared between 993 and 1255.[27] In this period, his work elects only six characters: two from the 12th century (Saint Bernard and Saint Thomas of Canterbury) and four from the 13th century (Saint Francis, Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, Saint Dominic and Saint Peter Martyr). This option clearly excluded from its collection royal saints and monk saints, especially Cluniacs. We see here once again that the activity of compilation does not exclude the possibility of important and calculated alterations to the compiled material. The recovery of the past gives way to updating processes that are worth investigating. The legends of the six saints of the 12th and 13th centuries as compiled by Jacobus de Voragine reproduce the essential facts from the ancient and late antique legends. They deal with ascetics committed to voluntarily poverty and mostly targets of persecution, in the course of which they quite often show a gift for preaching.

The narrative content of the ancient legends is organised based on a complementary dynamic of events: persecution/martyrdom and martyrdom/miracle. The scenario of the martyrdom is public and grandiose. The saint, placed between the crowd that watches him and the tyrants that flog him, preaches the doctrine that is his weapon against injustice and error. On this stage the tyrant is defeated completely by the sermon and the

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[24] It is also possible to look at the question from a complementary point of view. *The Golden Legend* is prodigious in recording the collection of the martyred bodies by members of the Christian community in order to bury them. These martyrs, generally rejected by their pagan families and tortured by their governors, found sense and rest in a new kind of community. The appropriation of the bodies of the martyrs helped to forge a new kind of society, a Christian one. The tomb brought forth the space of a new society in the same way that his body, given up to divine will, transformed the value and behaviour system of the ancient world as it crossed its spaces. For the spatialization of the Christian community, see Lauwers (2005). For the participation of the martyrs' tombs and the ascetical renunciations in the process of formation of a *single* Christian community, see Brown (1981) and Brown (1988).

[25] Iacopo da Varazze (1998), p.721: "*Rogassem uos ne repentinis me subito perimeretis uulneribus, sed paulatim et succesiue membra singula mutilantes, deinde ostensis coram meis oculis detruncatis membrorum particulis, ipsos etiam oculos eruentes ad ultimum semiuiuum laceratumque corpus sic permitteretis in suo sanguine uolutari, uel prorsus ad libitum necaretis.*"

[26] The Dominicans didn't expect to reach their targets of renewal by breaking with tradition. On the contrary, they strongly established themselves in it. The best known example is the way the friars adopted the model of the saints' lives of the Desert Fathers (*Vitae patrum*), something which becomes very clear already in the chosen title of their own lives: *Vitae fratrum*. According to Boureau (2004), p.76-78, the ascetic model of the Desert Fathers offered the Dominicans the possibility of an institutional identity which permitted them to escape both from the traps of the apostolic model – to which were associated many heretical groups – and from the model of the primitive Church, that could be then understood as a defence of the unrestricted preaching by laymen.

[27] Boureau (1984), p.39.

death of the saint is overcome by miracles that testify to resurrection and eternity. On the one hand, the miracles of the martyrs are as necessary to the story of their passion as is the doctrinal speech by which tyranny is opposed and the multitude is converted. Martyrdom, on the other hand, offers the hagiographer the opportunity to set forward the doctrine by means of the sermon of a saint. But if this sermon is fashioned on the description of the dynamic of relationship between heaven and earth testified to by miraculous events, it is also about earthly relationships.[28] Through these, the Dominican shows that it is possible and necessary to question the legitimacy, both earthly and from above, of the powerful that rule here and now.

In *The Golden Legend*, the passage from the martyrological to the ascetical sainthood is very subtle. One of the differences between them is that the tyrants are removed from the context of the ascetic passion and other enemies are chosen instead to combat with the saints. Such are the heretics that torment Saint Dominic and Saint Peter the Martyr, such are the fools that beat Saint Bernard and Saint Elizabeth. Among the six saints of the 12th and 13th centuries, we have two whose deaths were interpreted as martyrdoms. Saint Thomas of Canterbury was killed by allies of King Henry II of England for supporting the "freedom of the Church" (specifically the interests of the papacy in England) and Saint Peter Martyr or Peter of Verona, assassinated by the heretics he was trying to persuade. The others are ascetics who reach the doorsteps of martyrdom whether by the intensity of their desire, as in the case of Saint Dominic, or by the radical commitment to every kind of privation, as in the case of Saint Elizabeth and Saint Bernard, or by the profound identification with Christ, as it happens with Saint Francis in the case of the stigmata of the Passion. All of these legends have important peculiarities, but they also share the fact that they reproduce a system that, adopted by the ancient legendary, lends itself perfectly to the context of the young mendicant Orders, especially those of the Preachers.

