

'Thomas Becket, the "Lives": what to look for and what to think about'

I would suggest that you prepare for our discussion by looking either at Frank Barlow, *Thomas Becket*, pp. 1-9, or John Guy, *Thomas Becket*, pp. xiii-xix, to get some idea of the number of lives of Thomas that were written, by whom, and when. You could then focus on one of them. Critical questions to ask are:

WHO? Who wrote this life? There are a number to choose from. Ask yourself what kind of person this was. Was he a monk or a cleric? Was he known to Archbishop Thomas and / or to Henry II? Was he an observer? Or was he a participant in the action? These questions are critical if we are to understand his 'positioning' and the way in which he presented or represented events.

WHERE? Where was the author based at the time of the events he narrates and at the time of writing? Is this a Canterbury source, or was the author writing at a place that had Canterbury connections? Is this going to affect our reading?

WHEN? How soon (or not) after the events he was narrating is the author writing? Was he an eye-witness or did he rely on the testimony of others?

WHY? Why did our authors put pen to paper (or quill to parchment)? What was their purpose in writing and how might that have affected the way in which they portrayed events?

HOW? How did they construct their narratives? What sources might they have drawn on? Did they make use of symbolism and analogy?

You could also take a particular passage and consider it in relation to these questions.

I hope you are going to enjoy your reading.