

LIVES OF SAINTS IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES, AS A HISTORICAL SOURCE IN THE RESEARCHES OF L.M. BERKUT

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Summary

Leonid Nikolaevich Berkut (1879-1940), an outstanding Ukrainian medievalist. He studied the Western European medieval historiography and culture.

L. Berkut's research considers in this article, which dedicated to the Christian hagiography of the pre-Merovingian and Merovingian periods in Western Europe. Despite the special specificity and tendentiousness of the hagiographic material, L. Berkut was not a skeptic in the matter of using the lives of the saints as a historical source. For the Ukrainian professor, the lives of the saints, as well as the Christian legend, revealed the social and spiritual picture of medieval society and they were a special area of socio-cultural research.

Trough his own research, the professor makes it clear to the reader that the genre of hagiography itself always has a certain pronounced specificity. The main task of the hagiographer is not to provide a historically accurate biography, but to create an image of a person who has achieved holiness and serves as a role model for others. Therefore the author deprived his hero of individual "earthly" traits and left him in the form of a supernatural "heavenly", legendary, mythical role. In a hagiographic work, first of all, a certain "ideal of holiness" plays a role, and then specific information about the character's life. Therefore, a researcher, when studying this kind of sources, must be able to separate one from the other.

Do not forget that the biography of saints occupied a special place in medieval literature. For the majority of the population of medieval Europe, hagiography was the main source about the Christian picture of the world, the relationship between the earthly and the heavenly, about the influence of providence in everyday life.

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1. Introduction

Hagiography (agios from Greek holy grafo – I am writing) is a section of literature that combines the biography of Christian ascetics who canonized, and various miracles, visions, words of praise, about the acquisition and transfer of relics. (*Afinogenov, 2008: 283-345*).

The earliest type of hagiographic literature arose during the period of persecution of Christians in the 1st-4th centuries. The stories about the martyrs were created not only to spread their veneration, but also to strengthen the spirit of other believers during the period of persecution. (*Berkut, 1911: 69*).

These early hagiographic legends include the so-called "acts" and "martyrdom". The first should be understood as the text, which is basically the protocol of the interrogation of the

martyr. Here, the interference of the literary editor is practically not felt. However, it should be noted that the “acts”, in a pure form, have practically not preserved.

“Martyrdom” (passio; suffering, torment) is a direct author's creation and may include not only the protocol of interrogation, or its retelling, but also the story of the feat of martyrdom, his arrest, imprisonment, trial, fortitude, execution. Examples of the most ancient martyr texts were the martyrdom of St. Polycarp of Smirnsky; the martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitata and others ... (*Delee, 1908*).

The end of the persecution of Christianity in the second half of the 4th century led to a completely different type of hagiographic text – “Christian Life”, a consistent description of the life path of the saint. Now the main subject of description is the godly life, not the death of the saint.

Since the 12th century hagiography has been influenced by the chivalric culture, poetic and prosaic works about saints appeared, written in different languages with pronounced features of a novel. (*Paramonova, 2007:22-29*).

As a historical source, hagiography reflects not only a person's religious ideas about the world and religious ethics, but also affects historical events, reports information about the political and socio-cultural life of society. (*Adrianova-Peretz, 1962: 41*).

2. Main part

In medieval literature, the biography of saints occupies a special place. For the majority of the population of medieval Europe, hagiography was the main source about the Christian picture of the world, the relationship between Earth and Heaven, about the influence of Providence on everyday life. (*Klyuchevsky, 1871: 20*).

Starting from the 16th century in Europe, on the waves of the late Renaissance and at the beginning of the Reformation, a scientifically critical approach to hagiography, as a group of monuments requiring objective analysis, with the aim of further publication of verified texts, began to be developed. The most powerful breakthrough in scientific-critical hagiography was the work at the preparation of editions of the complete collection of Catholic saints “*Acta Sanctorum*”, begun by the Catholic monk of the Jesuit order – Heribert von Roseweid. After his death in 1624, this work was continued – by John Bolland (1596-1665) and further successors of his work, so-called “Bollandists”. In the period of the XVII-XX centuries, Bollandists, have published over seventy volumes of hagiographic monuments (*Knowles, 1963: 3-32*).

The historical-critical method of the Bollandists was distinguished by a special scientific scrupulousness. They studied a huge historical layer of various kinds of legends and myths, and set the time for compiling individual versions. The scientific research of the Bollandists proceeded from the thesis, the understanding of holiness as a kind of internal spiritual phenomenon, perceived and defined only in the sphere of supernatural or church life ...

A new milestone in the understanding of the hagiographic heritage was brought with “romanticism”, which saw in this literature the “best of folk poetry” helping to define, examine, and penetrate the state of mind of a medieval person. (*Donchenko, URL: <http://cheloveknauka.com>*).

The next stage in the study and analysis of hagiographic material was included it in the same category with historical sources.

