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Jacobus de Voragine
The Golden Legend



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The Golden Legend of
JACOBUS DE VORAGINE

(c. 1230-1298)



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The Delphi Classics Catalogue



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JACOBUS DE VORAGINE



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The Golden Legend of Jacobus de Voragine



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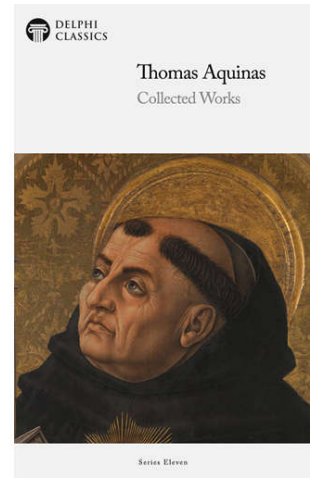
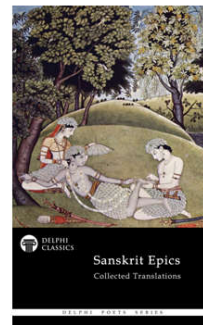
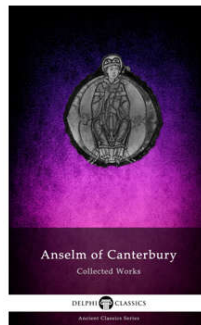
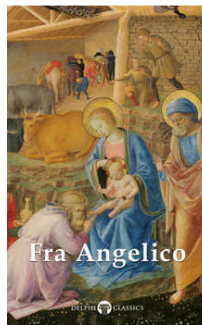
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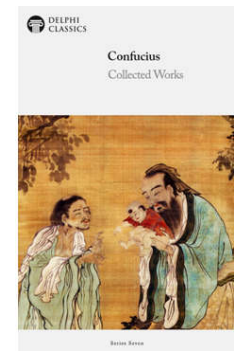
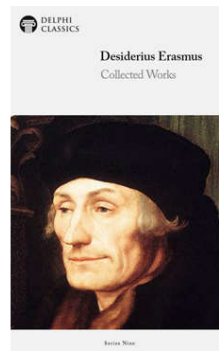
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The Translation



Varazze, a comune in the Italian region of Liguria — believed to be Jacobus' birthplace



Depiction of the port and fleet of Genoa in the early fourteenth century by Quinto Cenni, c. 1900 — some historians believe Jacobus was born in Genoa.

The Golden Legend (1265)



Translated by William Caxton and revised by Frederick Startridge Ellis, 1900

The Italian chronicler Jacobus was born either in Genoa or Varazze, in the Italian region of Liguria, located about 20 miles west of Genoa. He entered the Dominican order in 1244 and rose to become the prior at Como, Bologna and Asti in succession. Besides preaching with success in many parts of Italy, he also taught in the schools of his own fraternity. He attained the position of provincial superior of Lombardy from 1267 till 1286, when he was removed at the meeting of the order in Paris. He also represented his own province at the councils of Lucca in 1288 and Ferrara two years later. On the latter occasion, Jacobus was one of the four delegates charged with signifying Pope Nicholas IV's desire for the deposition of Munio de Zamora, who had been master of the Dominican order from 1285 and was eventually deprived of his office by a papal bull on 12 April 1291.

In 1288 Nicholas empowered Jacobus to absolve the people of Genoa for their offence in aiding the Sicilians against Charles II. Early in 1292 the same pope, himself a Franciscan, summoned Jacobus to Rome, intending to consecrate him as archbishop of Genoa. However, Jacobus reached Rome on Palm Sunday only to find that his patron was suffering from a deadly sickness and he died on Good Friday. The cardinals decided to carry out this consecration on the Sunday after Easter. Jacobus served well, establishing the reputation of an accomplished bishop, especially lauded for his efforts to appease the civil discords of Genoa among the Guelfs and Ghibellines. A tradition, mentioned by Jacques Échard (a learned Dominican historian) as unworthy of credit, reports how Pope Boniface VIII, on the first day of Lent, cast the ashes in the archbishop's eyes instead of on his head, with the words, "Remember that thou art a Ghibelline, and with thy fellow Ghibellines wilt return to naught." Jacobus died in c. 1298 and was beatified much later by Pius VII in 1816.

