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## HOW TO APPROACH TRANSLATING HAGIOGRAPHY; ST VALENTINE OF ROME; AND WHY I WON'T TRANSLATE HIS "LIFE"

I pressed "Publish". My [post with my translation of the \*Passio\* of St Valentine of Terni](#) shot out onto the internet. What now?

I found myself thinking about the "other" St Valentine, Valentine of Rome, the priest. I went back to the *Acta Sanctorum*, February vol. 2, for February 14th, and looked at the material there. I obtained the electronic text, including introduction and footnotes, and created a Word file; then fixed up the Latin by getting rid of ligatures, and the Word file by setting the paragraph margins to zero, left and right.

The text was in five *Lectiones*. It was printed from two manuscripts and a breviary. There was reference to a "Ms. Ultraiectinum S. Salvatoris". After a bit of guesswork, this turned out to be the church of St Saviour, part of the Cathedral of Utrecht. Another manuscript was mentioned, which I could not identify.

But clearest of all was that this "passio" was merely a selection from a long work, the *Acts of Marius, Martha, Audifax and Abachum*, printed in the *Acta Sanctorum* under January vol. 2, for January 19! If so, why bother with it? No wonder it was just extracts from breviaries. It would be better, surely, to translate the full *Acts*.

So off I went to the January vol. 2, and did the process again with the *Acts of Marius &c*. Luckily for me, the electronic text that I had found had the BHL number for the work at the top – the *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina* index number, which was BHL 5543. Had it not been there, of course, the BHL volume is at Archive.org, for it is a century old.

Now once I have a BHL or BHG number, I always google for it. It's always a good idea to see what is out there. Has somebody written a study on it? Can I get an idea of its contents, its age, the scholarship?

So off I went and googled "BHL5543".



bhl5543



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[https://www.persee.fr/doc/efr\\_0223-5099\\_1997\\_mon\\_234\\_1\\_5817](https://www.persee.fr/doc/efr_0223-5099_1997_mon_234_1_5817)

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Passio Marii, Marthae et sociorum (BHL 5543 ; Vle s. ?), *ibid.*, *lan.*, II, p. 583 : in quodam caenaculo multitudinem christianorum psallentium... (5). Passio Callisti ...

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Marii et Marthe = BHL 5543. *lan.* 19. 24. (f. 113-116V) (Passio S. Agnetis) = BHL 156. *lan.* 21. 25. (f. 116V-119) (Passio S. Vincentii) = BHL 8628+8633. *lan.*

**The Roman Martyrs: Introduction, Translations, and Commentary**

<https://books.google.co.uk/books?isbn=0192539353>

Michael Lapidge - 2017 - Religion

... mile Ad arcus [at the arches], Primus and Felicianus' (Appendix III, p. 653). 1 Listed BHL 5543 and CPL 2208; see discussion by Primus & Felicianus 419.

**Narrativity in Biblical and Related Texts**

<https://books.google.co.uk/books?isbn=9042908777>

Initial results were discouraging. All dross really. But I have found by experience that I need to keep going through several pages, and even redo the search in Google Books. So I did. And.... boy did I get this right. I hit **jackpot**.

In fact I found this: Michael Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs: Introduction, Translations, and Commentary*, Oxford University Press (2017), present on Google Books preview [here](#). It contained 800 pages of pure gold: translations and commentary and a sterling introduction to every single *Passio* relating to a Roman martyr. This included a full translation of the *Acts of Marius, Martha, Audifax and Abachum*, complete with the bits that are about St Valentine of Rome.

So there is in fact no need for me to make a translation of this work at all; Dr. Lapidge has done it, and with the aid of his publisher probably better than I could. The only fly in the ointment is the extraordinary price of the volume - **\$140 at Amazon**, and **£115 at Amazon UK (discounted from a p\*\*\*-taking £140)**. This places it firmly outside of the hands of the general reader.

It is a remarkable book. The sheer labour in translating 800 pages of *passiones* is awe-inspiring. But that is only part of what it achieves. This is not just a translation but a study.

I learned - from what I could see of the introduction - that it soon becomes clear that all these Roman *passiones* correspond exactly to places of pilgrimage in Rome! There is a church dedicated to each and every one of them, all of much the same period. The conclusion, that the *passiones* were composed by the clergy of these churches is hard to resist. But without working on the entire body of saints for Rome, Dr. L. might never have noticed this.

Likewise the clearly fictional nature, and even the stereotyped nature of the stories becomes clear. Flicking through the introduction, I found page after page of solid hard information about hagiographical literature, about why it was written, when it was written, the history of printing them, and much else. It's almost a primer on hagiography, although at 42 pages, all too short, and one studded with up-to-date bibliography. To read it is to feel the crying need for workers in this field.

But .... it is a book that nobody can afford to read. I wish I had a copy. I have a feeling that it would repay reading right through.

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