

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

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Received: 9 December 2013 Accepted: 2 January 2014 Published: 15 January 2014

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.

Index terms— medieval history, hagiography, authorship, historiography.

1 Introduction

ver 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 13 th century by the Dominican Jacobus de Voragine. We could point to the not insignificant role that it played as an instrument of social communication: an elevated expression of rhetoric of its time, ?? 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 13 th 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 II.

2 A Path Revisited

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.

My work on *The Golden Legend* resulted in a doctoral thesis submitted to the University of São Paulo. In regard to the relationship between civic rhetoric and hagiography by the time of *The Golden Legend*, see Miatello (2013). 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. In 1998. 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.

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. 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 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.

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*. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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 Voragine, 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. 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. Iacopo da Varazze (1998). See also Maggioni (1995). *Jacobi a Voragine* (1969). Grässe's edition was based on the Ebert edition of 1472. 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

104 intervention of several copyists. "Il lavoro di questa ricerca, qui ha riguardato I settanta codici più antichi, ha
105 dimostrato l'esistenza di almeno due differenti stadi redazionali (qui indicati come LA1 e LA2) e ha permesso
106 l'identificazione di due testimoni dell'ultima redazione che, essendo stati prodotti in luoghi corrispondenti per
107 spazio e tempo con le diverse fasi della biografia di Iacopo da Varazze, attestano l'autenticità della redazione
108 stessa." In this last case, the manuscripts were produced in Bologna between 1272 and 1276 and in Genoa between
109 1292 and 1299.

110 Voragine, was valued as a product of a historical process. In order to define the history of the successive
111 versions of the work established both by Jacobus de Voragine and by those that first altered it, Maggioni's
112 edition advanced in the knowledge of the intention of the author and in the recognition of questions of his own
113 time at The Golden Legend. Therefore Maggioni's edition became a hallmark to the historical studies of The
114 Golden Legend. 10 Between the mid-1970s and the mid-1990s, when hagiography received a definitive place
115 among the documents worthy of the attention of historians thanks to several advances both in theoretical and in
116 methodological fields, this genre immediately established itself as a privileged witness to the relationship between
117 learned and folkloric culture due to its peculiarity as an object of the faith of the common people. 11 Although
118 less vigorously, such approaches to the hagiographical genre continue up to now. This is clearly shown by the
119 2010 congress held in Verona, whose acts (appeared in November 2012) would become a posthumous homage
120 to one of its most illustrious participants, Pietro Boglioni, professor of the Université de Montréal and famous
121 scholar of "popular culture", who died in 2011. The subject of the meeting the connection between hagiography
122 and popular culture -attracted researchers like Paolo Golinelli, Gábor Klaniczay, Edna Bozoky and Didier Lett.

123 It was then conceived that this relationship was developed by means of conflicts between different systems of
124 meanings that were supposed to be characteristic of the history of both society and Christianity throughout the
125 middle Ages.

126 12 Despite the dynamism attested by the group that met in Verona, such studies lost the prominence they
127 had had between the 1970s and the 1990s. 13 This waning first came about due to the internal criticism
128 arising from the very evolution of cultural studies. Second, it also came about from outside by means of a
129 series of methodological questions raised 14 10 Evidently we cannot forget the role played by the Université de
130 Montréal Symposium of 1983 in this process (whose acts were published by Dunn-Lardeau (1986)) which put
131 researchers from different linguistic branches of the tradition face to face. Despite the presence of some historians,
132 literary studies dominated the meeting. 11 Particularly in terms of The Golden Legend, at least two examples
133 are worth mentioning: the position that the theme occupies in the important work of Boureau (1984) and its
134 presence at the congress dedicated to Jacobus de Voragine held in 1998. See Bertini Guidetti (2001), especially
135 the contributions from Vauchez (2001) and Boglioni (2001). 12 Golinelli (2012). 13 Situation recognized and
136 lamented by Boglioni (2001), p.115-116. 14 Künzel (1992) remains a pungent criticism of the methodology that
137 allowed the identification of the evidence for folkloric culture in medieval documents.

138 about the way such folkloric elements could be identified in the documents. How can one distinguish the use
139 made by Christian writers of literary topoi 15 Pietro Boglioni believed that The Golden Legend compiled an
140 unparalleled number of episodes of folkloric origin.