Preaching, passion (martyrial or ascetic) and poverty are common to ancient and recent legends compiled by Jacobus de Voragine. The material he chose allowed him to treat themes very dear to his Order: the freedom of the Dominicans to preach before any authority, the excellence of mendicant poverty and the supremacy of the papal authority in doctrinal and political issues. The ancient material compiled by him places the Dominicans as critics of power and protectors of the order by their defence of the Church against heresy and lay potentates. The absence of confrontation between saints and tyrannical powers in the ascetic legends is counterbalanced in the formal level of the text by the deliberate refusal of the author to include royal saints in the collection. We can detect here the expression of mistrust and disengagement of the Dominicans from earthly authorities but also the repercussion of their firm adhesion to the Roman Church.

Jacobus de Voragine has in mind a tense, morally and legally hierarchical relationship between the Church and the secular authorities. His choices within the hagiographical tradition show the efforts of the Dominicans to justify historically their autonomy in relation to the traditional clergy (above all monastic) and the authority of their order on earth, based on the mission attributed by God to a founder who is a model of self-renunciation and in the unrestricted support of the Church, identified to the papacy. At last, the martyr saint shows himself as a metaphor of the Preachers themselves, since they lead with humility and win by their example and doctrine.[29] In this way, hagiography performs a dual role: it bestows identity on a new Order and it represents it as a historical inflexion. The appearance of the Preachers unfolds a new phase in the history of Christian unity: the one which gives way to the full emergence of a Christian society under the leadership of the pope supported by the preaching friars.

Jacobus de Voragine informs his audience by means of a legion of characters chosen from the most diverse regions of Christendom. His method does not permit the local environment to dominate his characters. The saint's playing field is the world split by good and evil, by the logic of merit and reward. His hagiography without personalism is part of his efforts to adapt the collection to the requisites of the Dominican praxis. Already in 1215, Saint Dominic had increased the preaching territory of the Order, thus fulfilling the universal character that the authorization to preach everywhere given by the pope already implied.[30] By the time of Jacobus de Voragine, the drive for a universal approach to hagiography led him to texts disengaged from local tones, where the interests of landlords and local families could be heard. Therefore *The Golden Legend* assembles the ancient material because it escapes these liabilities. Thus the choices of Jacobus de Voragine respect the imperatives of the will of universal communication and of universalising. The ancient form chosen by him imprints his work with a universalism convenient to the Dominican praxis. It is

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[28] The established secular power is never put into question. Thus, for example, the Empire is never questioned. The same doesn't hold true with its representatives whether they are princes, kings or emperors.

[29] This Dominican expression of *The Golden Legend* is also indirectly attested by the very success of the work shown by its first favourable reception amongst the Preachers. For an interpretation which raises the value of the injunctions of time present in *The Golden Legend*, see Airaldi (1988).

[30] In 1220, St. Dominic expanded the territory of the Preachers also to 'pagan' lands in the North and the East of Europe, in Asia and in the Near East. See Vicaire (1978) p.104.

therefore evident that the compilation is not only a combination of material but an activity capable of updating it even without altering the content in any substantial way.

Until the 12ᵗʰ century, the papacy, despite its control over canonisation that was then established, still refrained from regulating or even controlling local cults. From the 13ᵗʰ century on, this situation rapidly changed.[31] In order to do so, papal control over sanctity extended itself as far as the composition and advertisement of hagiographical material. The papal canonisation had as one of its main consequences the insertion of the saint into a universal family, allowing him to belong to a universal faith and not just that of some local groups. In the same way that in Late Antiquity the martyrs were deployed for the discursive construction of a single community, the example of the martyrs and ascetics in *The Golden Legend* favoured the establishment of a single and universal Christian society placed under the legal authority of the pope. It was for this project that the Dominicans – according the legend, by divine election – were established as historical craftsmen.

Jacobus de Voragine's compilation is not the fruit of the archaism of its author, but rather the systematisation of the Dominican representation of the ancient martyr. It is not by chance that the work became a basis for the subsequent imaginary of sainthood. In a conscious dialectic between time and eternity, the legends compiled by the hagiographer bring the prestige of "immutable" virtues to the historical Dominican action. From this point of view, the choices made by Jacobus de Voragine within the tradition of the lives of the saints show his entire scope. In the same way, it becomes clear the vast consequences of the "compilations" appeared in the 13ᵗʰ century, for long held as minor works for being considered mere appropriations and copies of tradition.

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[31] Vauchez (1988), p.30-31 and 161-162.

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