

From Local Hero to European Celebrity? The Textual History of the Legend of St. Symeon of Trier

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Traditionally, the history of books is described as the social and cultural history of communication by means of the written word. Accordingly, its purpose is to study the production, publishing and distribution of literature, with equal respect to the different stages of a book's passage, from the author to the reader and finally to its impact.

There seems to be, however, a curious lack of communication between historians of the handwritten and printed book, at least in Finland. That is why my contribution may seem heretic or even out of place to many local book historians. The methods of manuscript studies, however, shed light on the traditional questions of book history: many questions about the authors, texts and their dissemination as well as their audience – both readers and listeners – may be answered. In addition, there is much to be learned from cultural relations between individuals and communities. In many cases the medieval material offers fascinating opportunities to follow the books' *iter* from the making of the volume through different generations of owners, the complicated dissemination of manuscripts, through the forming of cultural ties between persons and regions; and the impact and reception of the written texts.

It is from this point of view that I analyse the textual history of the legend of St. Symeon of Trier. Symeon was originally from Sicily, but he had studied in Constantinople, lived as a monk and hermit in Jerusalem, Betlehem and on Mount Sinai. In addition, he had travelled a lot in Near East and in France and Germany. The last seven years of his life he spent as an *inclusus* in the German town of Trier, where he died in 1035.¹

The legend of St. Symeon – his *vita* and *miracula* – was written in a preliminary form very shortly after his death by a friend of his, the local abbot Eberwin, commissioned by the archbishop of Trier,

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¹ Vita s. Symeonis, 86–92.

Poppo.² It is easy to see that the local clergy was in a hurry to propagate the cult of their newest saint. Traditionally the tenth and eleventh centuries have been considered to have been an era of a number of new saints – and thus an era of a fierce competition between different saints' cults. Therefore, it was important to draw the attention of the fellow Christians; hagiographical texts, especially saints' lives as the most popular form of medieval literature³ played a crucial part in pursuing this aim.⁴ The relatively high amount of still existing manuscripts containing the legend of Symeon bears witness to the fact that his legend was used in a similar way, as well.

As mentioned, abbot Eberwin wrote his version of the legend of St. Symeon the very year the saint died.⁵ It contained the life of St. Symeon as well as stories of some miracles he had accomplished.⁶ Later on, many more miracles were added to the *miracula* part of the text. This happened mainly in the 1050s ja 1060s, but the text underwent modifications still as late as the 1090s.⁷ It is interesting to note that the different versions served partially diverse purposes. Whereas the earliest redaction aimed to establish the new cult and to achieve the papal canonization of Symeon, the later redactions were much more of advertisements by nature, with many miracles added to the actual life of the saint. The differences of the versions demonstrate that the text had several publics.⁸

Since the text was very efficiently disseminated from the very beginning, the preserved Symeon manuscripts show a great variety of redactions. This makes it easier to reconstruct the routes of the dissemination of the legend of St. Symeon. All in all, there are still about thirty manuscripts of the legend datable to the eleventh – seventeenth centuries, which witnesses both of the interest in Symeon and of the eagerness to propagate his cult. Most of the manuscripts can be dated to the

² See the prologue of the *vita*: *Vita s. Symeonis*, 86F. Eberwin had learned to know Symeon during his pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1026-27. See Landes 1995: 154-158; also Micheau 1979: 88-93; Dauphin 1946: 281-296, 306-308. The most important sources to the pilgrimage are the *Historia* of Ademar of Chabannes, 3.65-67; *Vita s. Symeonis*; *Vita Richardi*, 288-289 and the *Chronicle* of Hugo of Flavigny, 393-398.

³ de Gaiffier 1947: 148; Auerbach 1958: 214.

⁴ Abou-el-Haj 1994: 13; de Gaiffier 1947: 139.

⁵ Coens 1950: 185.

⁶ According to Annegret Wenz-Haubfleisch (1998, 101) and Maurice Coens (1950, 185) the very first version of the text ended somewhere between c. 27 and c. 30. In my opinion, however, the first version could have ended either after c. 25 or after c. 27; the *miracula*-part – the miracles of St. Symeon from the time he had already died – of the text follows apparently strict chronology and cc. 26 and 27 contain miracles from the time Symeon was still alive.

⁷ The last miracle is dated in the manuscripts to the year 1086; see *Vita s. Symeonis*, 92.

⁸ On the several publics of hagiographical texts see esp. de Gaiffier 1947; Coué 1997: 20; Philippart 1977: 120.

eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries.⁹ Accordingly, those centuries seem to have been the time when Symeon's cult was propagated most intensively.

To be able to analyse the different ways and motives of the dissemination it is essential to have an overview of the actual geographical distribution of manuscripts containing the legend of St. Symeon. As early as the 11th century, manuscripts are known from Trier, where the legend was written, from Senones, Fécamp, Aulne, Rouen, Metz, Liège, Fulda, Tegernsee, Paderborn, Regensburg and Augsburg. In addition, one very early manuscript was sent to the pope in Rome in order to have the pope canonise Symeon. The wide and early dissemination of the legend shows clearly the intensity of the attempts of the Trier clergy to propagate the cult of their newest saint's cult. It is also to be noticed that there were many different versions of the legend circulating.

