

CALCIFIED SANCTITY

*Belief and Affect in the Veneration of Early
Medieval Relics*

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April 15, 2023

Undergraduate Senior Honors Thesis
Completed in Partial Fulfillment of A.B.
Department of Religious Studies, Brown University

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Acknowledgements

I must first thank the faculty of the Department of Religious Studies, whose lessons have made my life profoundly richer and imparted a deep sense of meaning that I will always carry with me. I thank Professor Stephen Bush for his guidance in learning the theories and methods of religious studies, a foundation that has guided and grounded my work, Professor Jason Protass for the community that he built and for the dedication, care, and levity with which he mentored us all, and Professor Susan Harvey for her mentorship and counsel, and for introducing me to the ancient texts that remain alive in my heart and mind.

I would also like to thank my professors from the Department of the History of Art and Architecture, Professor Erica Kinias and Professor Jeffrey Moser, whose collective passion and devotion to their fields inspired in me a reverence for the material stuff of our world. They have taught me, in the words of Zhou Dongqing, an immutable lesson: in order “to probe the subtleties of the ordinary, we must describe the indescribable.”

I also am immensely grateful for my primary advisor Professor Jae Han and my second reader Professor Sheila Bonde. Professor Han has provided me with insightful and incisive advice throughout this past year, helping me to think and write with greater depth and nuance than I ever have before. The breadth of Professor Bonde’s expertise and her eagerness to share it, all while on sabbatical, has been similarly essential to this thesis.

This thesis would not have been written if it weren’t for the support and care extended by every member of the religious studies senior class and our writing proctor, Chavi Banker. The wisdom and thoughtfulness of my fellow students deeply reflects the humanism inculcated in those who engage with the questions religious studies posits. I am forever grateful for the community and friendship I’ve found in the Department.

Lastly, I owe an immense debt of gratitude to my family. This process has been one of the most rewarding aspects of my life in college, and it would not have been possible without their encouragement and support. To my parents especially, thank you.

Introduction

The medieval cult of relics turned on a dialectic of divine immediacy. This thesis seeks to parse the methods by which immediacy was facilitated by examining venerators' engagement with sacred relics in the early and high Middle Ages. A "relic" (Latin *reliquiae*, "leftovers," "physical remains") refers to the material remains of a saint after their death, as well as to the sacred objects that had been in contact with their body.¹ Relics were housed in artful containers referred to as reliquaries and venerated in ritualized liturgies and private devotions. Immediacy denotes the meeting of devotee and divine in the presence of relics and their reliquaries. It engenders the simultaneous holding of the unmediated and the mediated – a moment of contact, coexistence, and conversation between interior and exterior, earth and heaven. This definition of "immediacy" is best articulated by scholar of East Asian literature Michael Fuller, who writes "At the end of the chain of exchanges that occur well below the threshold of consciousness comes the moment of fusion of inside and outside, self and Other," a moment in which categories of inner and outer, subject and object collapse.² While Fuller locates immediacy in the work of Chinese literati, this thesis seeks to examine and delineate the immediacy inherent in the lives of Christian relics and reliquaries in the Western medieval world.

In this thesis, I will argue that relic rituals engaged both the mind and the body in their facilitation of divine immediacy. I will primarily engage the work of three scholars: St. Augustine (whose thought was especially omnipresent in the early and high Middle Ages),

¹ Wilfrid Bonser, "The Cult of Relics in the Middle Ages," *Folklore* 73, no. 4 (1962): pp. 234-256, 234.

² Michael A. Fuller, "Pursuing the Complete Bamboo in the Breast: Reflections on a Classical Chinese Image for Immediacy," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 53, no. 1 (1993), pp. 5-23, 6-7.

