Compilation Strategies

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This chapter compares the various arrangements and techniques used by medieval compilers across different regions and religions to mould individual texts into a cohesive whole and imbue biographical collections with unified messages. It examines the structure and ordering of the particular biographical collections under consideration in this volume in the wider context of their respective genres. The chapter discusses the different principles compilers used to arrange the individual texts and looks at the devices, such as prologues and titles, they employed to tie the component parts of the collections together. Due to the multiplicity of biographical tracts, the special potential of such compilations to deliver messages of a specific type to their readers is considered, most notably in regard to the authority, legitimacy and historical continuity of particular institutions. The comparison of compilations from different regions and religions highlights the many options available to the compiler and the creativity involved in crafting collections of old or new biographical texts in the medieval period.

Keywords: compilation, collection, biography, titles, prologues, comparison

This volume's focus on medieval biographical collections places the whole rather than the parts centre stage. Accordingly, the content and narrative strategy of the individual texts or biographies are primarily of interest insofar as they can be related to the broader questions of the overall structure, aims and meaning of the relevant collections. This distinction is a crucial one, as the volume seeks to identify, describe and evaluate the potential offered by this multiplicity and thus to determine how the juxtaposition of several biographical texts might have opened up new avenues to an author or compiler in conveying his or her vision of a particular community. This introductory section outlines the range of compilation strategies employed in the different collections within the wider context of the norms of their respective genres and source regions. It focuses on the ways in which the various collections were structured, the techniques that were used to tie the biographies or different sections together and the authorial or creative dimension to the overall process. Finally, the question of the motivation and intended meaning, the overall message that determined the choices and methods adopted by a compiler is also discussed.

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The individual collections under consideration in this volume are arranged according to a number of different principles. Some follow a more or less strict chronological framework, in which the biographies appear according to the sequence of their subjects' deaths. In the *Libellus de situ civitatis Mediolani* (*De situ*), for instance, the lives of the six Milanese arch-bishops follow the order of their succession, while in the *De episcopis Salisburgensibus* (*De episcopis*) there is also a discernible chronological progression from texts concerning Salzburg's origins and early prelates to those dealing with a later period. Although the sequence is not unbroken in the latter case, the compilers' interest in the correct succession of the Salzburg bishops and archbishops is nonetheless made clear by the inclusion of a list containing all prelates from the foundation of the see up to the time of writing, which ends with a sentence giving 30 as the total number of bishops. This chronologically based quantitative focus, *»das zählende Element«*, as Kaiser puts it, is a staple of the *Gesta episcoporum* (»Deeds of the bishops«) genre, to which *De situ* and, to a lesser degree, the *De episcopis* can be said to belong.[1] As Sot argues, »concern with the catalogue and with chronology is fundamental to local history«, as exemplified by *Gesta*-type compilations.[2]

Beyond an underlying historiographical impulse, the interest in chronological accuracy and the correct succession of office-holders up to the present day would have been tied in with the potential legitimising function of such works. This is true also of works with a dynastic focus, such as the chronicle of *al-ʿUqūd al-luʾluʾiyya fī taʾrīkh al-dawla al-Rasūliyya* (*al-ʿUqūd*), where familial rather than episcopal lineage serves as the structuring element for the work as a whole. Here the biographies take the form of obituaries (*wafayāt*), which are mainly given at the end of the chronicle's annual entries, following a pattern that first appeared in 12th-century Islamic historiography in Ibn al-Jawzī's history of the Muslim world (*Muntaẓam*).[3]

Indeed, the multiplicity of biographical tracts characteristic of such collections provided compilers with a ready means of establishing and emphasising historical continuity and thereby affirming the unbroken authority and legitimacy of the relevant institution or dynasty. In a European context, the early medieval *Liber pontificalis* and the 12th-century *Kaiserchronik* are good examples of the strength of biographical collections in conveying a message of historical continuity and legitimate authority.[4] In the case of Jerome's late antique *De viris illustribus* (*De viris*), the chronological sequence and sheer number of biographical tracts has the effect of asserting the intellectual weight and, by extension, authority of the Christian church from its beginnings, with the updated version of Gennadius only adding to this sense of historical continuity. On the other hand, Frechulf's 9th-century reworking of *De viris*,

