THE RESEARCH QUEST: Types of Sources and How to Find Them

Detail of a miniature of a hermit at work on a manuscript, from the Estoire del Saint Graal, France (Saint-Omer or Tournai?), c. 1315 – 1325, Royal MS 14 E III, f. 6v
RESEARCH REQUIRES SOURCES
(DIRECT DIVINE ILLUMINATION IS UNFORTUNATELY NOT A COMMON OCCURRENCE)

St. Bridget's Eucharistic Vision, from St. Bridget of Sweden, Revelations and other texts, in Latin, Italy, Naples, Late 14th century
As you are doubtless aware, direct divine illumination is unfortunately not a common occurrence. The Almighty seems to be content working through more mundane means, which means that choosing appropriate, authoritative sources is essential.

St. Bridget's Eucharistic Vision, from St. Bridget of Sweden, Revelations and other texts, in Latin, Italy, Naples, Late 14th century
Like a good conversation, research is a give-and-take process of asking questions, going to sources for information, which leads to further questions and additional research FOREVER (not really – that is why God has graciously given us deadlines)

RESEARCH IS LIKE A SPIRAL
USING SOURCES IS WHAT MAKES RESEARCH A CONVERSATION INSTEAD OF A MONOLOGUE

A research paper is not a record of your experiences but a rigorous and engaging conversation with your sources and other scholars, guided by your thesis.
THREE TYPES OF SOURCES
You can find information on your topic in three types of sources: tertiary, primary, and secondary. These are sort of like third, second, and first person conversations:

- I can speak about myself (first person - primary),
- I can say something about “them” (third person – tertiary),
- or you and I can have a conversation (second person – secondary).
Has anyone here started a research project by going to the library and checking out a stack of books? If so, how many of the books that you checked out did you wind up actually using?
AND NOW I WILL SHOW YOU A MUCH BETTER WAY:
TERTIARY SOURCES

Francis of Assisi, St.
New Catholic Encyclopedia

Francis of Assisi, St.

Founder of the Order of Friars Minor, the Order of Saint Clare, and the Order of Brothers and Sisters of Penance. b. Assisi, c. 1182; d. there, Oct. 3, 1226.

His father, Pietro di Bernardone, was a wealthy merchant; his mother was Pica. He was baptized John, but was called Francesco, that is, Francis. Having received the usual liberal arts education of the period, he knew Latin and possessed some knowledge of French. His wealth and love of life made him a flamboyant leader of Assisi's youth. In the fighting between Assisi and Perugia he was imprisoned (1202–03). Afterwards, a debilitating illness brought him to a realistic awareness of his strengths and weaknesses. In 1205 he dreamed about joining a campaign against Apulia, but after a dream promising him glory, he changed his plans and at Spoleto returned to Assisi. Soon after, he met a leper and began a life of continuous conversion. A short while later, he entered the abandoned church of San Damiano on the outskirts of Assisi where he heard a voice from the cross calling him to rebuild the house of God. Taking his inheritance he used the money to fulfill the mandate. Severed relations with his father, and dramatically and publicly rechristened dependence on his father, Pietro. After hearing the missionary discourse in the Gospel of Matthew 10: 5–14 on Feb. 24, 1209, he embraced poverty and gave his life to preaching penance and peace.

Early Days of the Order. He began attracting followers and when there were a dozen, Francis drew up a form of life consisting of Gospel passages and some practical norms of living. Francis and his brothers presented the document to Pope Innocent III who approved it orally in 1209 or 1210. They then returned to the chapel of Our Lady of the Portiuncula (Santa Maria degli Angeli) in the valley below Assisi. Clare was invested there March 18–19, 1212 into a new way of life and thus the Second Order was founded. The preaching of Francis and his brothers initiated in Italy a strong penitential movement, which spread elsewhere among the laity, and later developed into the Third Order.
A QUICK introduction so you can determine whether you are interested in researching the topic.