Donovan Schaefer (a contemporary scholar of religion and affect theory) and Robert Sharf (a scholar of Buddhism and the methodologies of religious studies). In the first chapter, I argue that relics engaged the mind through their reliance on a lineage of belief and on a uniquely Christian visuality. I trace the history of the cult of relics to explicate the beliefs that justified their use and place their history in conversation with Augustinian theories of cognition that explained how venerators should engage with the material world. In the second chapter, I argue that relics also engaged the body through their affective presence. I examine theories of Christian materiality and argue that the material rhetoric utilized by reliquaries enacted affective, pre-cognitive flows of power through the bodies of venerators. In the third chapter, I argue that the seemingly incompatible theories introduced in the first and second chapters coalesce in the ritual lives of relics. I explore accounts of relic rituals and analyze them through Sharf's ritual framework. I argue that the divine immediacy experienced in the presence of relics was made alive by ritual – moments in which the somatic and the cerebral (affect and belief) coalesced. Due to the breadth of my argument, I rely on a diverse array of relics and rituals to thematize the experiences they elicited, ranging from the French reliquary bust of Ste. Foy de Conques to an English amuletic ring that once held a relic of the True Cross.

There existed a substratum of divine instantaneity beneath the surface of the relics explored throughout this thesis – through the ritual use of relics, channels of communion between devotee and divine were immediately enacted. In the context of relics and their reliquaries, two categories were collapsed in the experience of immediacy: sight and apprehension. As Michael Fuller writes,

The essential is not *within* the phenomenal, and no vision, no matter how discerning, will lead from the actual to the ideal. Indeed, the two modes of seeing, though analogous, require two different organs of sight, one merely physical, the other metaphysical.³

As will be argued throughout this thesis, relics relied on both physical sight and a mode of metaphysical sight in aiding their viewers to locate from the phenomenal the “essential” and the “ideal” – in other words, the divine, intercessory presence suggested by and contained within reliquaries. Gerard of Arras, eleventh-century Bishop of Cambrai, spoke to these two modes of seeing:

The mind of the inner man is to be aroused through that visible image [of the cross], on which the passion and death of Christ [which he] assumed for us is inscribed as if on the membrane of the heart ... Likewise, the images of saints are permitted ... not that they should be adored by humankind, but so that through them minds are excited interiorly to contemplation of the working of divine grace.⁴

As visual repositories of the divine and as material manifestations of immaterial presence, relics and reliquaries functioned as the cross did in the eyes of Gerard of Arras: relics were both seen and seen through, arousing aesthetic empathy while visually signifying that which they could not be. They simultaneously engaged the bodies of venerator and their belief-laden imaginal potentials.

It is within this dual-natured visuality of early medieval relics and reliquaries that an example of a religious phenomenon that relies on both the belief-oriented and the affective realms of religion is found. As such, the cult of relics challenges both the purely belief-driven understandings of cognition and apprehension proposed by figures such as Augustine and the purely materialist readings of spiritual experience suggested by scholars such as Donovan Schaefer. It instead suggests the possible integration of the two within Sharf’s theory of ritual.

³ Fuller, 8.

⁴ Herbert L. Kessler, *Experiencing Medieval Art*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 209.

Saint Victricius, fifth-century bishop of Le Mans, in an appraisal of saints' beneficence, wrote:

Come then, brethren, let us pour out for the sacred relics the words of psalms steeped in honey and milk. Let sobriety drunk on vigils and fasting beg for the cleansing of sins. Let us draw the saints' favor towards us in the fervor of their arrival. Their dwellings are on high but let us invoke them as guests.⁵

The full complexity of relics is evident in Victricius's appeal. Bodies, belief, aesthetics, and affect all coalesce in a sensorially laden moment of divine invocation. Through the careful delineation and broad integration of these often-contradictory categories, the essential lives of relics may be revealed in the immediacy of materialized divinity, of calcified sanctity.

⁵ Saint Victricius, and Gillian Clark, "Victricius of Rouen: Praising the Saints," *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, no. 3 (1999), 382.

