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ST NICHOLAS AND THE "LIFE" BY JOHN THE DEACON

The *Acta Sanctorum* is of no use for the Saints' Life of St Nicholas of Myra, as his feast day falls in December, a month that the *Acta Sanctorum* has yet to reach. However there is a Latin *Life* that I want to translate. It is that of John the Deacon.

The text of John the Deacon was edited by N. Falconius in 1751 in *Nicolai:... Acta Primigenia*. But this is an awful edition to work with, because of the 18th century typeface. Worse still, Falconius seems to have got confused in his texts. He gives the text on pp.113-126, in 23 chapters. But if you pay attention to the footnotes, something funny happens after chapter 13!

The *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina* states plainly that the remainder of the text is to be found, not in the body of the edition, but on p.126. There, in a footnote, we read "Tertia decima lectio, sic clauditur in membranaceis Codd.Vaticanis, num. 1194. & 5696. pag.109." - "Chapter 13 is completed thus in the parchment manuscripts Vatican lat. 1194 and 5696, p.109." And so the rest of the chapter is given, and a different pair of chapters 14 and 15 also. How very odd.

I prepared an electronic text from this, but then I became aware of an oddity.

An early printed collection of Saints' *Lives* was made by Boninus Mombritius, probably before 1480, "from many manuscripts". I had occasion to mention this when dealing with St Valentine. But I was not aware that it was reprinted in two volumes in modern typeface in 1910 (on archive.org [here](#) and [here](#)). It includes the *Life* of John the Deacon!

One would like to think that the Falconius edition, which at least names manuscripts, was a better text. But quite frankly it seems possible that it is not!! I shall have to see.

One red herring that has bothered me is at last cleared up. Angelo Mai also printed a *Life* of St Nicholas by a "John the Deacon" in *Spicilegium Romanum* vol. 4. The author is another John, it seems, also a deacon, but of a later date.

The real work is translated in part from the Encomium of Methodius, that inscrutable, hardly translatable Greek text that has defeated all my translators. But the John the Deacon version in Latin is probably the source of a great deal of western St Nicholas legend.