TERTIARY SOURCES GIVE YOU

**Gregory IX** (c.1148–1241), Pope from 1227.

Count Ugolino of Sagra, a near relation of Innocent III, studied at Paris and Bologna. He was created Cardinal Deacon on the accession of Innocent in 1196, Cardinal Bp. of Ostia in 1206, and was employed as Papal legate on a series of diplomatic missions to Germany. In 1217 he was commissioned to preach a Crusade in northern, and later in central, Italy, from him the Emp. Frederick II took the Cross at his coronation (1220). Insisting on the immediate fulfilment of the vow as soon as he became Pope, he forced the Emperor to embark in 1227, excommunicated him (29 Sept.) when he returned a few days later, and refused his overtures for peace. When Frederick II sailed unrepentant (1228) he proclaimed an interdict over his lands and wherever he should go. After conducting an unsuccessful campaign against Sicily, he agreed in 1230 to the Treaty of San Germano with the Emperor, losing him from the ban. In 1239, however, he again excommunicated Frederick for invading Lombardy and usurping the rights of the Church in Sicily, tried to secure the election of an antiking and in 1241 summoned a General Council to Rome which Frederick II, however, prevented from meeting. He died while the Emperor was besieging Rome (22 Aug. 1241).

A personal friend of St Francis of Assisi, he was appointed Protector of the Franciscan Order as early as 1220 and assisted in the development of the Third Order. It was largely from the Dominicans and Franciscans that he drew the full-time inquisitors appointed from c.1233. He canonized St Francis in 1228, St Antony of Padua in 1232 and St Dominic in 1234. In 1230 he commissioned Raymond of Peñafort to collect the Papal decreals of the past hundred years in the so-called ‘Liber Extra’ (published in 1234) and in 1231 instructed William of Beaune to examine the works of Aristotle and prepare an orthodox edition to supersede the old Latin translation, the use of which had been forbidden in 1210 (‘Physics’) and 1215 (‘Metaphysics’). Throughout his pontificate he laboured unsuccessfully to effect a union with the E. Church.

**Bibliography**

- Find this resource:

G. Levi (ed.), *Registri dei Cardinali Ugolino d’Ostia e Ottaviano degli Ubalderi* (Fonti per la storia d’Italia, 8, 1890), 3–154.
- Find this resource:

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- Find this resource:

TERTIARY SOURCES GIVE YOU

A QUICK introduction so you can determine whether you are interested in researching the topic

A general sense of the topic, its context, and the major themes it represents

Gregory IX (c.1148–1241), Pope from 1227

Count Ugolino of Sarno, a near relation of Innocent III, studied at Paris and Bologna. He was created Cardinal Deacon on the accession of Innocent in 1198. Cardinal Bp. of Ostia in 1206, and was employed as Papal legate on a series of diplomatic missions to Germany. In 1217 he was commissioned to preach a Crusade in northern, and later in central, Italy; from him the Emp. Frederick II took the Cross at his coronation (1220). Insisting on the immediate fulfillment of the vow as soon as he became Pope, he forced the Emperor to embark in 1227, excommunicated him (29 Sept.) when he returned a few days later, and refused his overtures for peace. When Frederick II sailed unreconciled (1228) he proclaimed an interdict over his lands and wherever he should go. After conducting an unsuccessful campaign against Sicily, he agreed in 1230 to the Treaty of San Germano with the Emperor, removing him from the ban. In 1239, however, he again excommunicated Frederick for invading Lombardy and usurping the rights of the Church in Sicily, tried to secure the election of an antipope and in 1241 summoned a General Council to Rome which Frederick II, however, prevented from meeting. He died while the Emperor was besieging Rome (22 Aug. 1241).

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J. Fallet, Papst Gregor IX (1895).
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**Gregory IX (c.1148–1241), Pope from 1227**

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Primary sources are documents created by someone who was actually present at the event or who knew the participants in the event. A primary source is someone who experienced something first hand.

Francis’ autographed benediction for Brother Leo
Primary sources are the heart and soul of research.

Francis’ autographed benediction for Brother Leo
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Tertiary sources are important because they help introduce, contextualize, and lead to relevant primary sources.

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Tertiary sources are important because they help introduce, contextualize, and lead to relevant primary sources.

Secondary sources are important because they interpret primary sources.