During the next century, manuscripts appear in Trier, Zwiefalten, Einsiedeln, Echternach and St. Omer. Whereas most of the oldest legend manuscripts seem to have found their new owners via already existing cultural connections between Trier and other ecclesiastical institutions or were written under the influence of the archbishops of Trier, the dissemination of the legend seems to have been got up to another level in the 12th century. The legend found its way to St. Omer almost certainly from Fécamp and Rouen. The manuscripts of Zwiefalten and Einsiedeln were probably part of a larger group of *codices* circulating in the reform monasteries of the Hirsau movement in Southern Germany. Of the manuscripts of the 12th century probably only Echternach one witnesses of direct cultural ties to Trier. The longer the period of time and the further away the cult expanded, the weaker the influence of the Trier clergy on the dissemination of manuscripts became. Thus, the legend and the expansion of the cult had partially life of its own by the 12th century. This was underlined by the fact that the legend soon became a part of extensive martyrologies copied throughout Europe regardless of the intentions of the clergy of Trier. It has to be said, however, that the wide dissemination of the legend was striven after by Trier clergymen, because knowledge of Symeon encouraged pilgrimage and brought different kinds of gifts to the community of St. Symeon and to the town as a whole.¹⁰ In this respect it is interesting that the papal canonization of

⁹ At least 11 mss. are from the 11th, at least 9 from the 12th, and at least 4 from the 13th century. The shelf-marks shall be published in my doctoral dissertation.

¹⁰ Heikkilä 2000a: 43–47. On general, see Delehaye 1955: 2; de Gaiffier 1970: 140; Heinzelmann 1973: 27–44; Heinzelmann 1994: 152; Ward 1982: 31.

St. Symeon does not seem to have contributed significantly to the dissemination of the saint's legend.¹¹

The biggest group of early manuscripts comes naturally from Trier, where the saint was buried and the cult of Symeon was at its strongest. On this background it is surprising to notice that there are none or only fairly recent manuscripts of the Late Middle Ages from the monasteries and ecclesiastical communities of the rural area surrounding Trier. This can be explained in two different ways: on one hand the area in near vicinity of the town was dominated by the monasteries of Trier. Thus, the manuscripts of those monasteries could witness of the knowledge of Symeon's cult in the surrounding area, as well. On the other hand, however, the dissemination of medieval manuscripts never happened according to a specific plan but in leaps. After all, the dissemination of manuscripts was only to some degree under the control of the Trier clergy. Much depended on already existing cultural ties and personal relations.

Such existing relations must have played a crucial role, when the manuscripts and the cult travelled a long way. Thus, the very early existence of *codices* containing the legend of St. Symeon in Augsburg, Fécamp and Paderborn, for instance, reveal us close and mostly otherwise undocumented cultural ties between these communities and Trier. On the other hand, the cult of St. Symeon formed new ties. That was the case when other monasteries wanted to have relics of St. Symeon from Trier, for instance.¹²

In addition to the ties between communities, even personal relations played a role in the dissemination of the manuscripts. The Symeon-manuscripts offer a beautiful example of the significance of the ties of friendship in the expansion of a new cult. There is one Symeon manuscript from the 1060s written by one of the most famous authors of the High Middle Ages, Otloh of St. Emmeram. After having spent four years in the monastery of Fulda, he returned to St. Emmeram. It is most probably then that he gave the manuscript to Fulda as a gift.¹³ He was a good friend to abbot William of Hirsau. Apparently the Hirsau movement was interested in propagating the cult of St. Symeon. Hirsau acquired very early relics of the saint. It furthermore possible that the

¹¹ Heikkilä 2000b: 39.

¹² For instance the monastery of Hirsau in 1091 at the very latest. See *Historia Hirsaugiensis monasterii*, 261–262; Beissel 1892: 26.

¹³ I shall deal with this in detail in my doctoral dissertation.

Hirsau connection is responsible for the circulation of the legend between Regensburg, Hirsau, Einsiedeln and Zwiefalten.

There is codicological evidence that the cult of Symeon and the manuscripts of his legend were disseminated from the very beginning in *libellus* form i.e. small manuscripts that contained all of the relevant texts of the cult, including the life of the saint, the stories of his miracles, and his liturgy.¹⁴ That kind of manuscripts seem to have been relatively common in the High Middle Ages, when it came to propagation a fairly young cult. The same form of dissemination is known to have been used in the cult of St. Magneric of Trier, St. Gallus of St. Gall, and St. Anno of Cologne, for example.¹⁵

As the example of the textual tradition of the legend of St. Symeon of Trier demonstrates, there are vast possibilities of manuscript studies in the field of history of books. The careful study of manuscripts, their different redactions, and their dissemination can contribute significantly not only to the history of books, but to the knowledge of the medieval history of ideas as a whole.

Manuscripts

Trier, Stadtbibliothek, Ms. 118.

Trier, Stadtbibliothek, Ms. 1379.

Sources

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Vita Richardi abbatis s. Vitoni Viridunensis. MG SS XI. Hannover 1854, 281–290.

Vita s. Symeonis. Acta Sanctorum. Junii I. Editio novissima. Parisiis et Romae 1867, 86–92.

¹⁴ Trier, Stadtbibliothek, Ms. 118/106, foll. 296v–309v (*vita* and *miracula*), 309v–312r (*officium*).

¹⁵ Magneric: Trier, Stadtbibliothek, Ms. 1379 contains (foll. 12r–13r) in addition to the life of Magnericus parts of his *officium*, as well. Gallus: discussion with professor Andreas Haug (Trondheim) in October 1999; Anno: Wenz-Haubfleisch 1998: 231.

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