

Article

The Ethics of Doing Comparative Hagiology

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Abstract: This paper argues that a virtue-informed methodology is foundational to best practice in scholarly, collaborative, and comparative hagiological work. Following a discussion of how this resonates with Todd French’s work in this volume, I then draw from my experience as an educator to outline how a virtue-based approach might play out in pedagogy. Finally, I offer two metaphors for an “other-person centered” collaborative–comparativist mindset. Both of these are taken from my lived, and conversational “apprenticeship” in comparative hagiology on the Argentine–Brazilian border. Reflection on these metaphors, as well as their generative experiences, demonstrates the need for holistic self-reflection in the comparative study of religions, and of “hagiography” in particular.

Keywords: collaborative scholarship; comparative method; comparative religions; disciplinary innovation; ethics; hagiography; hagiology; justice; pedagogy; religious studies

1. The Pressing Issue

One of the most pressing issues in comparative hagiology is how to carry it out when we often do so in a highly charged context, whether this is in the arenas of academic collaboration, pedagogical settings, or lived religion. The potential for misunderstanding each other’s assumptions, biases, intentions, and conclusions means that, unfortunately, the spectre of unintentionally causing offence hovers over the entire enterprise. This may have the effect of eroding and discouraging productive relationships and projects. This concern is further heightened by our recognition that it is not possible to be an expert in a number of scholarly fields, which in practice means that very often we will carry out our comparative work as non-experts looking “over the fence” into someone else’s scholarly domain, which is often heavily guarded. Such guardedness about our work and scholarly expertise needs to be acknowledged, because it is a reality that stems from complex processes that are entrenched within individuals and academic groups.¹ These include, but are not limited to: the desire to be respected as a significant researcher, insecurities about our competence, the psychology of merit associated with the risk-taking inherent to higher education, professional silos of expertise, and fear of public shaming. These interdependent issues contribute to the scholarly and relational maze through which we must find our way if we are going to work well together. In what follows, I argue that virtues such as justice and wisdom help mitigate a number of the hazards that accompany comparative hagiology. I trust that this essay will generate a conversation about the need for group self-reflection for the benefit of collaborative scholarship and comparative hagiology.

¹ Todd French deals with this issue in his essay in this special issue. He promotes the importance of the work of scholarly “generalists” who may shed light on a range of academic disciplines and their methodological cultures (French 2019, pp. 1–2).

2. Virtues as the Moral Basis of Collaborative and Comparative Hagiology

If we begin our discussion from the perspective that persons and flourishing relationships are valuable fundamental realities, then we can claim that collaborative and comparative hagiological work requires *respect and justice for one another including for different religious traditions and methodologies. Respect and justice may work to the end of generating candid interpersonal interest and openness in comparative hagiographical work.*² This emphasis on collaboration applies to all comparative work, because we are necessarily dealing with other people's past work and often collaborating with live people in the process of comparison, too. Respect means treating each other with justice. In practice, justice means relating to each other in such a way as to uphold the demands for fair treatment that intrinsically belong to each human being and their work.³ A concern for justice is accompanied by the other virtues of wisdom, restraint and courage. Justice, restraint, wisdom, and courage are explicitly and implicitly built into the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as the American Academy of Religion code of conduct.⁴ A secular Western society and the AAR are our primary working contexts, so they can be reasonably taken as an informative common basis for our work in hagiology, because a human rights approach to our work assumes and expects justice with respect to all areas of a person's life, including their religious views and the practices related to them.⁵ In addition to these reasons, there are personal experiential motivations for this claim, which I discuss at the end of this essay in recognition that our scholarly work stems holistically from whom we have become and are becoming in culture, relationships, and time. The interconnected scholarly and personal dimensions of what I discuss result in the belief that those involved in comparative hagiology will act and think justly with respect to all religiosities, and in return, the work of comparative scholars will be treated with justice too.⁶ This moral aspect of the comparative study of religions has been recently pointed out by Kathryn McClymond, who argues that it is necessary in view of the correctives that have been offered to comparative studies. "Looking forward", McClymond states, "I believe comparative work has to be more cognizant of its moral component."⁷ McClymond's moral stance is especially necessary to comparative work across religious studies.

² Here I align my views with others in this special issue. For example, DiValerio's proposal of a controlled vocabulary for our shared enterprise is an instrument that allows for shared values and language in order to facilitate best academic practice (DiValerio 2019). Rondolino's social-scientific proposal is another example of setting the rules in order to allow for clear communication within an agreed framework that, at the same time, includes some aspirations and not others (Rondolino 2019). Sara Ritchey also addresses these issues (Ritchey 2019).