141 from the description of evidence of folkloric origin? How can one prove that evidence scattered throughout
142 our sources that don't seem to fit to the (in our view) expected thinking of medieval clergymen are part of a
143 common cultural system? Taken that is possible, one still needs to prove the sociological nature of this system,
144 demonstrating if, and how, the distinctions are linked to conflicts or to dissonant social identities. How can we
145 effectively sustain that what seems eccentric to us in these texts was so regarded by those who wrote them?
146 In sum, if it is not possible to claim for the medieval period a homogenous cultural landscape and a society
147 devoid of conflicts, then there is doubt if the place where folkloric culture studies locate the social and cultural
148 divisions is at all pertinent. 16 In fact it is possible to find in the text sparse elements and episodes that seem
149 to be out of place in comparison to the reverence and doctrine that we expect to see applied to the domain of
150 sainthood. During my doctoral studies, these elements attracted my attention, as also did what seemed to me
151 to be a tendency of the miracle towards magic. 17 15 These elements, attributed to the living of a folkloric
152 nature in a Christian context, are from diverse provenances: biblical 'magic' (such as the flowering of sticks),
153 cult of the Roman gods, episodes of undocumented origin related to 'magic' and animistic 'cults'. 16 Thinking
154 specifically about the folkloric tale, Boglioni (2001), p.130 stated that "The Golden Legend undoubtedly stands
155 out as the largest repertoire of tales, fables, legends, romance, and narrative times produced by the West and
156 perhaps by the whole of world literature." 17 I distinguished magic from miracle on the basis of the subject of
157 belief. In the case of the miracle, the actions of the subject qualify the event as a consequence of the exercise of
158 the will of a creator. In the case of magic, the actions of the subject qualify the event as part of the nature of
159 things and their relationship. Between these two poles, I qualified the narratives of The Golden Legend from the
160 standpoint of a group of texts which marked the 1990s. Amongst these Thomas (1991), p.35 stood out, stating
161 that, with the beginning of Christianity, the Church put itself as the wielder of the "most powerful magic" and
162 took the realization of miracles as the most efficient form of demonstrating its monopoly on the truth. It became
163 permissive towards magic as long as it was maintained under its control (Thomas (1991), p.52-53). The same
164 relationship between the combat of effectiveness, permissiveness and Christian magic is highlighted by Cardini
165 (1982), p.20, 22-23. During the early Middle Ages the Church showed itself to be little concerned with the
166 ongoing pagan resistance to conversion, considering magical beliefs as harmless, which permitted the continuity

167 of the therapeutic chantings and divinatory practices (Cardini (1982), p.27). Today it seems to me fundamental
168 to reassess this point of view by considering, for example, the profusion of miracles at a distance that take place
169 in The Golden Legend. They lead us to a different kind of event which seems to me to refer to the field of
170 the miracle proper. I asked myself if the representation of sanctity in The Golden Legend deeply rooted in the
171 material exuberance of the body of the saints, that endured the unbearable, and of the body of the devotees,
172 whose intercession had the power to re-establish them -was deploying elements from a competitor cultural system
173 for the sake of preaching in 13 (D)

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

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

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

194 Alain Boureau helps us to reconsider this point when, as he criticizes the approach to the Christian legend
195 as a literary genre, he states that the legend itself does not consist of its form. On the contrary, "The reality
196 of the form comes in fact from the content that was surreptitiously introduced (holiness, virtues, canonisation,
197 exemplarity). [?] There is then a considerable difference between a genre, a simple form and a functional norm
198 institutionally formulated, applied globally to forms, contents and uses. [?] We would not know therefore how
199 to dissociate the legend its content: sainthood. It seems thus necessary to speak about a diffuse and mobile
200 collection of legends rather than about distinct genre and species. [?] The true field of the legend is made up
201 of the ensemble of accounts produced in a religious context and intended for a religious interpretation [?] the
202 medieval religious legend is not a simple form, but a convergent bundle of complex narrative modes. It seems
203 arbitrary to separate the narratives of the religious men from the lay ones.

204 [?] But it is nevertheless necessary to maintain this occasionally weak boundary in order to reaffirm that
205 the medieval religious legend proceeds from a pious act of interpretation prepared for the practice of biblical
206 reading, the *lectio divina*." (Boureau, 2004, p.16-19) Despite Alain Boureau's more specific concerns, his idea
207 that the unity of the "diffuse and transitory collection of legends" rests on its contents allows us to affirm that
208 the divergent elements are subordinated to a common logic, defined by the dynamic of salvation/condemnation.
209 Thus the divergent, disruptive or unexpected evidence does not necessarily indicate the existence of competing
210 cultural systems. It would preferably act as a means of identification among the text, the author/narrator and
211 the reader/listener, who would unite themselves in the respect for the doctrine and in the rejection of elements
212 that, according to a secular tradition, diverge from it and are regarded thus as worthy of contempt, derision or
213 condemnation.

