Paul Peeters, S.J. (1870-1950)\textsuperscript{1}

Venance Grumel

Less than ten years after the death of Father Delehaye, the Société des Bollandistes and, with it, the world of scholarship, has suffered another loss, at least equally as sad. (18 August 1950).

The Reverend Father Paul Peeters was born in Tournai on 20 September 1870 to a family whose paternal line numbered some French ancestors. After brilliant studies at the Jesuit College in Tournai, he entered the famous Company in 1887. After his three years of philosophy, he was assigned to the high school of Tronchiennes for five years as a professor of his young fellow brethren. It was an eminently productive period for the maturation of his spirit and the formation of that humanism—in the full sense of the word—that is useful for everything, as St Paul says.

The young schoolmaster dreamed of far off missions: yet it was within library walls, at a work table, that he would pass his whole life. Rarely would religious obedience have better preserved a calling inscribed in his temperament and in the abundant gifts from both nature and the preparation that preceded his adulthood.

Ordained priest on 18 August 1901, in 1902, he offered his first article to the \textit{Analecta Bollandiana} and, after a stay in Beirut where he learned Arabic, he was officially assigned to the Bollandists on 31 July 1904. From then on, no volume of the journal appeared on which he had not extensively collaborated, with the exception of 1949 and 1950, which were offered to him in honor of his 80 years.

His field, which was still untouched at the time, was eastern hagiography. He was its tireless pioneer and soon its authoritative master. Four enormous volumes in folio of the \textit{Acta Sanctorum} bear his name along with those of his brethren. It is difficult to discern his role in the Propylaeum of December in which nothing indicates who worked on what; but in all the other volumes the initials P.P. accompany all the commentaries on eastern hagiographies. Furthermore, he assembled the \textit{Bibliographia Hagiographica Orientalis}, a priceless inventory modeled on the volume assembled by Père Delehaye for Greek hagiography. Another work \textit{Orient et Byzance. Le Tréfonds Orientale de l'hagiographie byzantine}, on which he was putting final touches and which will soon appear, should receive special note because it marks the culmination of an evolution and the expression of a precious discovery. It had been a firmly established principal that the origin of all eastern hagiography was Greek. The young Bollandist could only disagree. Little by little, his meticulous research and his critical sense caused a doubt to emerge which grew until finally the counter-evidence appeared that enabled him to recognize the existence of an original eastern hagiography from which Byzantine hagiography was the tributary.

\footnote{1 Translated by W.L. North from \textit{Revue des Études Byzantines} 9 (1951), 298-299.}
Meanwhile, by which I mean always, he devoted all his care to the *Analecta Bollandiana*. One might say that he identified with this publication. Beyond the articles themselves with which he enriched it, we must also mention the critical reviews which, for almost half a century, he offered the most competent and helpful judgment on a considerable number of works, so much so, in fact, that some think that this work is the more important.

It is worth noting that the author employed a very pure French, with regard to word usage and syntax, that was made to conform to the curve of his thought. His style was without redundancy or verbosity, it was precise and tightly constructed, though sometimes relieved by a bit of incisiveness, humor, or, even more, of impatience in the face of vanity or injustice.

The scholarly merits of Father Peeters have been recognized at home and abroad. He was Consulteur of the Sacred Congregation of Rites in the historical section from the time of its foundation in 1930; a member of the Belgian Academy, President of the Société belge d'études orientales, member of the Academie Romaine Pontificale d'Archéologie, doctor honoris causa of the Université de Strasbourg and Louvain, and foreign associate (by unanimous election) of the Academie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres.

The interdependence of Byzantine and eastern hagiography and the perfect knowledge that Father Peeters had of Byzantine history meant that Byzantinists and especially our Institute, to which he loved to indicate his esteem and goodwill, have special cause to lament his death and to lay upon his tomb, with the support of their prayers, the homage of their admiration and recognition.