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1   Kaiser, Die Gesta episcoporum, 464. In the same regard, Reuter points to the fact that medieval historians often also wrote computistic texts; Reuter, »Past, present and no future«, 34-35. The Salzburg *De episcopis* provides an example of a collection where historiographical/hagiographical and computistic texts appear together. On the *Gesta episcoporum* genre, see Sot, *Gesta Episcoporum*; idem, Local and institutional history; Kaiser, Die Gesta episcoporum.

2   Sot, Local and Institutional History, 108.

3   Irwin, Mamluk History, 160.

4   On the *Liber pontificalis*, see Gantner, *Freunde Roms*, 16-38 and *passim*; Deliyannis, *Liber pontificalis*. On the *Kaiserchronik*, see Shaw, Kaiserchronik; Matthews, *Kaiserchronik*.

which ends with Gregory the Great (pope from 590 to 604), seems to intentionally convey a sense of discontinuity, marking off an extended Patristic Age from the Carolingian present, arguably in keeping with contemporary notions of a *renovatio*, which encouraged the preservation of and reverence for the literary products of a long-elapsed ›golden age‹.[5] The effect of canonising a particular set of authors, texts or knowledge inherent to biographical compilations such as the different versions of *De viris* can again be seen as one of the benefits of the collective nature of the format.[6]

The added value of medieval biographical collections arising from this multiplicity is, however, not necessarily predicated on the collections exhibiting a diachronic structure. As in the case of the first generation of monks portrayed in the *Gesta sanctorum Rotonensium* (*GSR*), for example, an author or compiler can create an impression of a ›golden age‹ through the inclusion of the biographies of a series of worthy contemporaries. Furthermore, other collections such as *De viris* and *De episcopis*, which purvey a sense of historical continuity while at the same time highlighting a narrower period of time through a profusion of biographical subjects from a particular era, demonstrate that both a sense of continuity and that of a ›golden age‹ can be evoked by the arrangement of texts in a single compilation. Indeed, even in the absence of any discernible chronological framework, a biographical collection can, as in the case of the *Singular Volume of the Rlangs* or *Rlangs-kyi-po-ti-bse-ru* (*Singular Volume*), create through its timelessness a sense of a never-ending ›golden age‹, the multiple tales of extraordinary feats giving the impression that a particular institution or dynasty had been forever marked by a particular excellence or authority. Whereas other biographical collections such as the Salzburg *De episcopis* and the Milanese *De situ* stake their claims to legitimacy and permanence by detailing historical events, the *Singular Volume* demonstrates that dehistoricisation or *Entzeitlichung* can also be employed with the same ends in mind.[7]

The encyclopaedic quality associated with the type of alphabetically, generationally and geographically arranged collections spoken of in Heiss' comparison of *al-Sulūk fī ṭabaqāt al-ʿulamāʾ wa-l-mulūk* (*al-Sulūk*) and *Ṭabaqāt al-khawāṣṣ ahl al-ṣidq wa-l-ikhlāṣ* could also lend the compilations an authority-building or legitimising character, depending on the profile of the individuals featured in the biographies, although works of this type belonging to the *muʿjam* and *ṭabaqāt* traditions in Islamic historiography often do not exhibit these ideological aims.[8] In fact, new research approaches have begun to look at biographical dictionaries in the Islamic world as archives to be mined for a deeper understanding of the societies they reflect, while also keeping in mind the intent of their compilers.[9] Large, calendrically

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5   Contreni, Patristic Legacy, esp. 524-535; Otten, Texture of Tradition; also, for a wider approach, McKitterick, *History and Memory*, esp. chap. 10.