I. A Relic Theology, the Role of Belief, and the Spiritual Senses

Within the gilded confines of a medieval reliquary, what distinguished an unremarkable bone from a sacred one having belonged to a martyr? Why exactly were specific bones believed to harbor calcified sanctity, to refract divinity through marrow? The bone's backstory and that backstory's theological context provides one component of a holistic answer. The full apprehension of relics in the early Middle Ages depended on a viewer's cultivated spiritual sight (the filtering of carnal vision through the lens of Christian belief). Relics were semantically charged objects – they were laden with histories and theologies that enabled their proper veneration. Through this perspective, belief played an essential role in relics' exercise of spiritual, suasive power. To elucidate the role of belief in the lives of these material objects, I will trace the development of the Christian idea that the bone of a martyr, an ascetic, or a saint could be imbued with tangible holiness. I will examine the evolution of this belief from its biblical origins, its prominence in the arenas of martyrdom and asceticism, its Roman, Greek, and Jewish contexts, and the Augustinian thought that theologically grounded it in the eyes of the early medieval church. Through this process, a graceful arc of belief will emerge, upon which the medieval relic squarely rests and from which the relic partially derives its religious authority. Here, an essential component of early medieval Christian experience is obviated: within the medieval understandings of cognition, the spiritual senses, and belief, a sacred object's story and its theological underpinnings preceded its treatment as such.

“If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well”¹: The Biblical Basis of Relics

The cult of relics is conspicuously absent from the bible; there is no mention of the use of relics in liturgy, no descriptions of reliquaries, and no explicit explanation of their ability to transmit holiness.² Despite this absence, there exists an extensive foundation for relics’ emergence in Late Antiquity as justified by early church theologians and philosophers, whose writings heavily influenced the medieval conceptualization of relics.³ There are two central biblical motifs that explain and justify the veneration of body relics: stories of bodily sanctity and stories of healing through contact with sacred bodies. In Late Antiquity, the latter depended on the former, as a relic’s capacity to perform miracles depended on the sanctity of the body from which it came.

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.”⁴ The idea of bodily sanctity was rooted in the Incarnation, a doctrine accepted by the church at the First Council of Nicaea that formalized the belief that Christ was both fully God and fully human.⁵ As such, Christ was the prototypical sacred body. His was a holy body (God incarnate), a suffering body (tortured and killed by the Romans), and an aspirational body (an example of cultivatable, corporeal sanctity). As an embodiment of resurrection, Christ’s body was sacrosanct and

¹ Mark 5:27.

² Robert Wiśniewski, *The Beginnings of the Cult of Relics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 9.

³ Eric Saak, “Augustine in the Western Middle Ages to the Reformation,” in *A Companion to Augustine*, ed. Mark Vessey, (Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), pp. 465-477, 465.

⁴ Philippians 2:5-8.

⁵ Mark Edwards, “The First Council of Nicaea,” in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, ed. Walter Simons and Miri Rubin, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 552-567, 556.

represented the body and soul one could possess if one believed in his being God: “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live.”⁶ Salvation was made accessible through a paradigm of belief, enacting a mimetic tradition in which believers in Christ imitated his life and death to achieve his same sacrality. The apostle Paul articulated this belief, writing in his letter to the Philippians that “[Christ] will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.”⁷ This belief is also evident in 2 Corinthians, in which Paul argues for the sacred potentiality of Christian bodies, “[We are] always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies.”⁸

Attempts to fully understand the biblical notion of bodily sanctity were the subject of much philosophical and theological discourse. For some Christians, the conjoining of Christ’s resurrection, theories of the mortality of the body and its function after death, and of the relation between body and soul all coalesced around a physical understanding of the resurrected body during the fifth century.⁹ This was an Augustinian innovation, the product of a theology proposed by Augustine, Bishop of Hippo. In “On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis,” he argued against the notion that resurrection was simply a spiritual existence, insisting that the apostle Paul, in his New Testament texts, “had simply meant that the *corruptibility* of the flesh would not survive into the resurrection, but that the substance of the flesh itself would indeed endure in that kingdom, where the flesh would be incorruptible.”¹⁰ The Augustinian idea that

⁶ John 11:25.

⁷ Philippians 3:20-21.

⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:10.

⁹ David Hunter, “Augustine on the Body,” in *A Companion to Augustine*, ed. by Mark Vessey, (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 353–64, 356.