Likely compiled around 1259-1266, Jacobus' chief literary work is *The Golden Legend*, a collection of 153 hagiographies that were widely read in Europe during the Late Middle Ages. More than a thousand manuscripts of the text have survived and it has been extensively added to over the centuries. The impact and influence of this important work cannot be overstressed, as it has had a widespread influence on the development of European literature and our understanding of many religious stories.

Initially entitled *Legenda sanctorum* (Readings of the Saints), the collection eventually overtook and eclipsed earlier compilations of abridged legendaria, the *Abbreuiatio in gestis et miraculis sanctorum* attributed to the Dominican chronicler Jean de Mailly and the *Epilogus in gestis sanctorum* of the Dominican preacher Bartholomew of Trent. With the invention of printing in the 1450's, numerous editions of Jacobus' work appeared quickly, not only in Latin, but also in almost every major European language. Indeed, prior to 1500 Jacobus' *Legenda aurea* was printed in more editions than the Bible. During the height of its popularity, it was so well known that the term "Golden Legend" was often employed generally to refer to any collection of stories about the saints. It was one of the first books that William Caxton printed in the English language; Caxton's version appeared in 1483 and his translation was reprinted, reaching a ninth edition by 1527.

Composed in simple, readable Latin, *The Golden Legend* was chiefly admired in its day for its colourful stories of sacred lives. Each chapter concerns a different saint

or Christian festival. The book is considered the closest thing to an encyclopaedia of medieval saint lore that survives today and is regarded as a precious resource for art historians and medievalists seeking to identify saints depicted in art by their deeds and attributes. Jacobus' sole intention was to compile the extant traditional lore about saints venerated at the time of compilation, ordered according to their feast days. For the most part, he follows a template for each chapter: etymology of the saint's name, a narrative about their life, a list of miracles performed and finally a list of citations where the information was found. The opening etymology of the saint's name is often fanciful. Jacobus moves on to the saint's life, compiled with reference to the readings from the Roman Catholic Church's liturgy commemorating that saint. The author then embellishes the biography with supernatural tales of incidents involving the saint. Many of the stories also conclude with miracle tales and similar wonderlore from accounts of those that have famously called upon that saint for aid or used the saint's relics.

The most widely read book after the Bible during the late Middle Ages, *The Golden Legend* also contains accounts of events in the lives of Christ and of the Virgin Mary, and information about holy days and seasons, all arranged as readings (Latin: *legenda*) for the church year. It recounts some of the most famous exploits of the saints — such as the first appearance of the valiant St. George slaying the dragon and saving a princess. The life of St. Barbara, a virgin who turned to Christianity against the will of her pagan father, is also mostly known from *The Golden Legend*, as is much of our understanding of the legendary life of Mary Magdalen.

In 1900 the Caxton translation was updated into more modern English by Frederick Startridge Ellis, a publisher of works by William Morris and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who was also a close associate of A. C. Swinburne, Edward Burne-Jones and John Ruskin. Ellis issued his revision of Caxton's *The Golden Legend* in seven volumes, which is the text that appears in this edition. Medieval and Renaissance artists found *The Golden Legend* a storehouse of events and persons to be illustrated in profusion. However, the miraculous stories it contains and its natural lack of historical perspective rendered the book unacceptable at the Reformation and after the rise of the new learning, it went out of fashion. Still, in spite of its dubious historicity, *The Golden Legend* remains one of the most important sources for the analysis of Christian iconography, while offering an invaluable window into the beliefs and spiritual wonders of the medieval world.



'Legenda Aurea', Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence, c. 1290



