We are lucky to know far more about Walter of Châtillon than many of his peers, such as the mysterious Archpoet. In addition to autobiographical details attested in his works, we have several lives and lengthy glosses with biographical information. Glosses accompanying his lyrics often give details about the circumstances of their composition or presentation. Our sources, however, are not consistent and are sometimes demonstrably wrong. Poets’ lives, moreover, are particularly susceptible to the biographical fallacy, and the more striking the anecdote, the more suspicious we should be.

The account that follows is a modified version of the general consensus. It cannot be conclusive: Carsten Wollin is in the process of producing a new edition of Walter’s saints’ lives for the Corpus Christianorum, and his existing publications indicate that he is reviewing the manuscript evidence for Walter’s life, with results that will challenge the current narrative. The following account is based mainly on the lives and glosses edited by Marvin Colker in the introduction to his edition of the Alexandreis and the scattered biographical evidence contained in the works themselves. Walter was born in the vicinity

1 Gaulteri de Castellione carmina, CCCM 167/1: Vitae sanctorum rhythmicae (Turnhout, forthcoming). See C. Wollin, “Das Festgedicht Si de fonte bibere für den Glossator Martinus Gosia und seinen Sohn Wilhem—ein unbekanntes Frühwerk Walters von Châtillon?” Zeitschift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte 110 (2002), 266–68, for example, where he argues that we can date the prosimetrum delivered at Bologna to 1175/76 or even as late as 1177.

2 Walter of Châtillon, Alexandreis, M.L. Colker (ed.), (Padua, 1978): Vita 1 (Oxford, Exeter College, 69, A.D. 1290), p. xii; Vita 2 (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, lat. 8359, s. 13), pp. xii–xiii; Vita 2a (Laon, Bibliothèque Municipale, 401, s. 13), p. xiii; a biographical note in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, lat 8359 at the end of the Alexandreis, pp. xv–xvi, and a fourth Vita (Erfurt, Wissenschaftliche Allgemeinbibliothek der Stadt Erfurt, Amplon. 8° 90, s. 13²), p. xvii. Despite the attribution to the poet by Vita 2a, the apparently autobiographical poem reported by Vita 2a was
of Lille, one life specifying Ronchin as the town of his birth.³ Walter studied in Paris under Stephen of Beauvais; one life adding that Walter studied with him at Rheims as well.⁴ Walter taught at a place called Castellio, probably Châtillon-sur-Marne, just south of Rheims. Here Walter wrote his treatise against the Jews, and according to one life, poetry (*quedam ludicra*).⁵ One life adds that he taught at Laon, again, not far from Rheims.⁶ Walter abandoned teaching the liberal arts to study law at Bologna.⁷ One life asserts that he was discouraged by the excess of effort and lack of practical reward involved in the liberal arts.⁸ He entered the service of the archbishop of Rheims, the first vita identifying the archbishop more precisely as William of Sens and Walter’s position as *notarius* and *orator*. This is William of Champagne (a.k.a. Guillaume des Beaux Mains), from the powerful house of Champagne-Blois, son of the count of Champagne, brother-in-law of Louis VII and uncle of Philip II Augustus, regent of France during the third crusade. William had been bishop of Sens before being elected to the see of Rheims in 1176. The *Alexandreis* is in fact dedicated to him (*Alexandreis* 1.12–26) after he had accepted the see of Rheims (*Alex*. 1.17). The lives note that Walter wrote the *Alexandreis* in honor of William or at his behest. The first letters of each book of the *Alex*. spell William’s Latin name, Guillermus. Two lives agree that William then made Walter a canon, according to one of Amiens, to another of Beauvais.⁹ He also wrote a lyric (*Ver pacis aperit, Saint-Omer* 30)¹⁰ to commemorate the coronation in 1179 of

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⁴ For a possible identification of Stephen of Beauvais, see J. Williams, “The Quest for the Author of the ‘Moralium Dogma Philosophorum’,” *Speculum* 32 (1957), 740–41. For Rheims, see *Vita* 2a.


⁶ For Laon, see *Vita* 2a.


⁸ *Vita* 2.

⁹ Amiens: *Vita* 2; Beauvais, *Vita* 2a.