Accordingly, the criteria of modern scientific historical research have been applied to these works, and the literary and philosophical nature of the texts themselves began to be completely ignored. Since this kind of material did not always meet the requirements of critical

analysis, it was automatically included in the category of moralizing literature, which has no special scientific value from a historical point of view.

Representatives of this trend were the well-known publishers of the lives of saints of the Merovingian era – B. Krusch and V. Levison. Criticizing legends, the researchers have tried to rationalize miracles, finding them scientific justification. (*Krusch, 1888-1910; Levison, 1927: 1*). The method that was proposed by B. Krusch and V. Levison was based on a stylistic analysis of sources and, on a purely philological basis, provided an opportunity to determine the historical and chronological homogeneity of legends and lives, absolutely excluding the philosophical specifics of medieval literature ...

The hypercriticism in the editions of Crusch and Levison has caused a lot of controversy, particularly by the pro-Catholic authors, finding responses in Catholic apologetics. The most significant for this topic are the fundamental works by the French abbot, professor of the Free University of Paris, Louis Duchenne (1843-1922) and his: “Origines du culte chrétien” (Origins of Christian worship), in collaboration with another Italian professor de Rossi, a critical publication of Jerome martyrology.” (*Duchesne 1920*).

In this polemic, it is impossible to note the representative of the new Bollandian school – I. Dele, who outlined the completely new ways of the research before hagiography.

Delay's pioneering work is the development of a multi-level system of research of the “lives of the saints” based on the verification of a number so-called “hagiographic coordinates”, data that can be studied objectively: 1) analysis and characteristic of the ancient sources, 2) study of the cult of veneration, 3) verification for compliance with historical reality.

Dele, following the predecessors of the “Bollandists”, tried to clear the text from so-called “spreading cranberries” – stories about the supernatural, was written on earlier prepared template of an hagiograph. (*Delaye, 1905*). For Delay, the people themselves are the true holders of the entire legendary tradition in hagi-literature. Gradually, this idea was cultivated and spread in the works of scientific historians and literary critics K.G. Loomis and G. Gunther trying to consider everything “legendary” in the lives of the saints in terms of folklore (*Bondurand, 1887*).

A lively discussion in European scientific circles of the XIX-early. XX century, caused by the desire to find a new meaning, in texts of a religious nature, could not leave aside the Ukrainian scientist – medievalist, an excellent connoisseur of the history of European culture L.M. Berkut.

His work “Christian Legends and Lives of Saints” (*Berkut, 1911*) is one of the first scientific works devoted to Western hagiography of the pre-Merovingian and Merovingian times of the V-VIII centuries.

Methodologically, this essay is divided into two parts. In his work L. Berkut uses hagiographic material of the Merovingian legend, published in such authoritative series as the hagiographic reference book published by the Bollandists “Bibliotheca hagiographica latina antiquae et mediae aetatis” Brussels 1899-1901 (Bibliotheca hagiographica latina URL: [archive.org ›details](http://archive.org/details/bibliotheca_hagiographica_latina_antiquae_et_mediae_aetatis)) biblioth), and the works of the famous German historian and source researcher W. Watenbach “Historical sources of Germany in the Middle Ages until the middle of the 13th century, and also an alphabetical list of B. Krusha of the Merovingian era (470-750), and making reservations, referring to the criticism of the Abbott Duchenne, having found it in most cases quite substantial and equitable. (*Deutschlands, 1858 URL: http://www.mgh.de/bibliothek/opac*).

In the first part of his work L. Berkut from the whole mass of legends of the pre-Merovingian period singles out one as especially important: “Passio Sanctorum Quatuor Coronatorum”. This legend, writes L. Berkut, tells about 4 Christian martyrs, the workers of the Pannonian quarries, who converted their comrades and they were martyred to Christianity.

The main thing here is the answer to the question: how did Christianity spread in the border southeastern regions of the empire? "... there were not so much missionaries in the proper sense of the word, but various ordinary people – masons, soldiers and itinerant merchants, and their missionary activity was unchanged" ... Passio ss. Quatuor Coronatorum, undoubtedly has a historical significance, its first compilation is written by L. Berkut – dates back to the time before the influx of barbarians into Pannonia. "Life in quarries is depicted in it with such clarity and knowledge of technical expressions that its compiler, undoubtedly, should have had personal observations and information" ... (*Berkut, 1911: 7-8*).

A stunning and, in its historical importance, completely exceptional picture from the era of the collision of Christianity has already been organized in the southern Dunajskih lands with the paganism coming there is given by the life of St. Severin. (*Vita s. Severini abbatis et Noricom apostoli +482*).

For the first time in Comagen, inhabited by the Romans, this city was located near Tyuln (modern Austria) – the image of St. Severin appeared. Nobody knew where he came from. By the language they saw him as Roman, from his accent he was from the East. He brought much comfort to the inhabitants of Noriki, always barefoot and abstinent, he was preaching throughout the country. Soon Severin gained special respect for himself, that even barbarian princes bowed before him, fulfilling his requests and following his advice. He led Odoacer to the conquest of Italy and foretold him rich booty and success for him. But still he could not save the country from the influx of savage barbarians who destroyed traces of Christian culture in Norik.