³ (MacDonald 2018, p. 13); and (Twiss 2013, p. 2456).

⁴ <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>. For AAR see <https://www.aarweb.org/aar-annual-meeting-policies>. For illustrative purposes, it is worth noting that their Professional Conduct Statement (2017 draft) includes the following on respect, which is a foundational value to my own work. "As a scholarly and professional value, respect manifests itself in mutual accountability—of AAR members to one another and to the organization's stated commitments. Respect as a scholarly and professional value requires that AAR members recognize the inherent worth of each member of the organization." (American Academy of Religion Professional Conduct Task Force 2017, p. 2). "Transparency" is another key value in the AAR policy, and is related to my use of justice and respect for collaborative work. It reads: "As a key value of our learned society, transparency promotes a culture of openness, accountability, reflexivity, integrity, and honesty." (American Academy of Religion Professional Conduct Task Force 2017, p. 3). An expanded version of this work could deal more fully with the rationale for normatively (not merely informatively) drawing from these documents, with some examples of how to implement the virtues they promote in comparative hagiology with both past and living interlocutors.

⁵ This is a coherent worldview argument made within the documents themselves (Bradley 2013, p. 2770). A related philosophical argument for why we cannot compartmentalize our lives, especially our mindset and perspectives, is made by Rondolino (Rondolino 2019). I would add fundamental psychological and social reasons for this.

⁶ (Twiss 2013, p. 2456). The AAR states the following on its value of "diversity": "Within a context of free inquiry and critical examination, the AAR welcomes all disciplined reflection on religion. This outlook includes two different components: one has to do with the methodological variety of our inquiries, and the other with the diversity of the persons who undertake these inquiries. At many points in our history we have underscored the importance of diversity in teaching, research, and service. Equally important is the diversity of scholars who represent different cultures, social locations, perspectives, professional standings, and experiences. These enrich and enlarge our understanding of ourselves and our community." (American Academy of Religion Professional Conduct Task Force 2017, p. 2)

⁷ (McClymond 2018, p. 4).

In what follows I firstly discuss how Todd French's essay resonates with the idea of a virtue-based culture as the necessary foundation for comparative and collaborative hagiography.⁸ I demonstrate this approach with examples from my lecture room practices. A discussion of two metaphors that drive my practices—"deliberate border crossing" and "modulating our accents"—shows that we carry out our work based on experiences as much as anything else. Therefore, we need to be cognizant of the need for holistic self-reflection, because we will be clearer and more open with others when we appreciate who we are, whom we are becoming, and how this shapes our approach to other scholars and sources for our work.

2.1. Formal Scholarly Collaboration: Some Thoughts on Best Practice

There is a shared sentiment across the contributors to this special issue that collaboration in cross-disciplinary and cross-tradition hagiological efforts is the way forward for this task. The benefits of this will be academic as well as ecumenical.⁹ The academic benefits revolve around bringing to light unrecognized dimensions in both the original sources for study and also in the comparanda.¹⁰ Ecumenical outcomes include a deeper understanding of our conversation partners across traditions, as well as real-world improved relationships and harmony.¹¹ This may have tremendous social and personal benefits in local and global community relationships that are often fractured by religious misunderstandings. We cannot argue for scholarly "social engagement" and "outreach" whilst ignoring the benefits of well-intended and well-informed scholarly engagement with real issues from a range of perspectives.

The challenge moving forward is that we need to create a scholarly language and culture in which comparative and collaborative hagiological work can breathe anew and in fresh ways. If this pioneering work is successful, then it may contribute as a template for other comparative projects. Examples of this include Rondolino and DiValerio, who are leading the way in terms of developing a new vocabulary for the enterprise.¹²

The first step for the new directions in comparative hagiology is the pursuit of a productive intellectual ethos, or culture (where ethos refers to ethical values and culture refers to their implemented practices in situ), within which anything that carries meaning can be explored comparatively. Such a culture is dependent upon a scholarly, permission-giving framework for an open-minded as well as rigorous scholarly methodological process. A quest for a new hagiological culture is implicit in the work of a number of contributors to this volume. For example, French calls for, "the creation of a third space in which comparative partners can *play* with ideas . . ." ¹³ A new space, or culture, for comparative hagiology, enlarges the possibilities for the discipline by avoiding the common problem of allowing shallow comparative work to *precede* the selection of the theme, or *tertium comparationis*. Methodologically, scholars must deliberately create comparative cultures within which the entire sequence of our procedure is based upon a conceptually narrow, early, and preliminary point of comparison. Freedom to bring a number of approaches to bear on a *tertium comparationis* will surely allow for more productive and surprising comparative hagiological insights.