¹⁰ Hunter, 355.

sacred bodies, cultivated through extreme devotion to Christ, represented the complete union of body and soul and possessed incorruptible flesh formed the basis for the veneration of body relics. According to Pauline theology, the earthly body is the “body of death.” It is perishable, physical, and subject to the vagaries of one’s animalistic desires.¹¹ Conversely, a sacred body was composed of incorruptible flesh, and as such was imperishable and “spiritual.”¹² So, as Christ was resurrected, his body was fully intact and present, yet his flesh was incorruptible. The same would be true for those holy, earthly figures who in imitating Christ’s life and death earned for themselves salvation. Augustine’s word *persona* encapsulates this complex idea: the full union of body and soul analogous to the union of humanity and divinity in Christ. As he writes in book twenty-two of *City of God*:

How wonderful will be that body which will be completely subdued to the spirit, will receive from the spirit all that it needs for its life, and will need no other nourishment! It will not be animal; it will be a spiritual body, possessing the substance of flesh, but untainted by any carnal corruption.¹³

Utilizing the Pauline articulation of a spiritual body, Augustine argues for the abnegation of carnality’s influence, thus speaking to the corruptibility of the physical, material world. As in the bible, where sacred bodies performed miracles demonstrative of God’s power and presence, so too did these cultivated sacred bodies possess thaumaturgical prowess – all centered around touch and physical contact with the divine.

In both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, there is an emphasis on physical contact between sacred bodies and ill bodies in enacting miracles of healing.¹⁴ In the Hebrew

¹¹ Romans 7:24.

¹² 1 Corinthians 15:44.

¹³ Hunter, 362.

¹⁴ John Wortley, “The Origins of Christian Veneration of Body-Parts,” *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, no. 1 (2006), pp. 5-28, 10.

Bible, notable instances of healing occur in stories of Elijah and Elisha in the Books of Kings. In most accounts, divine intervention occurs after an outpouring of affective sentiment by the devotee.

After this the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became ill; his illness was so severe that there was no breath in him ... [Elijah] stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried out to the Lord, 'O Lord my God, let this child's life come into him again.' The Lord listened to the voice of Elijah; the life of the child came into him again, and he revived.¹⁵

Two elements of this narrative are relevant. The act of Elijah stretching himself over the child and the valid concomitant assumption that he physically touched the child speaks to the centrality of contact in these biblical stories. The miraculous moment of healing occurs only after contact is initiated and Elijah releases an affective cry to God. Touch and affective energy seem to be consistently present. A similar narrative of healing through contact is seen in 2 Kings:

When Elisha came into the house, he saw the child lying dead on his bed ... Then he got up on the bed and lay upon the child, putting his mouth upon his mouth, his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands; and while he lay bent over him, the flesh of the child became warm.¹⁶

In the New Testament, Christ's ministerial career mirrored these Old Testament healing stories. For example, in the Gospel of Luke:

Once, when he was in one of the cities, there was a man covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he bowed with his face to the ground and begged him, 'Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean.' Then Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, 'I do choose. Be made clean.' Immediately the leprosy left him.¹⁷

Here we see again an emotional plea to a holy figure coupled with physical contact. Similar examples recur throughout the Gospels. In the Gospel of John:

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth ... he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, 'Go, wash in

¹⁵ 1 Kings 17:17-22.

¹⁶ 2 Kings 13:20-21.

¹⁷ Luke 5:12-13.

the pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.¹⁸

In the Gospel of Mark, a woman who had suffered from hemorrhages for twelve years heard of Christ's thaumaturgical powers, saying "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well."¹⁹ In touching the garments of Christ, she was healed. Through a close reading of this text, the flow of power can be read to directly emanate from Christ. His healing *dynamis* (an inherent power and potential in the ancient Greek sense) leaves his body as the woman touches the garment; the garment itself was not the source of sacrality.²⁰ The porosity of Christ's sanctity is critical – the flow of divine energy from relics and reliquaries mirrored the emanation of Christ's healing powers as chronicled in Mark, reinforcing the reliance of reliquaries' authority on its biblical foundations. Figures such as the apostle Paul, while not God incarnate, were described as being similarly capable of performing miraculous acts through objects that had come into contact with them: "God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that when the handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were brought to the sick, their diseases left them, and the evil spirits came out of them."²¹ The power of transference emerges in these stories: the healing power of God was diffused through holy bodies, transforming even inert objects into sources of sanctity capable of relieving suffering and performing the miraculous.

