



NOVELSAINTS

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Novel Saints. Ancient novelistic heroism in the hagiography of Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages

From 2014-02-01 **to** 2019-01-31

Project details

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EUR 1 467 300

EU contribution:

EUR 1 467 300

Coordinated in:

Belgium

Subprogramme:

ERC-SG-SH5 - ERC Starting Grant - Cultures and cultural production

Call for proposal:

ERC-2013-StG

Funding scheme:

ERC-SG - ERC Starting Grant

Objective

The novel is today the most popular literary genre worldwide. Its early history has not been written yet. In order to enhance our understanding of this history (both conceptually and cross-culturally), this project offers the first comprehensive reconstruction and interpretation of the persistence of ancient novelistic material in hagiographical narrative traditions in the Mediterranean in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages (4th-12th cent.). This period constitutes a blind spot on the radar of scholars working on the history of the novel, who conceptualize it, much to the detriment of the study of narrative in subsequent periods, as an 'empty' interim period between the latest ancient representatives of the genre (ca. 3rd-4th cent.) and its re-emergence in 11th/12th-century Byzantium and 11th-century Persia.

This project, on the other hand, advances the hypothesis that different hagiographical traditions throughout Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages were impacted (directly or indirectly) by ancient novelistic influences of different kinds and adopted, rehearsed, re-used and adapted them to various degrees as tools for the representation of saints as heroes/heroines. In this sense, constructions of heroism in these traditions should be understood to varying degrees as 'novelistic' and raise crucial issues about fictionalization and the texts' own implicit conceptualizations of fiction.

Three stages of the project will test different aspects of this hypothesis. Firstly, the project will chart for the first time all novelistic influences in the hagiographical corpus texts. Secondly, it will analyze the impact of these influences on constructions of heroism in specific hagiographical traditions (mainly Latin, Greek and Syriac Martyr Acts, hagiographical romances and saints' Lives) and examine implications for notions of fictionalization and/or strategies for enhancing verisimilitude and authenticity. Finally, diachronic and cross-cultural dimensions of the research hypothesis will be articulated through the study of continuity of hagiographical traditions (and their constructions of heroism) in narrative genres from the 11th and 12th centuries in the West (medieval romance), Byzantium (novels) and the East (Persian romance).

By generating an improved understanding of the impact of ancient novelistic material in different hagiographical traditions throughout Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, this project aims to contribute not just to the history of the idea of fiction but also to the study of hagiography, the early history of the novel and to all disciplines that study these literary genres.

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Subjects

Social Aspects

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