L SE DESTINGVE Tutto tempo de l'anno in quattro parte ouero tempi cioe nel tempo della deuotione: reuocacione: ouer reuocacione: reconciliacione: & peregrinatione. Fu adunque el tempo della deuotione da Adā cioe dapoi che se diparti da Dio: & duro infino a Moyse. Onde la chiesa representa quello tempo dalla septuagesima per infino a pascha: & alhora legge el libro Genesi nel quale se pone la deuotione de primi parenti. Incomincio el tempo della reuocacione ouer reuocacione da Moyse & duro per infino ala natiuita di christo: nel qual tempo per gli propheti sono stati reuocati & reuocati gli huomini alla fede. Si che la chiesa rappresenta quel tempo dal aduento del signor per infino alla natiuita de Christo. Et in tale tempo legge huiusmodi apertamente fate mentione di questa reuocacione. El tempo della reconciliacione e quel tempo nel qual per Christo reconciliati siamo. Onde la chiesa rappresenta quel tempo da pascha infino ale penthecoste. Et alhora legge lapocalipsi nel qual libro aperta & pianamente fate mentione del misterio di questa tale reconciliacione. El tempo della peregrinatione se el tempo della uita presente nel quale sempre peregrini siamo & sempre in combattimento. Si che la chiesa rappresenta quello tempo da octaua delle penthecoste infino al aduento. Et in tal tempo legge gli libri di Re & di Machabei: nel quali fate mentione de diuerse & molte battaglie per le quali significate la nostra spiritual battaglia. Ma quel tempo che e dalla natiuita del signor per infino alla septuagesima contieue parte sottol tempo della reconciliacione equal tempo di leticia che e da natale per infino al octaua della epiphania parte sottol tempo della peregrinatione che e da octaua della epiphania per infino alla septuagesima. Onde quella quadruplica variatione de tempi puote essere appropriata quasi alle distinctione & variatione de quattro tempi. La prima chome liuerno se riferisce al primo tempo: la prima uera al secondo: del fate al terzo: la uera al quarto: si che sufficientemente appaue la ragione della appropriacione. Seconda secondo le quattro parte del giorno che la notte se riferisce al primo: la mattina al secondo: el mezzo di al terzo: & la sera al quarto: & benché prima fusse la deuotione che la reuocacione e inuestimento la chiesa principalmente icomincia gli officii suoi nel tempo della reuocacione che e della deuotione cioe nel aduento facendo questo molto piu conuenientemente che nela septuagesima: & questo ha per due ragione. Prima accioche non para intrinsecare dal errore. Imperio che lei tiene la chosa & non sequira l'ordine del tempo secondo che ipesse siate fanno gli euangelisti. La seconda ragione e conciosia che per lo aduenimento de Christo sono state reuocate tutte le chose. Per laqual chosa etiam questo tempo e dicto tempo di reuocacione secondo si legge al terzo capitolo dello apocalipsi. Ecco che io faccio tutte queste cose. Congruamente adunque la chiesa in questo tempo della reuocacione reuocata tutti gli officii: & adunque sia obseruato l'ordine del tempo diuino & distincto dala chiesa. In prima faremo mentione de quelle feste che occorreno infra tempo della reuocacione representato dalla chiesa dal aduento infino alla nati

uita del signor. Secondo farase mentione de quelle feste occorrente fra tempo contenuto parte sottol tempo della reconciliacione parte sottol tempo della peregrinatione representato dalla chiesa dalla natiuita del signor per infino alla septuagesima. Terzo farase mentione de quelle feste occorrente fra tempo della deuotione representato dalla chiesa dalla septuagesima per infino a pascha. Quarto de quelle feste che occorreno fra tempo della reconciliacione equal tempo la chiesa rappresenta da pascha per infino a octaua delle penthecoste. Quinto farase mentione de quelle feste occorrente infra tempo della peregrinatione che la chiesa rappresenta da octaua delle penthecoste per infino al aduento.

Finito e il Prologo.

Incomincia el libro intitolato legendario di sancti composto per el reuerendissimo padre frate iacobo de Voragine de l'ordine de predicatori Archiepiscopo de Genova.