⁸ I focus on French's work because I was part of the discussion group that focused on his paper during the 2018 workshop. I am not arguing that he alone pursues this avenue of thought, rather in this paper I am also trying to convey the way in which collaboration occurs shapes our perspectives. My views would have been slightly different, and with different emphases as well as concerns, had I been a participant in another group.

⁹ (Hollander 2019).

¹⁰ French wonders: "How do we push past the siloed nature of thinking in academic disciplines and fields of study? e.g., how might one's reading of a text be affected by awareness of other modes of writing/reading/reception/function?" (French 2019, pp. 2–3).

¹¹ We can hope for "substantial and empathetic immersion in a tradition other than one's own, followed by patient comparison of how some matter of importance is engaged in in this other and in one's own tradition, *for the sake of* collaborative articulation of some new understanding and ultimately more productive relations between communities" (Hollander 2019).

¹² "I wish to initiate a conversation to establish a shared vocabulary for the comparative study of hagiographical sources, whether inter- or cross-cultural" (Rondolino 2019, p. 2). See also (DiValerio 2019). On collaboration see (O'Rourke et al. 2013).

¹³ (French 2019, p. 5).

A crippling destabilization of hagiological questions can be restrained when appropriate attention is paid to the documentary pre-history within its native context, while simultaneously being controlled by present day scholarly interests and their leading interpreters. On the other hand, locating “hagiography” in both the past as well as in the present enables hagiologists to overcome the biases that pertain to both the hagio- and the comparative dimensions of comparative hagiology.¹⁴

A “culture of life” for hagiological studies always keeps its moorings securely grounded in the empirical world: if we allow both the historical past and the scholarly present to breathe their insights into a new hagiological culture, then we have a framework that allows for creativity within reasonable bounds. This is precisely what French suggests is the first step in the comparative method: “interest in expanding beyond the range of regular meanings.”¹⁵ This naturally cascades onto finding and agreeing upon “common territory” for discussion. We therefore have a sequence that looks like moving from a permission-giving culture, to an interest in new meaning, and subsequently to common territory. The upshot of this is the “playful third space” that contemporary and productive hagiological study requires. Once in place, and if it is structured well, such a culture would continue to be an exciting, yet grounded framework for handling the insights that will follow on from its use.

A “third space” ethos could potentially allow Islamic, Christian, Buddhist, and Hindu sources to be brought into new conversations with one another. It is important to note that these conversations would trade on collaborative consultation with scholars from other traditions, in order to make sure that we work in a scientific and scholarly manner when we “look over the (hagiological) fence.” Collaboration of this kind would allow us to re-examine or rectify our hermeneutics from “a foreign framework,” offering up new results from seeing our “own texts in a new light, before even hearing others’ findings.” At this point, the importance of virtues became glaringly obvious. To cite one example alone, justice and wisdom require that when we are working with another scholar’s hermeneutical lenses, we do so in constant consultation, in order to make sure we are being fair to their scholarship as well as informed about our sources. In practice, French’s suggestion that we share unfinished work amongst scholars gives each other permission to actively ensure the justice of each other’s work and results. By means of ongoing conversation and cross-checking, we could become a community that habitually encourages the organic development of virtues in ourselves and others. Justice therefore grounds the scholarship that functions as a communal form of quality control on comparative work.¹⁶ Indeed, this special issue is the result of a collaborative and cross-checking process, which has deepened my understanding and reception of key ideas from the past two years’ worth of workshops.