Augustine provided a theological basis for these miraculous transferences. "We cannot deny that many miracles were wrought to confirm that one grand and health-giving miracle of

¹⁸ John 9:1, 4-7.

¹⁹ Mark 5:25-34.

²⁰ Candida Moss, "The Man with the Flow of Power: Porous Bodies in Mark 5:25–34," *The Journal of Biblical Literature* 129, no. 3 (2010), pp. 507-519, 510.

²¹ Acts 19:11-12.

Christ's ascension to heaven with the flesh in which he rose," wrote Augustine.²² Thus, in the miraculous healings of the bible there existed the bearing witness to and proving of God's power in the world, as well as the idea that spiritual figures (ranging from Elijah to Christ to Paul) could enact this power through their unique connection to God and use it to heal the sick. In all instances, the physicality of this enaction is emphasized, revealing how through touch and contact a channel of communion with the divine was generated and thaumaturgically utilized.

There existed, then, an extensive biblical foundation for the belief that bodies could possess a healing dynamis that could be conducted from the living body to perform miracles. This foundation was relevant to the veneration of relics due to its continued interpretation by figures such as Augustine, who utilized the aforementioned narratives to theologically justify church practices.²³ The broad belief, held by certain Christians like Augustine, that served this function was thus: the body was a site of transformation and a locus of spiritual power; bodily sanctity was possessed and transmitted by holy figures, turning inanimate garments into objects infused with the sacrality needed to transform sick bodies into healthy ones. By centering the idea that bodies held the potential to function as depositories of miraculous powers, the theologies that justified the cult of relics placed their veneration within an authoritative lineage of Christian stories of miraculous healings. As such, relics possessed and utilized the same *dynamis* that was suffused through Christ's body. The use of individual body parts was further explicated, with early theories of relics explaining how even the smallest fragment of a sacred body could possess the same level of *dynamis* possessed by the full bodies of biblical figures.

²² Saint Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods, (2017), 779.

²³ Charles Freeman, *Holy Bones, Holy Dust: How Relics Shaped the History of Medieval Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 11.

Theodoret of Cyrrhus, fourth-century bishop of Cyrus, articulated this idea in a sermon, stating that “In spite of the fact that the body is divided, the grace remains undivided, and the smallest particle of relics has the power equal to that of an undivided martyr.”²⁴ Since the emergence of the veneration of relics in Late Antiquity, the corpses and inanimate body parts of martyrs, ascetics, and saints shared the same dynamis that Elijah, Christ, and Paul possessed due to the status that they earned in life and that enabled their veneration in death: they were sacred bodies cultivated through acts of devotion that mirrored the life and death of Christ.

Acts of Mimetic Devotion: Martyrdom and Asceticism in Early Christianity

Your cruelties, each more refined than the last, achieve nothing. They attract others to our school. Each time you mow us down, you increase our number: the blood of Christians is seed. Many of you preach endurance of pain and death: Cicero in the *Tusculans*, Seneca in *Chance*, Diogenes, Pyrrho, Callinicus. But their words do not find as many followers as the Christians do in teaching by actions.²⁵

These words, written by Christian apologist Tertullian in 197 CE, function as a martyrrium, encapsulating the suffering of martyrs within a sepulchral theology of victorious death. The Christian confidence in salvation through death placed martyrdom in a salvific frame. Accounts of martyrdoms were rhetorically inflected to advance this notion of victorious death; however, the historicity of these narratives is secondary to the theology they reflect. The many accounts of martyrdoms in Late Antiquity focus intimately on the torture and death of captive Christians, serving to emphasize the serene courage of martyrs amidst intense bodily suffering.²⁶ This narrative emphasis on bodily pain had a theological basis, as it enabled the martyr to imitate and share in the physical suffering of Christ. In doing so, martyrs reenacted and embodied his

²⁴ Wiśniewski, 194.

²⁵ Gillian Clark, *Christianity and Roman Society*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 38.