214 The ability to produce identity, to integrate within a community of values might be more efficient than
215 the dispersion provoked by a focus on recrimination or by strategies of persuasion. Repeating in a sermon a
216 recognised ancient reproach for the worship of ancient gods like Apollo may not have had any moral effect due to
217 the absence of the object of cult, but it might have had the sociological effect of cementing a common conscience,
218 of strengthening and of producing identification. Denying the existence of these so-called folkloric elements would
219 undoubtedly be an error. However, their profusion needs to be explained by returning to the author and to the
220 overall sense of the work in which they appear. After all, the logic of the conflict upon which the text was
221 composed might emerge from specific needs required by the audience of the sermon. Hence the actual time of
222 the composition of The Golden Legend and the choices of its author ??8 18 "So what does an author do? He
223 composes, he deals with, he assembles, he combines, he writes down, he puts in order, he splits, he forges, he
224 weaves, he interlaces, he compresses. But above all he speaks and he writes. Or rather, he takes up the pen, he
225 scribbles, he works the page. He can lie if he is a pagan author, to whom everything is permitted. He invents
226 little, he never creates. And evidently, he also never authorizes, a concept that would be better to be sought in
227 the doctor/docere family. The verbs related to the notion of author are focused on the production of the work,
228 with a deployment of handcrafted metaphors which remind the scholar that his act belongs to the dominion of
229 labour and of the well-done work." (Bourgain, 2001, p.374). In the specific case of The Golden Legend, Maggioni

230 (1998), p.XX wrote: "The legendary of Jacobus de Voragine is actually a work of compilation mostly made up
231 through the reworking or through epitomes of previous works [?] Take for example the case of the quotation
232 from Daniel 11:31-32 in Advent 98 where all of our testimonies attest "et desolationem templi": it is basically
233 a corruption of the text of the Vulgata "in desolationem et impii", but the way Jacobus de Voragine employs
234 the quotation seems to presuppose must 14 (D) be taken into account, at least in part, when considering this
235 evidence regarded as disparate.

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

243 3 III. Unity and Universalism Updated

244 Established in Late Antiquity, the theology of the Christian martyrdom changed little in the following centuries.
245 The most significant change in its history was the identification between martyrdom and the ascetic life that took
246 place since the end of the third century, significantly when the Persecutions were already waning. 19 Of the 153
247 chapters of The Golden Legend exclusively dedicated to saints' lives, 91 end with the ordeal of the saint, turning
248 the martyr into the largest sub-category of sainthood in the work. 20 The impact that the martyrs had on late
249 antique Christian communities was soon amplified by the effect of the learned texts that, by pondering upon
250 them, were responsible for the appearance of a real theology about the subject. The martyrs allowed members
251 of the Christian community to be seen as successors or those continuing the essential acts of Christ and of his
252 disciples -preaching and complete submission to God that culminated in a bloody death.

253 Nevertheless, if we consider the legends in which sanctity is built on the basis of the ascetic profile of the saint,
254 we can affirm that all of them foster the "martyrological" sainthood whether it be from its bloody or ascetic
255 character. From this point of view, we can clearly see the author's intention acting on the establishment of the
256 unity of the work. What remains to be understood is the reasoning behind this choice. 21 that the corrupted
257 reading of the Vulgata is the authentic reading of The Golden Legend". 19 The Golden Legend reproduces this
258 identification in an exemplary manner. In the midst of the constellation of narrative forms and types of saints
259 from which it is constituted, we can clearly distinguish the similarities between the lives of saints and the lives
260 of the ascetics. On the comprehension of the ascetic -and consequently monastic -life as martyrdom, Baumeister
261 (1991) Thus the martyrs offered tangible support to the idea that history had a Christian meaning. 22 If we
262 consider that in these centuries the Christian communities did not possess firm bases for an identity (whether it
263 be of an ethnic, political, linguistic or doctrinal nature) capable of producing a single community, the election of
264 the memory of the martyrs' ascetic renunciation proposed to the Christians then the possibility of unity based
265 on a history and in a way of life. ??3 22 This evidently situates the Bible both as a historical narrative and as a
266 source for the interpretation of History. It is significant that the legends of the saints were further developments
267 of a peculiar form of care with the martyrs' memory. The founding gesture of the legends is the election of the
268 martyrs' day of death as the date in which they should be read in public. Jacobus de Voragine is particularly
269 careful with the exactitude of the dates, always exposing a doubt or a contradiction when necessary, whether
270 due to uncertainties in the sources or due to liturgical praxis. 23 The prominence given to the martyrs still had
271 other cohesive virtues.