It is worth noting that this collaborative methodology is consistent with the DNA that Rondolino has tried to build into the network of scholars studying “hagiography” who participate in his workshops. Conversational and open scholarship needs to be cultivated. This means naming assumed group values in scholarship. These are often assumed and enjoyed without being explicitly stated. For example, one reason for the ease with which a collaborative approach appears to be viable in the minds of this journal’s contributors has to do with scholarly trust and friendship, as much as other factors. A number of us know and respect each other from past work in “hagiography” and from events such as the 2017 AAR hagiology pre-conference workshop in Boston. In practice, this meant that some of our group members (myself included) were very comfortable with one another due to a pre-existing baseline level of trust and non-defensiveness. In other words, we appear to have been biased towards a hermeneutic of trust rather than suspicion. This is an important point to make, for in the same way that at times superficial, curiosity-driven comparison precedes the selection of the theme, trust and friendship seem

¹⁴ “How ought one begin conceiving a project in comparative hagiology? I suggest that two main options exist, derived from the tension between *comparative* and *hagiology*. They present scholars with a fork in the methodological road. Immediately but not necessarily consciously, the scholar must choose a path that prioritizes one of the two terms over the other. For *comparative* and *hagiology* each is rooted in a different set of considerations and disciplinary lenses” (Keune 2019, p. 2).

¹⁵ (French 2019, p. 4).

¹⁶ (Freiberger 2019, pp. 99–110).

to precede the positive uptake and implementation of methodological ideas. Virtues such as justice ensure the initial possibility, and ongoing potential, of a fair and respectful collaborative culture.¹⁷

Following French, I believe that concrete examples of ongoing sharing and collaboration should be taken deliberately in order to demonstrate the plausibility of a “playful third space”, and to provide the structures that it requires.¹⁸ Collaborative outputs from these cross-fertilizing efforts are also important to this process; examples of these could include special journal issues and dedicated podcasts. The collaborative nature of these could be disruptive of some of the vices of academia, such as individualistic pride and greed. In addition, a new approach, such as multi-authored papers, which is common in the sciences, could enable longer-term conversations without professional penalties.

Perhaps one of the most helpful aspects of French’s work is his emphasis on the ongoing value of working in groups. This pushes us to consider virtues at a corporate level rather than merely on the register of the individual. French’s work presumes a vital community in which select issues are deliberately pursued in a group context over the medium term. If comparative hagiologists as a group are known for working in wisdom, justice, temperance, and courage, then we will be more likely to resist the reflex to make simplistic and safe comparisons, whilst avoiding substantive areas of difference. In fact, because our self-understanding is deepened in conversation with others, it seems that best practice *in life* as well as hagiology would entail embracing the virtue-based ethos described above.¹⁹ Assuming that we flourish together when we act ethically and consistently across all aspects of our existence, there will be powerful connections between our scholarship and pedagogy, as I note below.

2.2. Pedagogy: The University Classroom

The pedagogical implications of renewing the culture of comparative hagiology have not been explored at length in scholarship.²⁰ In the classroom I promote insights into justice, modes of expression, and conversation with the hope that my students will deploy these in order to serve our societal good in a multicultural context. My experience is that I have been able to generate classroom cultures that support collaborative comparative hagiological work. I begin with the assumption that I am “apprenticing” students into the discipline of comparative hagiology as part of the larger formal study of religion.²¹ At my college, we carry out comparative work in a number of classes, including history and ethics. Texts with hagiographic features from Roman, Maccabean, Christian, Islamic, Buddhist, and Hindu sources may be considered.

Because I know we are going to engage with these texts and traditions, I prepare the students in a number of ways. In particular, I provide a foundation on the classical Roman virtues during the first three hour class:²² the accent on justice promotes responsibility, the emphasis on wisdom asks us to consider which is the best way forward, temperance restrains rash judgment, and courage locates our task at the mean between academic cowardice and recklessness. I also add the virtues of hope, trust, and care.²³ The benefits of these three are critical. By carrying out our work in hope we may avoid cynicism as we aim for the best outcomes despite the tension in the task at hand. In fact, hope has been an important sustaining element as I experienced the AAR workshops, which at times have felt

¹⁷ In this Section, I draw from the experience at AAR 2018 to develop French’s argument and propose some initial thoughts on the ethics of an aspirational “code of best practice.”

¹⁸ (French 2019, p. 5).

¹⁹ In French’s words, “we can only accurately learn about ourselves in the context of others” (French 2019, p. 7). French draws from (Nussbaum and Cohen 2002, pp. 11–12)

²⁰ It is worth noting that Hollander is attentive to this issue in his essay (Hollander 2019).

²¹ This echoes McClymond’s notion of comparison as a craft (McClymond 2018).

²² The cultural make-up of the class is diverse, however, the historical context for most of my classroom sources is Ancient Rome and Late Antiquity, therefore, I use Rebecca Langlands’s 2018 *Exemplary Ethics in Ancient Rome*.