NEL Q. VATRO septimane se celebra l'aduento del signor & esto a significar esserai quattro aduenti: cioe nela carne: nela mente: & nela morte: & al di del iudicio. L'ultima d'uno septimana tutta no se adimple spero che la gloria di sancti facile se dara ne l'ultimo aduento no hura gran fine. Da questo etiam uiene quel pio respitio della prima domenica del aduento deputato ala gloria patri in se ceteris quattro uersi acio dimoltri li padri quattro aduenti. Iste a cui pia coeungo el prudere ledione attenda. Et benché l'aduento sia quadrupartito nicetissimo la chiesa specialmete pare che facia memoria de duo aduenti: cioe del aduento nela carne & de l'aduento nel iudicio secundo appaue nel officio de esso tempo. Da questo etiam uiene che lo ieiunio che se fa nel aduento parte de exultatione & parte de mestitia. Onde quinto p ragione del aduento i carne si dice ieiunio de exultatione & letitia & quinto p ragione del aduento al iudicio si dice ieiunio de mestitia: & p dimolltare isto la chiesa cura a quel te po alquanti canci de leticia & isto p rispetto del aduento della misericordia & exultatione & alquiti de poe & letitia & questo p rispetto del aduento della fenera iustitia & merore. Se puo adunq uedere esser doi aduenti de christo in carne che e l'opportunita & la necessita & l'urtilta del uentre suo. Considerati etiam da tre cagione la opportunita del uentre de christo i carne. Primo quanto da parte de l'huomo cendo egli nel principio nela lege della natura fu conuincio in diffiditio della diuina cognitione. Onde in quel tempo egli uide in pef-



An edition from 1490

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Here begynneth the legende named in latyn legenda aurea / that is to say in englysh
the golden legende : For lyke as passeth golde in valewe al other metallys / soo
this legende exceedeth all other booke :



Illustration for 'The Golden Legend', 1493



'The Life of St. Barbara' by the Master of Affligem, The Walters Art Museum, c. 1500. St. Barbara, a virgin that turned to Christianity against the will of her pagan father, is mostly known from 'The Golden Legend'.

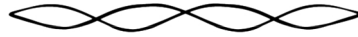


A Byzantine icon depicting the legend of Saint George slaying the dragon

VOLUME I.



PROLOGUE



AMONG THE BOOKS which afford us an insight into the popular religious thought of the middle ages, none holds a more important place than the *Legenda Aurea* or *Golden Legend*. The book was compiled and put into form about the year 1275 by Jacobus de Voragine, Archbishop of Genoa, who laid under contribution for his purpose the Lives of the Fathers by S. Jerome, the Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius, and other books of a like kind; while for the lives of the saints more nearly approaching his own age he appears to have industriously collected such legends as he could meet with, whether in manuscript or handed down by oral tradition. All persons living in later times have been deeply indebted to the man who thus embodied for their benefit and instruction a picture of the mental attitude of the age in which he lived. If the study of it be not absolutely essential, it may safely be averred that it will be most helpful and profitable, to all those who care to realise to themselves the faith of their forefathers, and in no small degree will it enable them more fully to understand the inspiration of the men whose faith found its expression in the glories and mysteries of Gothic ecclesiastical architecture. To those who can pace the aisles of a great cathedral or priory or abbey church, or even tread the humbler stones of an ancient parish church, without being touched with a sense of reverent wonder, the pages of The Golden Legend will appeal in vain. Its perusal will strike no responsive chord in their hearts. But to those who, whatever may be their creed, never set foot in those stone-written records of the past without a feeling of awe and veneration, mingled with an earnest longing to understand something of the spirit which breathes forth from them, and a desire to know what it was that so wrought in the minds of their makers as to produce the Music Gallery at Exeter, the South Porch at Lincoln, the Galilee at Durham, the stained glass at York, the East Window at Wells, and a thousand other marvels, to say nothing of the greater glories that await us in the magnificent churches of France, which even after centuries of destruction, neglect, and ill-usage still impress us with wonder and admiration, the histories of The Golden Legend will be a new revelation of inestimable value. The corbels of roof and cloister vaulting which look down on us with quaint and tender beauty, and the strange and sometimes monstrous or demoniacal gargoyles of the exteriors, will have a newer and fuller meaning if we allow ourselves thoroughly to enter into the spirit of the book before us.

We shall seem to hear the majestic roll of the solemn chants of Advent and the rejoicings of Christmas, the penitential pleadings of the Lenten season and the triumphal songs of Easter, as we read the eloquent passages devoted to those sacred seasons, even though the style be such as modern ears are little accustomed to, and therefore may sometimes appear, especially on a first reading, as more or less rugged and obscure.

Lovers of the picturesque can scarcely fail to be charmed with such wonderful tales as those of the childhood of Moses and the history of Pontius Pilate, which the author frankly sets down as 'apocriphum'; while the folk-lorist will find a rich field to interest him in a territory hitherto but little explored.