6   Regarding the canonising effect of compilations, see, for example, Thier, Aus Altem ein Neues.

7   On this latter strategy, see Rehberg, Die stabilisierende »Fiktionalität«, 401: »Diese Geschichte ist mythisch, die eindrucksvolle Präsenz des »Immer-schon-so-Gewesenseins« beruht auf einer geschichtsmächtigen »Enthistorisierung« (...) Dauer und Entzeitlichung ergänzen sich, und dem Vergangenen wird jede Kontingenz genommen, der *status quo* zum Endpunkt einer langen Verkettung von »Notwendigkeiten«.«

8   For examples of the variety of motives for writing biographical collections in medieval Islamic historiography, see Gibb, Islamic Biographical Literature, 54-55, and Khalidi, Islamic Biographical Dictionaries, 54-58.

9   See Hirschler, Studying Mamluk Historiography. Prosopographic analyses of these collections have also received a boost due to recent breakthroughs in the ability to digitally recognise and organise the contents of these texts; see Romanov, Algorithmic Analysis.

structured compilations, as exemplified by the *Magnum Legendarium Austriacum*, a collection of over 500 saints' Lives that features prominently in the reception story of the Salzburg *De episcopis*, are also encyclopaedic in character. Similar to *De viris*, this enormous hagiographical compendium offers a vision of a shared and continuous Christian past and of a universal Church.[10] Indeed, by adding local saints to such universalist legendaries, a community was in a way incorporating their own church or region into the history of Christianity. Heiss' contribution also highlights the possibility of the arrangement of a biographical collection along occupational, religious or class lines, while in the *Singular Volume* the biographical tracts are divided into two groups according to whether they are non-salvational (martial) or salvational figures, although this format was generally uncommon in Tibetan texts.

This division according to theme or genre is often found in collections of Christian saints' Lives or legendaries, the most frequent type of biographical collections compiled in the European Middle Ages, where biographies can be grouped according to categories such as apostle, martyr and confessor or on the basis of gender, i.e. female *virgines* appearing separately from male saints.[11] While the sequence of categories often reflects entrenched perceptions of the hierarchy within sainthood – for example, the precedence of apostles over other saints – the context of a collection's production and the perspective of its compiler could also have an effect on the perceived hierarchies and consequently on the order chosen. Where, for example, such a hagiographical collection was produced in a nunnery, the group of female virgin saints might be afforded an atypical level of prominence, as in the case of a 13th-century legendary from the Cistercian nunnery of St. Thomas an der Kyll in the Rhineland, where the female saints precede their male counterparts.[12] Biographical collections also offered their compilers the possibility of highlighting the particular importance of certain individuals, for example, the patron saint of a monastery or the prophet Muḥammad, by giving precedence to these figures within a sub-category or an overall series.[13] The *Singular Volume* offers a reminder, however, that the sequence need not always reflect the precedence of categories within a biographical collection. In this case the non-salvational texts appear first, but are expressly described as »the great base« of the collection, whereas the subsequent salvational tales are referred to collectively as »the noble ornament«.

In addition to the method of structuring the group of biographies or texts, various devices were available to the compiler in order to add coherence to a collection and express or reinforce the overall message that he or she wished to convey. These include titles, prologues, epilogues and intermediary passages between the individual texts. Because autograph copies of texts from medieval Europe are rarely preserved, it can be difficult to determine what – if

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10 See Ó Riain, *Magnum Legendarium Austriacum*, 91.

11 Philippart, *Les légendiers*, 85-99; Dolbeau, Notes sur l'organisation, 15-20; Degl'Innocenti, I leggendari, 138-139, 141.

12 Mons, Bibliothèque Centrale de l'Université de Mons-Hainaut, Cod. 26/210/8402; Catalogus codicum hagiographicorum, 263-269.