²⁶ Clark, 38-47.

crucifixion, thereby transforming their own bodies into spiritual bodies composed of his same incorruptible flesh.²⁷ This transformation of flesh directly preceded the treatment of corpses as holy – once a body had partook in Christ’s death, it, and its relics, became charged with a healing and protective power, an immense spiritual force.²⁸ Victricius, fourth-century bishop of Rouen, elevated the sacred bodies of martyrs to the essence of God, writing that “[Martyrs’ bodies] are the same as the highest power and the absolute and ineffable substance of godhead.”²⁹ Examples of martyrdoms provide insight into this theology, the doctrine of transformable bodies, and the earliest sources of body relics used by the western church.

Polycarp, second-century bishop of Smyrna, in a narrative that deeply recalled Christ’s own Passion, was martyred in the second century. After being betrayed by an associate (whose own fate was similar to Judas’), Roman authorities captured the Christian bishop and forced him to state that the emperor was divine. Refusing to renounce his faith, his captors attached him to a pyre to burn him alive. As the flames were lit, Polycarp’s body was transformed in a process similar to the purification of gold – his flesh did not burn, but instead emitted a sweet scent.

The fire, taking on the appearance of a vaulted room, like a boat’s sail filled with the wind, formed a wall around the martyr’s body. And he was in the center, not like burning flesh but like baking bread or like gold and silver being refined in a furnace. And we perceived a particularly sweet aroma, like wafting incense or some other precious perfume.³⁰

Amidst the flames that were meant to kill him, a triumphant and effervescent form emerged instead of a charred body. Like refined gold or the scent of baking bread, his body became a

²⁷ Clark, 44.

²⁸ Clark, 54.

²⁹ Wiśniewski, 194.

³⁰ “The Martyrdom of Polycarp,” in *After the New Testament: A Reader in Early Christianity 100-300 CE*, 2nd ed., (Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 34-29, 38.

source of luminous virtue, abnegating the mortal afflictions of bodily pain and suffering and becoming holy. After he had died, Christians observing the scene “Removed his bones, which were more valuable than expensive gems and more precious than gold, and put them in a suitable place.”³¹ These bones were imbued with the sanctity Polycarp earned in death; as his body was likened to incorruptible gold, so too were his relics. Sacred bones originated in the reenactment of a biblical narrative; belief in their backstories and in the transformational potential of bodies preceded their treatment as fragments of divinity on earth.

A similar narrative is found in the martyrdom of Barbara, in which her father murdered her for confessing her Christian beliefs. The father “[yearned] to seize his daughter, in order to find, kill, and slaughter her, not as a father but rather as the son of the original murderer of mankind.”³² The father is laden with the symbolism of original and primordial sin, with his daughter presented as being starkly the opposite – in this dichotomy, the sacred potentiality of the girl, in the face of biblically symbolic oppression, is emphasized. After presenting his daughter to a judge, the magistrate ordered that “she be stripped naked and scourged mercilessly and savagely by rawhide whips. Then, wishing to impose an even more bitter pain on her, he ordered that her wounds be also rubbed with haircloth.”³³ Despite her suffering, Barbara was depicted as being resolute in her Christian beliefs: she refused to deny Christ. The sheer intensity of the bodily suffering described in this account speaks to a rhetoric of alignment between the deaths of martyr and the death of Christ, all while centering the body. In emphasizing the

³¹ “The Martyrdom of Polycarp,” 38.

³² Symeon Metaphrastes, “Passion of the Holy and Triumphant Martyr of Christ Barbara,” in *Christian Novels from the Menologion of Symeon Metaphrastes*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), pp. 155–81, 165.

³³ Metaphrastes, 169.

sanctity of the suffering body, an explanation for the subsequent treatment of the martyrs' corpses was provided.

