



FACULTY OF ARTS AND PHILOSOPHY

Call for Papers

Holy Hero(in)es. Literary Constructions of Heroism in Late Antique and Early Medieval Hagiography

International conference at Ghent University (Belgium), Thursday 18th to Saturday 20th February 2016

The ERC research group *Novel Saints* (Ghent University) builds on and contributes to a recent trend in scholarship of studying late antique and early medieval hagiography (4th-12th cent.) *as literature*. We welcome paper proposals for our first, international conference, which will deal with literary constructions of characters as hero(in)es in different types of late antique and early medieval hagiographical narrative (*Lives, Martyr Acts, hagiographical romances, etc.*). We envisage contributions on hagiography from different linguistic traditions (Latin, Greek, Syriac, Georgian, Coptic, Armenian, Persian and Arabic).

The conference aims to explore definitions of and aspects/concepts relevant to heroism in Christian narrative. What does it mean to be a hero(ine) in these narratives? Are there different types of hero(in)es (and of heroism)? To what extent can narratological concepts provide useful tools for evaluating hagiographical constructions of heroism? The other central question is *how* saints (and/or, possibly, other characters) are characterized, shaped, imagined and/or constructed as hero(in)es. This last, broad question comprises a number of important sub-questions:

- Which literary and/or rhetorical techniques underlie such constructions? To what extent and how do these narratives employ techniques rooted in ancient rhetoric (e.g. *ecphrasis, syncrisis, ethopoeia, etc.*), and to what purpose?
- Does the notion of heroism imply specific behavioural patterns and/or speech acts?
- What is the relevance of other literary traditions, such as biblical narrative, Acts of the Apostles (both canonical and apocryphal), ancient biography, historiography and fiction (pagan and/or Jewish novels)? To what extent do these traditions offer models of heroism that are adopted/adapted in hagiographical narratives? To what extent and how, for example, do ancient fictional strands of heroism persist in hagiographical constructions of martyrs and saints, as they are well known to do, for example, in the *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles* (e.g. Paul & Thecla) and other early Christian narrative such as the *Ps.-Clementines* and a few pre-Nicean *Martyr Acts*?
- How do hagiographical narratives adopt/rework authentication strategies common in biography or historiography in order to construct its hero(in)es?
- To what extent and how do constructions of heroism in saints/martyrs in different cultures develop over time and cross-fertilize other such constructs throughout late antiquity and the middle ages?

In relation to this, the conference also aims to explore issues like the following:

- heroism and definitions of sainthood and holiness;
- heroism and explorations of moral/ethical dimensions of character;
- heroism and development (*is one a hero(ine) or does one become one?*);



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- saints, self-presentation and performance: constructions of heroism and/or re-enactments of earlier models *by saints themselves* (rather than by the narrators of their narratives);
- heroism and ego-narration;
- heroic constructions in collective v. individual life-writing;
- impact of depictions of hero(in)es/heroic behaviour on audiences;
- heroism and meta-literary approaches: 'heroic' qualities of both saints and texts;
- types of saints (e.g. desert saints, military saints, converted prostitutes, holy fools, etc.) v. character individuation.

Abstracts (in English or French) should contain **300-350 words** and should be sent to novelsaints@ugent.be before **20 September 2015**. Notifications about acceptance (or not) will be sent out by 20 October 2015. Not only senior scholars but also PhD students are welcome to submit abstracts.

For further queries, please contact klazina.staat@ugent.be or julie.vanpelt@ugent.be.

Prof. dr. Koen De Temmerman
Klazina Staat
Julie Van Pelt