²³ This is an academic rephrasing of the virtues of hope, faith, and love, which are heavily used in first and second century CE Mediterranean Christian ethics.

like a “two steps forward and one step backwards” experience.²⁴ Trust in those who collaborate with us, and our own trustworthiness, is the basis for collaboration. I promote trust in the classroom by gradually sharing experiences (beginning with short spontaneous personal reflections on *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity*). This “scaffolds” the experience of collaboration by starting small yet building to larger collaborative and open presentations during the semester. Finally, care, defined as active work towards the other’s flourishing, locates collaborative comparative hagiology within relationships, in which the task serves the good of those with whom we work. The seven virtues I mention have a norming, an authoritative, shaping influence over our work together. Consequently, they promote scholarly and relational habits that I hope will shape the future of academic research in religious studies, including comparative and hagiological studies. I operate as somewhat of a referee in the early stages of the semester, “throwing flags” or “showing yellow cards”, for those who are not just, wise, temperate, courageous, hopeful, trusting and trustworthy, or caring. I try to do this in a fair manner and explain my actions when I do show a yellow card. I encourage the work and attitudes of those who learn and enact these virtues.

Naturally, the virtues relate to content. I circulate Smith’s, Freiburger’s, and Rondolino’s work on comparison for student reading in preparation for a subsequent classroom discussion on method, followed by carefully phrasing and parsing out our interaction with the “lives” that we read. I also discuss Rondolino’s work in reading groups or individual meetings with students who are particularly interested in comparative hagiology, with a view to them carrying out their final research projects in this area. The procedure outlined above may go some way to resolving the tensions between the hagiological (to do with saintliness and the holy) as well as the comparative tasks at hand, which are outlined in this volume by Jon Keune.²⁵

3. Models of Practice from Informal Comparative Conversations and Lived Religion

I would like to close this essay with two “models of practice” that I believe help shape a virtuous and collaborative mindset for our purposes.²⁶

3.1. Deliberate Border Crossing

The first is the idea of “deliberate border crossing”. The context in which I learnt to justly and respectfully engage with multiple religious expressions was Argentina. I grew up in Argentina and also worked there as an adult. Crossing the border to Brazil was a semi-regular occurrence that strongly generated my interest in comparative studies. As we drove over the bridge from one country to another, we moved into another religious imagination and way of life. Animistic and Roman Catholic Argentina gradually gave way to Brazil’s Umbanda and Candomblé, as well as their influences on Roman Catholicism. Even as a child I understood that “crossing the border” was a literal border crossing into Brazil, but it also functioned as a metaphor for moving into a slightly different, yet somewhat familiar religious worldview. There was overlap in belief between Argentina and Brazil in terms of shared heroes of faith, including Gauchito Gil (a Robin Hood-like figure) and his red coloured shrines. Yet, there are strong differences in song, dress, and focus with respect to the majority of other shrines dedicated to divine, spiritual, and living dead beings. If we are cognizant of deliberate border crossings in the task of comparative hagiology, we are less likely to make mistakes “looking over

²⁴ Aaron Hollander writes: “Recognizing the need for such metatheoretical reflection has led the comparative hagiology workshops into a kind of two-steps-forward-one-step-back rhythm, as every apparent agreement has been accompanied by the recognition that the agreement obscures differences in our working definitions of core problems and holds a tenuous common ground between different frameworks of scholarly sense-making” (Hollander 2019, pp. 3–4).

²⁵ (Keune 2019).

²⁶ This article is intended to raise some of the neglected ethical dimensions that comparativists and hagiographers often face. Due to essay length constraints, I cannot propose an ethically sound and constructive model that responds to the challenges I have outlined. However, my hope is to work with other scholars on a collaborative volume that explicitly outlines an ethical model framework for comparative hagiography.

the fence”, *because we are already over the fence*. A border crossing makes more likely the empathetic comparative work that Hollander and Clooney advocate.²⁷ As Kathryn McClymond understands it, comparative hagiology is a descriptive conversational craft.²⁸ It is also a craft into which we are apprenticed by social groups and individuals.²⁹ This apprenticeship requires an openness to being shaped by those we meet over the border: those we meet “looking over the fence”. Comparative hagiology is a conversation in which the only way to understand the stories of importance and their meaning for any given sub-culture, is via engagement on the other’s home turf.³⁰