Valentinus collected the sacred bodies of the martyrs. After honoring them with sacred hymns, as was fitting, he solemnly and piously laid them in a village called Gellastos ... as a cure for illnesses, exultation for souls, a much-desired pleasure for pious men, for the glory of Christ.³⁴

Similar to the Christians who gathered Polycarp's remains, a ritual of collection and veneration is notable in this story as well; Barbara's Passion transmogrified her body into bones capable of performing the miraculous. This understanding was facilitated and justified by early church figures, who by utilizing the aforementioned theology emphasized the divinity of martyrs' bodies in sermons and apologetics. "A man who touches the bones of a martyr partakes in the grace and sanctity which dwell in the body," wrote Saint Basil the Great, reinforcing the idea of transference through contact with sacred objects.³⁵ Similarly, Archbishop of Constantinople John Chrysostom said in a sermon "So then, with this ardor let us throw ourselves on their relics. Let us embrace their chests. For the martyrs' chests too contain much power, just as the martyrs' bones, then, too hold great strength."³⁶ Gregory of Nazianzus, fourth-century Archbishop of Constantinople, argued that the bodies of martyrs, venerated as saints, held power equal to that of their souls.³⁷ Thus, a tradition emerged in Late Antiquity that enabled the veneration of human remains thought to have become divine – their sacrality, grounded in beliefs in biblical narratives and articulated by certain early Christians, originated in stories and in a lineage of cultural practices inherited from the Greco-Roman world.

³⁴ Metaphrastes, 179-181.

³⁵ Wiśniewski, 131.

³⁶ Wiśniewski, 133.

³⁷ Wiśniewski, 194.

A rapid shift in the Roman socio-political topography led to the development of another primary source of body relics: asceticism. As Constantine the Great converted to Christianity and adopted the Edict of Milan in 313 CE (granting Christians the ability to publicly practice their religion), he made the achievement of bodily sanctity at the hands of Roman executioners inaccessible.³⁸ Thus, as devotees could no longer imitate Christ's death, they instead imitated his life. In the place of literal death through martyrdom, early desert ascetics imitated Christ's life by dying to the world, turning the martyrial impulse inwards.

"As in Adam all men die, so in Christ all will be brought to life."³⁹ This Pauline verse encapsulates the philosophy that undergirded the rise of ascetic practices in Christianity; all men die in Adam as they lose their spiritual flesh due to the Fall of Man. By renouncing the earthly and bodily concerns (including eating, drinking, sleeping) that characterized the mortal Adam, however, one could cultivate a body akin to the spiritual body Adam possessed before the Fall, thereby earning the same bodily sanctity as would have been earned through martyrdom and bringing oneself into life in Christ. Augustinian thought heavily colored this interpretation in the eyes of the early church, with him writing that

Our sacred books tell us that this human flesh of ours was differently constituted before man's sin ... it was possible for this flesh never to suffer death ... this condition changed after man's sin, and man's flesh became what it has always been to be in this distressful situation of mortality.⁴⁰

Through voluntary poverty, bodily discipline, and lives dedicated to prayer and reflection, ascetics sought to reconstitute their postlapsarian mortal flesh into a prelapsarian spiritual flesh.

³⁸ Clark, 61.

³⁹ 1 Corinthians 15:22.

⁴⁰ Peter Robert Lamont Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 18.

In doing so, they united body and soul to align both with God's will, gaining the incorruptible flesh of martyrs and of Christ. In the words of the desert fathers, "Give the body discipline and you will see that the body is for him who made it."⁴¹ "Ascetics ... devoted their lives to bringing down the barriers that separated them from God," namely bodily barriers rife with carnal desires and emotions that distracted the soul from its pursuit of closeness with God.⁴² The life of St. Antony, written by Athanasius, fourth-century bishop of Alexandria, provides an example of how the bodily barrier to God was disassembled and how through this process, bodily sanctity was cultivated and sacred relics were produced.

"This was the achievement in Antony of the Savior, who condemned sin in the flesh so that the righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the spirit," wrote Athanasius, in a rhetorically inflected account of Antony's life, making clear distinctions between flesh and spirit, with the latter holding spiritual preeminence.⁴³ Antony, often credited as the founder of Christian monasticism, subjugated his flesh to his spirit, and his spirit to God:

Antony more and more punished his body and enslaved it ... He would keep vigil to such an extent that often he spent the entire night without sleep ... there were times when he went two days and often four days without eating ... For sleeping he was content with a rush mat, but mostly he lay upon the bare ground.⁴⁴

He denied his body its most basic needs and pleasures, overcoming its desires and his emotions, relying on the biblical refrain that "'Whenever I am weak, then I am strong'" (2 Cor 12:10). For at that time, he used to say that the soul's intellect grows strong when the body's pleasures are

⁴¹ "Selections," *Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetic Collection* (1975), 83.