In such histories as that of S. Brandon we dwell for a while in a veritable wonderland. The lives of S. Jerome, S. Macarius, S. Anthony, and S. Mary of Egypt, and other saints of the desert, read like the echoes of another world, so far removed are they from modern habits of thought, faith, and practice; while those of S. Francis,

S. Dominic, and S. Thomas of Canterbury bring before our eyes the life of the middle ages hardly less vividly than the tales of the *Gesta Romanorum* or the everliving creations of Geoffrey Chaucer. Verily there is a plentiful harvest for those who care to reap. Having read every page very carefully six times, with unabated interest, in the course of editing two editions, I can testify to the attraction the book has for one who loves the wondrous records of old days.

Though it does not appear to have been among the earliest of printed books, the *Legenda Aurea* was no sooner in type than edition after edition appeared with surprising rapidity. Probably no other book was more frequently reprinted between the years 1470 and 1530 than the compilation of Jacobus de Voragine. And while almost innumerable editions appeared in Latin, it was also translated into the vulgar tongue of most of the nations of Europe, usually with alterations and additions in accordance with the hagiological preferences of the different nationalities. It is with an early French translation that we are chiefly concerned, of which Caxton's version is a close rendering. The French book in question is a large folio volume of four hundred and forty-three leaves, printed in double columns, with forty-four lines to the page. Two copies of it only are known in this country, one in the British Museum, and the other in Cambridge University Library. There may of course be copies lurking in foreign libraries, but I have not been able to hear of any. It is without any indication of place of printing, date, or printer, and until quite lately these particulars had baffled the researches and conjectures of bibliographers; but latterly Mr. R. Proctor of the British Museum has succeeded in identifying the type as proceeding from the press of Peter Keyser, a rival of Anthony Vernard at Paris. It contains the lives of many French saints who are not included in the work of Voragine, notably those of S. Genevieve and S. Louis.

Convincing proof that this is the book referred to by Caxton in his preface as 'a legende in frensshe,' is afforded by the fact that where the printer has left gross misprints uncorrected in his text, the translator has blindly followed him without any attempt to make sense of them. The most curious instance of this occurs in the explanation of the supposed etymology of the name of S. Stephen. The French printer has turned the Old French which should have read 'fames venues,' (femmes veuves) into 'seine venues,' which Caxton attempts to translate by 'hole comen' (whole come), regardless of the fact that it has no meaning whatever. It has rarely been attempted to clear the present text of obscurities by any alteration, on principle; but in this instance, for the meaningless words 'hole comen,' those of 'widow women' have been substituted in accordance with the Latin, which Caxton seems never to have troubled himself to refer to. Again, in the life of S. Genevieve the French version has the typographical error of "a name" for 'a navire,' which the translator simply renders 'at name,' and this in later editions becomes 'at none' without making any better sense. This has been altered to 'by ship' as being the obvious meaning. The text has been amended in one or two other instances where a slight alteration made a passage intelligible; but, as I have said, there has been no attempt to clear obscurities generally or to interfere with the translator's language.

The observant reader can scarcely fail to note the difference between the style of the Bible histories, which I take it come from the 'Legend in English,' which Caxton mentions in his preface, and that of the translator's work, greatly to the advantage of the former. The summary is in truth done with a master's hand. The life of S. Thomas of Canterbury is again a specimen of vigorous English clearly written, and is probably also taken from the 'Legend in English.'

Though Caxton speaks of himself as the translator, and we have personal glimpses of him in the anecdotes he relates in 'The Circumcision of our Lord,' 'The History of David,' and 'The Life of S. Austin,' it is hardly to be supposed that he could have been at the labour of translating the whole book. He appears indeed to have employed some one whose knowledge of French must have been considerably less than that we are willing to credit him with, considering his long residence in French Flanders. Colour is also given to the suggestion that he availed himself of extraneous help in the work of translation by his special assertion at the end of the life of S. Roch: 'which lyfe is trans- lated oute of latyn into Englysshe by me, William Caxton.'

It may be remarked as a curious bibliographical and historical coincidence, that while Wynken de Worde was engaged in printing the last of the Old English editions of The Golden Legend in London, William Tyndale was busily occupied at Cologne trying to get into type the first of the unnumbered editions of the English New Testament. The old order giveth place to the new.

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