

Summary

BEDA VENERABILIS – VERAX HISTORICUS?

This paper analyses the terms *vera lex historiae* and *verax historicus* in the *Historia Ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum Bedae Venerabilis*. It discusses the opinion of a Czech translator of this work, Jaromír Kincl, who considers Bede Venerable basically a historian of modern type, sceptical to miracles and carrying out historical criticism of his sources on behalf of objective historical truth. Bede uses the term *vera lex historiae* for the first time in his *Expositio in Lucam*, in which he similarly to Jerome (*Adversus Helvidium*) suggests that even an erroneous or heretical *opinio vulgi* can serve a didactic purpose. In the *Historia Ecclesiastica* Bede perceives the *vera lex historiae* in a different sense. It is definitely not the “true law of history” but only a principle saying that the author can leave all responsibility for the factual to his sources (*fama*

⁵⁴ ADAMNANUS, *Vita S. Columbae*, III,6 (*Adomnan's Life of Columba*, eds. ALAN O. ANDERSON – MARJORIE O. ANDERSON, London 1961).

⁵⁵ EDDIUS STEPHANUS, *Vita Wilfrithi*, 37 (*The Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus*, ed. BERTRAM COLGRAVE, Cambridge 1927).

⁵⁶ WILLIAM D. MCCREADY, *Miracles and the Venerable Bede*, s. 233–234.

vulgans). The term *verax historicus* does not reflect this *vera lex historiae* – for Bede *verax historicus* has to give moral lessons and write instructive factual narrative in accordance to Christian (Roman) orthodoxy. Bede’s cautious selectivity of miracles, often acknowledged by scholars, is not caused by any scepticism to their reality. He mentions a considerable number of miracles in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* and also in his *Vita s. Cuthberti*, but his orthodoxy leads him to depend upon recognized parallels in authorised texts (above all the *Dialogorum libri IV* of Pope Gregory the Great). In order to find suitable didactic examples, Bede does not hesitate to use his sources and authorities (Adaman’s *Vita s. Columbae*, *Vita s. Wilfrithi*) and to adapt these or even create new analogies.

Keywords: Beda Venerabilis; *vera lex historiae*; *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*; *Vita Cuthberti*; miracles and historical criticism

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