272 It favoured the dialogue with the Jewish tradition by incorporating the teleology of suffering and the idea of
273 expiatory death developed in the books of the Maccabees and the logic of the opposition between punishment
274 and reward presented in the book of Daniel. It also allowed a dialogue with the Greek tradition by developing a
275 heroic type imbued with a way of life similar to that of the ascetic philosophers (Hadot (1999), p.333-380) and by
276 affirming the idea of the eternity of the spirit. For the Greco-Latin and Old Testament heritages which converged
277 to the Christian martyrdom, see Baumeister (1991), p.XI-XXVI. Evidently this approximation demanded some
278 additional efforts. For example, Auerbach (2007), p.19 showed that Christianity was capable of adopting the
279 normative principles of ancient rhetoric at the same time that it subverted them. Thus humility, a low element
280 in the eyes of ancient traditional rhetoric, became integrated into the sublime style. This change of content
281 of the elevated speech corresponded therefore to a significant change of the value system, demonstrating a real
282 transformation of the ancient world. It is not our aim here to explain how this took place. But it is important
283 to note that the greatest example of humility in this conception proceeded from the martyrs, who surrendered
284 themselves entirely to God's love by submitting themselves to the slanderous death and resisting injustice. So
285 the gloria passionis integrated the most elevated forms of ancient culture: "In the Fathers of the Church, the
286 conception of a simultaneously humble and sublime style, embodied in the Sacred Scriptures, is not constituted
287 in a theoretical way: it imposes itself, so to speak, due to the circumstances, to the situation in which it found
288 itself. The conception took shape during the course of the polemic with learned pagans that laughed at the
289 Christian books' defective Greek and low realism; in part also, due to the discomfort that the reading of these
290 books caused in those Christians well educated in the schools of rhetoric". Evidently the rhetorical praise of the
291 martyrdom does not explain by itself the components of the hagiographical narrative; it only bears witness to

292 the process of the emergence of new values that was conceived in a learned milieu that elevated the martyrdom
 293 to the sphere of the sublime, without the need to appeal to notions of folkloric origin.

294 Hence the gloria passionis is related to an internal dialogue within this learned milieu in the course of the
 295 apologetical debate and of the Persecutions.

296 As we hope to show, it is in the ancient sense of martyrdom as an element of representation of Christian unity
 297 that rested Jacobus de

298 4 (D)

299 Voragine's primary interest in the martyrological ideal. 24 "I would ask you not to take me from this life at a
 300 stroke, but little by little, cutting off my limbs one by one, in small pieces, and after I am mutilated in front of
 301 my own eyes, that you tear out my eyes and leave me abandoned in some solitary place where no-one can help
 302 me, so that without succour, my agony would be prolonged; and, if you do not want to comply with this request,
 303 then I ask you to kill me in the manner it best suits you."

304 The lives of martyr saints preserve the memory of Christian unity both in history -when the scene of martyrdom
 305 synthesises earthly conflicts opposing saints and tyrants and points, despite the death of the saint, towards the
 306 forthcoming Christian hegemony -and in eternity -manifested in miraculous events, which were conceived as
 307 irruptions of the hereafter.