This life continues L. Berkut "significantly differs from other works of that era. It is simpler and more natural in its language and content, without a tedious set of words and carefully conveys the image of St. Severin" ... (*Berkut, 1911: 10*).

L. Berkut devotes the next part of his work to a brief analysis of the Lives and Sufferings of the saints already in immediate Merovingian period. From the enormous amount of material it should be noted: "Lives of the saints of the royal blood", barbarian kings and queens of the VI-VII centuries. Although these works were written and edited much later during the Carolingian period, nevertheless they have a cultural and historical value. In addition to describing various legendary images and legends, it also contains a number of legal documents in the original.

The Life of St. Columban and Gallus deserves special attention.

It tells the story of a Christian mission in southern Germany during the early Middle Ages by Irish or Scottish monks. L. Berkut writes: "The very nature of the missionary activity of the Iro-Schott monks would remain for us a vague historical mystery if we did not have in our hands the precious life of St. Columban". He was the first Irish monk to enter southern Germany as a historical figure. (*Berkut, 1911: 18*).

The saint was born c. 530 in eastern Ireland, then entered the Bangor Monastery and at the end of the VI century. with the permission of the abbot, together with 12 companions, St. Gaul was among them, went to the continent to the state of the Franks. Despite various difficulties and setbacks, the Frankish kings Clothar II and Theodebert received him with full respect, and at their insistence, he went as a missionary up the Rhine, where he later chose Bregenz in Alemannia for his stay. In 612, Kollumban moved to the Lombard state, where he was received by Theodelinda, and where he later founded the famous Bobbio monastery.

Saint Gall stayed in Allemania, here he fought a lot against paganism, later he also founded the S. Galen monastery. L. Berkut writes about his life, there is "very important and extensive literature". (*Berkut, 1911: 19-20*).

A similar role was played by St. Collumban and Gall in the life of the Christian mission in southern Germany took over St. Amand (+676). A native of Aquitaine, he preached among

the Slavs and Basques, and also founded the Maastricht bishopric. *Viva s. Amandi* according to L. Berkut: “deserves all attention and trust.” (*Berkut, 1911: 20*).

Finally, the life of St. Bonifatius (VIII century) “the apostle of all Germans” – the founder of the new Frankish church, who united the individual actions of his predecessors into one whole organization and, in alliance with the Carolingian house, created a powerful building of enormous cultural and historical significance. His life is written by L. Berkut, “it was written shortly after his death, perhaps even during the life of Pippin the Short, by one of the Mainz presbyter Willibald”. Unfortunately, this extensive biography suffers from a common vice for all hagiographic literature: reality is not always reflected, a lot of details often invented, the author rushed to depict the end of his hero's life – his martyrdom. (*Berkut, 1911: 33*).

However, despite all the shortcomings, this does not detract from the historical significance of the personality of St. Boniface, his contribution to the educational process of his time (author of grammar and metrics), as well as important correspondence with various statesmen and Roman high priests.

Summarizing the significance this work, as a conclusion we will display the following points:

Being a fruitful researcher of the early Middle Ages, when the ancestors of modern peoples appeared in the vast territories of Europe, L. Berkut did not ignore the important issue of introducing new “barbarian aliens” to Christian culture and religion.

Searching for the formation of the foundations of the culture of medieval Europe, L. Berkut drew our attention to the history of Christianity in central and eastern Europe and its role in the reorganization of the spheres of social life in the society.

Being well informed with the methods of critical hagiography and textological criticism of Western scholars of the XIX – early. XX Art. – V. positivists Watenbach, Br. Krusha, the Italian meter de Rossi, L. Berkut, treated hagiographic material as a valuable and significant source that helped to determine the authentic features of Western European culture in the Middle Ages.

For the professor, a Christian legend (epic poetry, local legends, fantastic images) and the lives of saints could tell about the social picture in the society, about the life of various segments of the population that are practically not mentioned in other earlier sources, for example: the little-known life of the workers in the Pannonian quarries before V Art.

3. Conclusions

Studying hagiography before the Merovingian and during the Merovingian period, L. Berkut touched upon the following important theoretical issues:

- features of the process in spreading Christianity among the Germanic tribes;
- finding out the degree of relationship and interpenetration of folklore and the Merovingian hagiographic legend;
- the significance in the veneration of the cult of saints in social and cultural life in the Merovingian and pre-Merovingian society.

For L. Berkut, the lives of the saints of the period under review, certainly, contain some non-hagiographic elements: epic songs, ancient pagan legends, German legends, but the external similarity should not mislead the researcher. L. Berkut in his work made fundamental distinctions among legend, folklore, myth and Christian hagiography.

Using historical and critical methods which developed by Western positivists to identify non-hagiographic elements, L. Berkut left the figure of the saint unchanged- a real historical person.

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