13 For example, the most prominent late medieval collections of Irish saints' Lives begin with the vita of St Patrick, ›the apostle of Ireland‹; Sharpe, *Medieval Irish Saints' Lives,* 111-115, 240, 251. One of the earliest biographical collections in Islamic historiography, Ibn Saʿd's 9th-century *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, begins with an extended biography of Muḥammad and then continues with accounts of his companions and followers; Al-Qāḍī, Biographical dictionaries, 97-99.

any – title a text or a collection of texts was originally given.[14] The customary title of a medieval work today is often one that was attached to it at a much later date. The title *Gesta sanctorum Rotonensium*, for example, can be traced no further back than Mabillon's edition of 1680, the opening section of the work not having been preserved in either of the medieval text witnesses. Interestingly with respect to the text's early modern reception, the inherent focus on the deeds of the group of saints is absent from a slightly earlier title, *Histoire de la fondation de Redon*, ascribed to the text in a manuscript copy dating to 1660. The earliest transmitted title of *De situ*, the all-encompassing *History of the description and name of the Milanese city, of the visitation of the most blessed apostle Barnabas, who had been divinely directed there, and also of the venerable man Anatelon, who was his co-apostle and contemporary, and was consecrated in that very place by his (i.e. Barnabas's) episcopal blessing, and also of some of his successors*, also classes the work as a *historia* as well as offering a succinct summary of the contents with a particular emphasis on Barnabas and the origins of the see.[15] The title used here for the Salzburg collection, the descriptive *De episcopis Salisburgensibus* (*On the bishops of Salzburg*) first appeared in the printed edition of the work published by Heinrich Canisius in 1602. Indeed, in its earliest manuscript witness, an Admont codex that may even contain the autograph copy, neither the collection as a whole nor the constituent texts bear a title, and this is true of most subsequent copies. The title of *De viris illustribus* is Jerome's own and is of particular significance for the fact that it locates the work within an existing genre, represented most notably by Suetonius' 2nd-century work of the same name on Roman authors, a compilation specifically mentioned by Jerome in his prologue. The title would thus have had the potential to shape readers' expectations and also provided an immediate indication of the propagandistic quality of the work, the Christian authors being implicitly compared to their pagan Roman counterparts in stature, with this purpose then being made explicit in the prologue. Interesting too is Jerome's subsequent admission in a letter to Augustine of Hippo that the more instructive *De scriptoribus ecclesiasticis* (*On Writers of the Church*) would have been the appropriate title for his work, whereas the title *De auctoribus* (*On authors*), which some »ignorant« copyists had applied to it, did not meet with his favour.[16]

Of the biographical collections under consideration in this volume, the *al-ʿUqūd al-luʾluʾiyya fī taʾrīkh al-dawla al-Rasūliyya* (*The Pearl Necklaces of the History of the Rasūlid Dynasty*) boasts perhaps the most evocative title, and one whose authenticity is attested through its use by the actual compiler. In fact, the problem of lost original titles is not as acute in the Islamic world, where there are indices of book titles from booksellers and libraries, which indeed include ample works that are today no longer preserved. The common practice of medieval Tibetan authors and compilers mentioning titles within their works means that original titles are also more likely to be preserved in this region. The motif of linked pearls

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14   On the titles of medieval works, see Lehmann, Mittelalterliche Büchertitel; Fredouille *et al.* (eds.), *Titres et articulations*.

15   *Historia de situ et vocabulo urbis Mediolanensis seu beatissimi apostoli Barnabe visitatione ad eandem divinitus directa nec non et venerabili viro Anatelon eius coapostolo atque coetaneo ab eodem epischopali benedicione inibi consecrato vel quibusdam eius successoribus.*

16   The opening page was missing from the copy acquired by Augustine, who inquired with Jerome as to the correct title of the work; Augustine, *Epistula*, 40.2, ed. Goldbacher, 71; Jerome, *Epistula*, 112.3, ed. Hilberg, 370. For a recent discussion of these letters, see Vessey, Augustine among the Writers.