Francis’ autographed benediction for Brother Leo
"PRIMARY" DOES NOT MEAN "OLD" OR "IN ITS ORIGINAL FORMAT"

This is a digital rendering of the text of the parchment manuscript. An electronic version of a translation of a primary source can be a primary source (depending on your topic and facility with the original languages).
We may not have anything written in Jesus’ handwriting, like Francis’ autographed benediction, but we do have enough evidence, such as early manuscripts and records of oral tradition, to regard the New Testament as a credible primary source for the life of Jesus and the early Church.
The goal is not necessarily finding the oldest sources available; an item can be a really good primary source, but it might not be the best source for your specific quest.

Nor is it wise to accumulate vast numbers of resources of varying degrees of quality and relevance.

The aim is not merely to find sources, but to find the right sources for your project.

“it doesn’t have to fit!
It’s the most expensive ring I could find!”
“PRIMARY” IS RELATIVE TO THE SCOPE AND FOCUS OF YOUR PAPER

The Longest Day; Israel's Enemies Humiliated, Old Testament miniatures with Latin, Persian, and Judeo-Persian inscriptions from the Crusader Bible or the Morgan Picture Bible, France, Paris, 1240s
Clearly this would be a secondary source, a later interpretation, if you were studying either the book of Joshua or bronze age Canaan; yet this would be a primary source if you were writing a paper on medieval biblical illumination.

Note also that “sources” are not necessarily written: paintings, coins, sculpture, and other artifacts – even buildings – can provide information you can use to support your thesis.
SECONDARY SOURCES
SECONDARY SOURCES ARE SYNTHESIS BY SCHOLARS IN THE FIELD. THEY ARE BASED ON PRIMARY SOURCES, BUT ARE NOT PRIMARY SOURCES THEMSELVES.

“On second thought, let’s not go to Camelot. ‘tis a silly place.”
Secondary sources can present multiple perspectives on a topic.

They give you a sense of the overall story from beginning to end.

And they include analysis of the event—its causes, consequences, ramifications, etc.
TANGENT: PRESUPPOSITIONS

Bias

Ignore it, Jefferies.
It's unscientific
Secondary sources – like all sources – reflect the author’s point of view, and we must take this into account when evaluating the author’s argument or analysis.

It is best to take a stance of “critical humility” toward our sources – to trust them insofar as our knowledge of the available evidence allows, while subjecting them to rigorous cross-examination by comparing them with other interpretations.

Sources are innocent until proven guilty. (NB – it equally important to allow sources to critically evaluate our presuppositions in the course of the give-and-take spiral of scholarly conversation, i.e., research)
YOU ARE CREATING A SECONDARY SOURCE
FINDING SOURCES
One of the best ways to find primary sources is to look up your topic in a good, subject-specific dictionary or encyclopedia (tertiary sources) and check the bibliography, which should direct you to authoritative critical editions and translations.

**FINDING SOURCES USING BIBLIOGRAPHIES**

### Bibliography

The authentic writings of Francis are all quite short and their canon is still not fixed. They include two Rules (the 'Regula Prima' and the 'Regula Bullata'), the Rule for those living in hermitages ('Regula pro Eremitoribus'), the Testament, 28 Admonitions, 8 letters, the 'Salutation of the BVM' and other liturgical works, and the 'Canticle of the Sun'. The earliest collected edn. is that of L. Wadding, OFM (Antwerp, 1623, often repr.).

Crit. edn. by K. Esser, OFM (Spicilegium Bonaventurianum, 13; Grottaferrata, 1976; also, with less full apparatus, Bibliotheca Franciscana Ascetica Medii Aevi, 12; ibid., 1978).

- Find this resource:

Earlier edn. of works in Lat. by the Franciscans at Quaracchi (ibid. 1, 1904; 3rd edn., 1949) and H. Behemer and others (Tübingen and Leipzig, 1904; 3rd edn., 1961).

- Find this resource:

Esser's text is repr. with Fr. tr., introd. and notes by T. Desbonnels, OFM, and others (SC 285; 1981).

- Find this resource:


- Find this resource:

J. Meyer, OFM (Chicago, 1952).

- Find this resource:


- Find this resource:

B. Fahy, OFM (ibid. [1964]), and

- Find this resource:


Of course, a bibliography will only help you if you are able to find the sources listed there, and you will have much more success finding these sources if you can decipher the citations (i.e., know whether you are looking for a book or a journal article or an essay in a book).