3.2. *Modulating Our Accent*

The craft of communicating respect across the Argentina–Brazil border required time and hard work to develop, and I think could serve here as a good illustration of how comparativists may have to overcome unforeseen and unintended behaviours within their own mindset and method. I can illustrate this from my own experience. When, in Brazil, I engaged with local lived religions and the stories of people’s “great ones”, my only points for comparison were Argentine religions. In practice this meant that I was restricted to asking curious comparative questions from an Argentine point of view. As a child I assumed the Argentine perspectives were correct and the Brazilian ones were odd. However, as I matured, I became aware that the comparative questions I had asked as a child needed far more nuance. After an awkward conversation at a saint’s shrine, to my shame, I realized that the manner and mode of comparison mattered at least as much as how our interactions are interpreted by conversation partners. It was not primarily a question of knowledge, it struck me that *how I asked the question* also determined *how I came across* when I asked it, and hence how the conversation developed (or stalled!). I had to learn that the degree to which people were willing to share with me and then engage in comparative conversations was driven by whether or not they perceived that I would treat them with respect and justice. In a way that parallels the dangers of contemporary comparison across historically conflicted religious groups, it is important to note that, given my cultural location, this was particularly awkward and had inbuilt challenges.

Let me explain. I grew up in Buenos Aires, Argentina’s capital. Her native residents are known throughout Latin America as *Porteños*. This means that our Spanish has a very particular accent with its own series of inflections, a lot of unique slang, and the inclusion of a number of Italian words. It is also spoken in what non-Porteños oftentimes take to be an arrogant or harsh tone; questions sound like interrogations for the sake of information only. Consequently, *Porteños* are not often liked very much outside of Buenos Aires. The significance of this for comparative religious conversations began to dawn on me as a teenager. I began to realise that conversations about a local spiritual figure across the geographical and religious border would go better *if I modified my accent*. That is, if I spoke in a more generally Argentine (so not *Porteño*) manner, and in a more classically formal manner, then people behaved more warmly to me, and this included cross-religious dialogues. In other words, if I communicated as a respectful Argentine rather than “a certain kind” of Argentine, then a constructive religious conversation was more likely, whether it be at a bus stop at a shrine or a candle shop. This softening of my accent, and using a more formal manner with others, required a significant change to my Spanish. I even had to reorder words, for example. So, how questions were asked changed: they were asked in a gentler manner, in a more open-minded tone, and addressed the other person more politely. My questions hopefully did not come across as rude *Porteño* demands, which is

²⁷ (Clooney 2018, pp. 206–7; Hollander 2019).

²⁸ (McClymond 2018).

²⁹ “Ours is an apprenticeship profession [. . .] If we are lucky, we get to train with master craftsmen and craftswomen, watching over their shoulders [. . .] to see how they select the material they will work with, how they play with it, and how they bring the tools they have been trained to use to bear upon the “stuff” of religion. There is no single, correct method, although certain practices are common” (McClymond 2018, p. 5).

³⁰ I understand that when we are dealing with many cultures in the distant past our conversations will be indirect, mediated through material culture, literary products, and interpreters of these traditions, including scholars.

how Porteño “questioning” can often come across. My modification in how the question was asked, hopefully shaped how the question came across, and how I came across.

In a way that is suggestive for the academic task of comparison, I learnt that awareness of tone shifted the prospects for the whole enterprise. It applies to our basic disposition to other scholars, our willingness to shift from one perceptive framework to another, to listen for new tones over and above familiar ones, and to place ourselves in a posture of collaboration rather than competition.

4. Conclusions: Recognizing Virtues as Intrinsic to Successful Comparative Relationships

A new culture for comparative and collaborative hagiology is under development, and it will greatly benefit from a holistic view of its practitioners. To accomplish this, we need to grapple with who we are as scholars and as an emerging guild of specialists who comparatively and collaboratively work on hagiographical materials. We must be mindful of the fact that our lived experience will be expressed in our ongoing work towards developing “models” of best practice. Therefore, the best we can be and can do for each other at this early turn of a fresh movement in comparative studies is to encourage self-reflection on how our experiences shape and inform our work as researchers and educators. In so doing, we need to deliberately consider also how, vice versa, our work as researchers and educators shapes who we are *becoming* as whole persons. I hope we will be more able to skilfully and deliberately “move across borders”, as well as “shift our accents” in order to promote productive, collaborative, and comparative hagiographical work.

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