or some other sort of gemstone, as used in the title of *al-ʿUqūd*, is one commonly applied to compilatory works in the historiography of the Islamic world as well as being well attested in medieval Europe and Tibet.[17] In this case, it explicitly highlights the carefully curated and constructed nature of a text meant to not only preserve but also celebrate the institutional memory of the glorious achievements of the Rasūlid sultans during a period of time in which their power has diminished. The compiler of the *Singular Volume* provides a further instance of the use of the motif of preciousness in respect of a biographical collection in describing his work as a »gter-ma« or »treasure« text. *Rlangs-kyi-po-ti-bse-ru*, which literally means *The Rhinoceros Book of Rlangs* is another evocative title, again authenticated through its use by the compiler. The figurative meaning is rather *The Singular Volume of the Rlangs*, the single horn of the rhinoceros symbolising the perceived oneness of the collection's contents, comprising both a genealogy and an ›archive‹ of greatness and virtue, perhaps hinting that it was compiled out of originally separate documents.

Al-ʿUqūd* and the *Singular Volume* are also but two of the biographical collections under consideration to have an effusive prologue or, in the case of multi-volume works, a series of prologues. In the former the compiler used the prologue, consisting of genealogical, poetic and narrative elements, to emphasise the main message of the overall collection: the continuity and legitimacy of Rasūlid rule as extending out from a long line of pre-Islamic rulers of South Arabia. Similarly, the preface to the biographical vignettes in the *Singular Volume* reinforces the overall message of the collection in stressing the excellence of the dynasty's lineage. The conventional purpose of a prologue is, of course, to explain the purpose of a work.[18] In the case of *De viris* and *De situ*, the authors explicitly refer to the earlier works that had provided models or inspiration for their projects in order to help elucidate the function and form of, as well as the need for, the composition of the relevant collection. The prologue to the biographical book of the *GSR* explains the purpose of the text along familiar hagiographical lines, namely that it should preserve the memory of the saintly individuals and provide edification for the reader. The *De episcopis* lacks any prologue, which is not necessarily surprising, considering that it, unlike the other European collections under consideration, is not the work of a single author but rather a compilation of largely pre-existing texts. Indeed, the classic biographical collection in medieval Europe, the saints' legendary comprising collections of pre-existing hagiographical texts, is rarely furnished with a prologue.[19] Of the collections under consideration, only the *Singular Volume* features formal epilogues at the end of both books, where the theme of the dynasty's great lineage and connections to exalted figures of the past is again rehearsed. While not an epilogue, the final entry to *De viris*, Jerome's description of his own literary activity, provides the collection with an ending emphasising

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17   Hathaway, Compilatio, 43. On the evocative nature of titles in medieval Islamic historiography, see Hirschler, *Medieval Arabic Historiography*, 66-72. A Tibetan example, albeit of 19th-century date, is the »Jewelled Beryl Rosary« or »Rin-chen-baiḍūrya'i-phreng-ba«, compiled by Kong-sprul-Karma-ngag-dbang-yon-tan-rgya-mtsho, that is cited in Langelaar's contribution to this volume.

18   On medieval prologues, see Lake (ed.), *Prologues*; Hamesse (ed.), *Les prologues médiévaux*.

19   Dolbeau, Les prologues, 347-351.

the theme of historical continuity. This is also true of the decision of Gennadius to imitate the original by ending his continuation with an entry on himself. Again, though not a formal epilogue, the last lines of the final item in *De episcopis* date the composition of this text and probably of the compilation as a whole to the year 1186 and, in adding that this was 563 years since the death of Salzburg's first bishop, reinforce the theme of historical continuity and longevity emphasised throughout the collection.

Just like prologues, intermediary passages between the different texts can help to add coherence to a collection, perhaps highlighting the work's message and clarifying the place of the individual biographies within the overall scheme. Among the biographical collections under consideration, the *Singular Volume* and *al-Sulūk* contain such elements, with the lines that separate each biography again focusing on dynastic and scholarly lineages to varying degrees and in different ways and helping to legitimise their political authority and aspirations. In the case of the other biographical collections, it is intertextuality and thematic convergence that fosters an element of ›seriality‹ as well as the coherence of the collections. In *De situ*, for example, the serial nature of the individual Milanese bishops' succession to office is heightened by the new bishops generally being introduced as the disciples of their predecessors. Ultimately the coherence of each collection is a product of the overall chronological or other principles by which it is arranged as well as of the individual texts' adherence to the overriding thematic focus.