308 In the final third of the thirteenth century, the record of this ancient function of the lives of the martyrs and
 309 the ascetics suffered small alterations resulting from the general situation of the Dominicans and the direct action
 310 of the author Jacobus de Voragine. The idea that there existed an authorial intention guiding the selection of
 311 hagiographical material is reinforced by one of the episodes of the legend of the founding saint of the order to
 312 which Jacobus de Voragine belonged. In this legend, Saint Dominic emerges as a curious mixture of martyr and
 313 ascetic. The importance of the profile of the martyr to the Dominicans becomes evident in the saint's desire
 314 for martyrdom, even if disguised by his declaration of unworthiness for such an honour. Without avoiding the
 315 road where he exposes himself to get in touch with his heretical adversaries, Saint Dominic answers to their
 316 questioning on what he would do if they captured him with the intention of murdering him: 25 This imaginary
 317 martyrdom, proof of abnegation and profound humility, certainly helped compose the prestige of a character
 318 whose limited projection in life created problems to the establishment of the profile of a 24 It is also possible
 319 to look at the question from a complementary point of view. The Golden Legend is prodigious in recording the
 320 collection of the martyred bodies by members of the Christian community in order to bury them. These martyrs,
 321 generally rejected by their pagan families and tortured by their governors, found sense and rest in a new kind of
 322 community. The appropriation of the bodies of the martyrs helped to forge a new kind of society, a Christian
 323 one. The tomb brought forth the space of a new society in the same way that his body, given up to divine will,
 324 transformed the value and behaviour system of the ancient world as it crossed its spaces. For the spatialization
 325 of the Christian community, see Lauwers (2005). For the participation of the martyrs' tombs and the ascetical
 326 renunciations in the process of formation of a single Christian community, see Brown (1981) and Brown (1988).

327 founder of an Order with great responsibilities and powers such as the Dominican order was. The example
 328 shows the effectiveness of the martyrological model for precisely locating where the Dominican authority lied
 329 then.

330 The legends of Saint Francis and Saint Dominic are clear in attributing to the advent of these two saints the
 331 character of a truly historical inflection. Their births are prophesied and will make way to a welcome restoration
 332 that will lead mankind to a renewed age, one that is superior in the history of the Christian faith. This new age,
 333 however should take place in the recovery of the records (both textual and spiritual) of fullness of the past. 26
 334 It has already been noted that Jacobus de Voragine almost completely ignored the saints that appeared between
 335 993 and 1255.

336 If the legend of Saint Francis does not translate into words the intensity of the saint's interior desire for
 337 martyrdom, as it happens with Saint Dominic, it certainly does that in the palpable form of the stigmata.
 338 27 The narrative content of the ancient legends is organised based on a complementary dynamic of events:
 339 persecution/martyrdom and martyrdom/miracle. The scenario of the martyrdom is public and grandiose. The
 340 saint, placed between the crowd that watches him and the tyrants that flog him, preaches the doctrine that is
 341 his weapon against injustice and error. On this stage the tyrant is defeated completely by the sermon and the
 342 In this period, his work elects only six characters: two from the 12 th century (Saint Bernard and Saint Thomas
 343 of Canterbury) and four from the 13 th century (Saint Francis, Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, Saint Dominic and
 344 Saint Peter Martyr). This option clearly excluded from its collection royal saints and monk saints, especially
 345 Cluniacs. We see here once again that the activity of compilation does not exclude the possibility of important
 346 and calculated alterations to the compiled material. The recovery of the past gives way to updating processes
 347 that are worth investigating. The legends of the six saints of the 12th and 13th centuries as compiled by Jacobus
 348 de Voragine reproduce the essential facts from the ancient and late antique legends. They deal with ascetics
 349 committed to voluntarily poverty and mostly targets of persecution, in the course of which they quite often show
 350 a gift for preaching.

351 death of the saint is overcome by miracles that testify to resurrection and eternity. On the one hand, the
 352 miracles of the martyrs are as necessary to the story of their passion as is the doctrinal speech by which tyranny
 353 is opposed and the multitude is converted. Martyrdom, on the other hand, offers the hagiographer the opportunity

354 to set forward the doctrine by means of the sermon of a saint. But if this sermon is fashioned on the description
355 of the dynamic of relationship between heaven and earth testified to by miraculous events, it is also about earthly
356 relationships. 28 Preaching, passion (martyrial or ascetic) and poverty are common to ancient and recent legends
357 compiled by Jacobus de Voragine. The material he chose allowed him to treat themes very dear to his Order:
358 the freedom of the Dominicans to preach before any authority, the excellence of mendicant poverty and the
359 supremacy of the papal authority in doctrinal and political issues. The ancient material compiled by him places
360 the Dominicans as critics of power and protectors of the order by their defence of the Church against heresy
361 and lay potentates. The absence of confrontation between saints and tyrannical powers in Through these, the
362 Dominican shows that it is possible and necessary to question the legitimacy, both earthly and from above, of
363 the powerful that rule here and now.

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

377 the ascetic legends is counterbalanced in the formal level of the text by the deliberate refusal of the author to
378 include royal saints in the collection. We can detect here the expression of mistrust and disengagement of the
379 Dominicans from earthly authorities but also the repercussion of their firm adhesion to the Roman Church.