If you see a city and publisher, you are looking for an ESSAY in a BOOK
FINDING SOURCES USING CALL #S
LIBRARY BOOKS ARE ARRANGED BY SUBJECT, AND THESE ARE REPRESENTED BY CALL NUMBERS

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See the Sophi Search help page for more information
The premier database for finding scholarly journal articles and essays is the Atla Religion Database [NB – gaining access to this interface also will enable you to select other databases from this vendor/publisher – EBSCO]
Sometimes you will be able to gain access to full-text content; sometimes the database will only tell you that an article or essay or book exists and give you the clues you need to hunt it down.

La chasse au cerf, an illustration from *Livre de la Chasse*, written, or rather dictated to a scribe from 1387 to 1389 by Gaston Phoebus, Count of Foix.
The second trumpet depicted in the 14th century *Cloister Apocalypse*, Metropolitan Museum of Art
While it can be useful to know the difference between types of sources, just like it can be useful to know the difference between different building materials, they mainly useful because of what you can do with them.
Tertiary sources are like a map: use them to get a broad overview of your topic and for contextual and background information. This will help spark questions such as “in what ways did the English Civil War affect the CofE’s response to Wesley?” or “Why was the 13th cent RCC able to successfully integrate reform movements like the Dominicans and Franciscans, whereas the 16th cent RCC was unable to do so?”
Primary sources are foundational; they provide basis upon which you build your thesis.

This requires close reading, informed by the background and contextual information gleaned from tertiary sources, and detailed analysis.

This will prompt questions such as “what is that elephant doing there?” “why does she want to shoot it with a crossbow?” “what is the illustrator trying to depict, or say?”

PRIMARY SOURCES:
DATA OBTAINED THROUGH INFORMED, CLOSE READING AND DETAILED ANALYSIS

Woman armed with crossbow draws a bead on knights in an elephant castle. One of the knights seems to be shrugging.
Smithfield decretals. 1300-1340
SECONDARY SOURCES: CONVERSATION PARTNERS
It is OK – even necessary – to critically analyze the writings of authorities in your field; research is not a matter of humbly groveling before lofty immortals, nor should it be a thoughtless exercise of revolutionary iconoclasm.
Like a good conversation, research is a give-and-take process of

• looking at the information provided by primary sources,
• expressing your own ideas, and
• allowing others (other secondary sources) to offer their own interpretations in ways that either challenge or confirm you ideas, compelling you to re-evaluate them.
This is why it is essential to base your research on direct interaction with primary sources, and to keep going back to your primary sources, so when you enter into the conversation with other researchers and interpreters, you will have something to say, and a basis for saying it.
Writing a research paper is sort of like a work of representational art:
Writing a research paper is sort of like a work of representational art: Primary sources are the “subject” – they are “what” you are representing - and your paper itself is your representation – both description and interpretation – of this “subject.”
Each of these Madonnas is an interpretation, and each draws upon and reflects the historical-cultural presuppositions – dress, ethnicity, etc. – of the artist, yet each also represents the subject: the Christ Child and his Mother, the Virgin Mary.
Each of these Madonnas is an interpretation, and each draws upon and reflects the historical-cultural presuppositions – dress, ethnicity, etc. – of the artist, yet each also represents the subject: the Christ Child and his Mother, the Virgin Mary.

Your paper, your interpretation of the primary sources, both reflects your own historical-cultural context and presuppositions, and strives to faithfully represent your subject as you are able to gain access to it by means of primary sources.
Until the 20th century, the scholarly consensus seems to have been that the Crusades were primarily motivated by religious zeal, manifest in violence toward members of other religions. Under the influence of Marxism, Jones and other 20th century scholars began to appreciate the economic factors that may have motivated some to go on crusade. For example, Rameous compares the economic activity evidenced in Venice before and after the period of the crusades (11th-13th centuries). However, based on close readings of contemporary chronicles and first-hand accounts, more recent scholars have found that neither economics, nor religious hatred were primary motivations. Rather, the primary impetus seems to have been piety, and the crusaders largely thought of themselves as pilgrims and crusades as a form of penance. As Flemmish knight Guy de’Orlean relates to his personal chronicler . . .
ASK (FOR HELP), AND YE SHALL RECEIVE

Your librarians are here to help!

David Schmersal
dschmersal@austinseminary.edu

Contact us any time at libraryiq@austinseminary.edu with any questions.