This thematic convergence was a product of the biographies having been deliberately chosen or written because they each contributed to the overall message the compilers wished to convey. It is this potential to construct an overriding narrative and reinforce through repetition the central message that marks a compilation out from a single text. It offers an ideal means of creating and cementing tradition and of highlighting the repeated demonstration of a place's importance or sanctity, or of a dynasty's authority and legitimacy. Essentially, it is a ›vision of community‹ that is being conveyed, an idealised picture of particular groups or institutions. Not all biographical collections, of course, fell into the propagandistic bracket typical of the collections under scrutiny in this volume, offering either a different message or lacking any identifiable central theme due to their eclectic nature. This, however, takes nothing from the potential offered by the genre to strategic compilers. In order to search for the meaning of biographical collections, to understand their place in the *Sinngeschichte* of their communities, we must therefore consider both the tendency of the collection as a whole and how the individual ›selected‹ texts fit into the general picture.[20]

Drawing a clear line between author and compiler is not always easy, considering that many medieval authors from all historiographic regions reworked existing sources and many compilers edited, embellished or otherwise altered existing texts. This is quite evident in the biographical tradition of South Arabia, specifically, and of the Islamic world in general, as these collections developed and grew over time. If we look at classical and medieval use of the words *compilator* and *compilare* in European sources, it is clear that the terms were often applied to what we would now consider authors and authorial works.[21] This was despite the negative etymological connotations of the verb *compilare*, which means to pillage

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20   Assman, *Ägypten*, 9-12; Pohl, Identität.
21   Hathaway, Compilatio; Rouse and Rouse, Ordinatio, 119-123.

or plagiarise, the pejorative sense of the word only slowly dissipating over the course of the early medieval period. There can be no denying the creative dimension of compilation, even where the compiler incorporated the existing texts into his or her collection with little or no amendment.[22] In choosing and arranging the texts, a compiler is acting as creator, meeting the underlying definition of the word *auctor*, which is exactly the term the compiler of *De situ* applies to himself in the work's prologue.[23] As has been argued in relation to the biographical collections under scrutiny in this volume and by others with respect to different collections, the process of compiling provides the opportunity to convey a particular message, imbuing pre-existing texts with a new meaning by reusing them in a different context.[24] This is, in effect, a moment of simultaneous reception and inception. Indeed, the adaptation and reframing of earlier texts was very much a consequence rather than a diminution of the permanence and enduring authority of the written word.[25]

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22   Van Nuffelen puts it thus: »Compilation is, moreover, never wholly passive: it implies choices in selection and invariably entails reworking the original material into a new order and narrative. As such, it always implies an authorial voice as well as a recognition of the authority of the antecedent text«; Van Nuffelen, Introduction, 393. For a good study of the role of the compiler, here with respect to the works of Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel (d. after 826), see Ponesse, Standing Distant.

23   *»Non loquatur auctorem retexens rei geste tenorem«*; *De situ*, ed. Colombo, 6.

24   See, for example, Diesenberger's study of how contemporary concerns are reflected in the content of a particular hagiographical collection from early medieval Salzburg: Diesenberger, Der Cvp 420.

25   Cf. Boyle and Hayden, Introduction, xvii-xix.

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Abbreviations
al-Sulūk: *al-Sulūk fī ṭabaqāt al-ʿulamāʾ wa-l-mulūk*
al-ʿUqūd: *al-ʿUqūd al-luʾluʾiyya fī taʾrīkh al-dawla al-Rasūliyya*
De episcopis: *De episcopis Salisburgensibus*
De situ: *Libellus de situ civitatis Mediolani*
De viris: *De viris illustribus*
GSR: *Gesta sanctorum Rotonensium*
Singular Volume: *Singular Volume of the Rlangs (Rlangs-kyi-po-ti-bse-ru)*

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