380 Jacobus de Voragine has in mind a tense, morally and legally hierarchical relationship between the Church
381 and the secular authorities. His choices within the hagiographical tradition show the efforts of the Dominicans
382 to justify historically their autonomy in relation to the traditional clergy (above all monastic) and the authority
383 of their order on earth, based on the mission attributed by God to a founder who is a model of self-renunciation
384 and in the unrestricted support of the Church, identified to the papacy. At last, the martyr saint shows himself
385 as a metaphor of the Preachers themselves, since they lead with humility and win by their example and doctrine.
386 29 Jacobus de Voragine informs his audience by means of a legion of characters chosen from the most diverse
387 regions of Christendom. His method does not permit the local environment to dominate his characters. The
388 saint's playing field is the world split by good and evil, by the logic of merit and reward. His hagiography without
389 personalism is part of his efforts to adapt the collection to the requisites of the Dominican praxis. Already in
390 1215, Saint Dominic had increased the preaching territory of the Order, thus fulfilling the universal character
391 that the authorization to preach everywhere given by the pope already implied.

392 In this way, hagiography performs a dual role: it bestows identity on a new Order and it represents it as a
393 historical inflexion. The appearance of the Preachers unfolds a new phase in the history of Christian unity: the
394 one which gives way to the full emergence of a Christian society under the leadership of the pope supported by
395 the preaching friars. 30 29 This Dominican expression of The Golden Legend is also indirectly attested by the
396 very success of the work shown by its first favourable reception amongst the Preachers. For an interpretation
397 which raises the value of the injunctions of time present in The Golden Legend, see Airal di (1988). 30 In 1220,
398 St. Dominic expanded the territory of the Preachers also to 'pagan' lands in the North and the East of Europe,
399 in Asia and in the Near East. See Vicaire (1978) p.104.

400 By the time of Jacobus de Voragine, the drive for a universal approach to hagiography led him to texts
401 disengaged from local tones, where the interests of landlords and local families could be heard. Therefore The
402 Golden Legend assembles the ancient material because it escapes these liabilities. Thus the choices of Jacobus de
403 Voragine respect the imperatives of the will of universal communication and of universalising. The ancient form
404 chosen by him imprints his work with a universalism convenient to the Dominican praxis. It is therefore evident
405 that the compilation is not only a combination of material but an activity capable of updating it even without
406 altering the content in any substantial way.

407 Until the 12 th century, the papacy, despite its control over canonisation that was then established, still
408 refrained from regulating or even controlling local cults. From the 13 th century on, this situation rapidly
409 changed. 31 1. AIRALDI, G. (1988) *Jacopo da Varagine: tra santi e mercante*. Genoa: Camunia, 1988.

410 In order to do so, papal control over sanctity extended itself as far as the composition and advertisement
411 of hagiographical material. The papal canonisation had as one of its main consequences the insertion of the
412 saint into a universal family, allowing him to belong to a universal faith and not just that of some local groups.
413 In the same way that in Late Antiquity the martyrs were deployed for the discursive construction of a single
414 community, the example of the martyrs and ascetics in The Golden Legend favoured the establishment of a single
415 and universal Christian society placed under the legal authority of the pope. It was for this project that the
416 Dominicans -according the legend, by divine election -were established as historical craftsmen.

417 Jacobus de Voragine's compilation is not the fruit of the archaism of its author, but rather the systematisation
 418 of the Dominican representation of the ancient martyr. It is not by chance that the work became a basis for the
 419 subsequent imaginary of sainthood. In a conscious dialectic between time and eternity, the legends compiled by
 420 the hagiographer bring the prestige of "immutable" virtues to the historical Dominican action. From this point
 421 of view, the choices made by Jacobus de Voragine within the tradition of the lives of the saints show his entire
 422 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.^{1 2 3 4}



Figure 1:

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¹The 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.

²Almeida (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 Bognioni (2012).

³, p. 112.21 See Markus (1990).

⁴Iacopo da Varazze (1998), p.721: "Rogassem uos ne repentinis me subito perimeretis uulneribus, sed paulatim et successiue membra singula mutilantes, deinde ostensis coram meis oculis detruncatis membrorum particulis, ipsos etiam oculos eruentes ad ultimum semiuuium laceratumque corpus sic permitteretis in suo sanguine uolutari, uel prorsus ad libitum necaretis."

⁵The 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.

⁶The 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.

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