⁴² Clark, 73.

⁴³ Athanasius, "Athanasius: Life of Antony," In *Christianity in Late Antiquity: 300-450: A Reader*, ed. Bart D. Ehrman and Andrew S. Jacobs, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 368-77, 371.

⁴⁴ Athanasius, 371.

made weak.”⁴⁵ Athanasius described him as “pure in heart and ready to obey his will and nothing else.”⁴⁶ He disciplined his body for twenty years in the isolation of the Egyptian desert, as Christ did for forty days: “Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished.”⁴⁷ As Christ was tempted by the devil, so too was Antony with gold, women, and the remembrance of the life and family he left behind. After these twenty years spent battling with his body and with its demons, he emerged like Christ from the desert, ready to embark on a ministerial career: “And they, when they saw [Antony], were amazed to see that his body had its same condition; it was neither fat as if from lack of exercise nor withered as if from fasting and fighting demons.”⁴⁸ Antony had earned the spiritual flesh of Adam, regaining a prelapsarian equilibrium in body and soul. The sensorial descriptions of Antony’s reemergence speak to the intensely visual nature of bodily sanctity and its veneration, as will be articulated in later chapters. Through the enslavement of Antony’s body to his soul, according to Athanasius, he aligned both with God’s will: “The disposition of his soul was pure again, for it was neither contracted from distress nor dissipated from pleasure nor constrained by levity or dejection ... he was wholly balanced, as if he were being navigated by the Word and existing in his natural state.”⁴⁹ As the martyrs who came before him and the ascetics who followed him, Antony’s union of body and soul reinstated a closeness with God that had been lost at the Fall of Man, according to the views of Athanasius. Through ascetic discipline he transcended the limits of the body, cultivating within that which required it: the presence of God.

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ Matthew 4:1-2

⁴⁸ Athanasius, 373.

⁴⁹ Ibid

“Therefore,” wrote Athanasius, “through Antony the Lord healed many of the suffering bodies of those present, and others he cleansed of demons.”⁵⁰ “Therefore” is the operative word in this excerpt; it demonstrates how it was only after Antony had cultivated bodily sanctity that he was able to perform miracles of healing and exorcisms. Through ascetic discipline he gained the thaumaturgical powers of martyrs, of biblical figures ranging from Elijah to Paul, and of Christ himself. In death, his relics possessed these same powers. His garments were given to various bishops (including Athanasius), who treated them as if they contained the real presence of Antony: “Each of those who received the sheepskin of the blessed Antony and the garment he wore guards it as a great possession, for just seeing them is like gazing at Antony, and wearing them is like bearing his admonitions with joy.”⁵¹ While Athanasius’s account is admittedly not a purely historical account of Antony’s life, (it served a political and religious purpose, lending monastic practices ecclesiastical authority in an age of empire), it provides useful evidence for the emergence of body relics and an early church’s understanding of bodily sanctity, both of which directly speak to the genealogy of belief that formed an early medieval understanding of the role of relics and reliquaries.

As two major sources of body relics, the bones of martyrs and ascetics, emerged in Late Antiquity, a pilgrimage culture deeply intertwined with a Greco-Roman heritage began to develop around the sites that housed these relics. Early pilgrimage was generative in the sense that it contributed to a cult geography of the Holy Land that came to be mirrored in western Europe, a pilgrimage economy centered around rituals of memorialization and the activation of

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ Athanasius, 377.

the miraculous that formed the life-breath of the medieval cult of relics. From the eleventh century onwards, pilgrimages began to cater to the immediate and emotional needs of venerators, with pilgrims traveling to the relics of a saint to enact salvific miracles of healing.⁵² To examine the roots of pilgrimage (and thus the initial ways in which relics were venerated), we turn to the cultural contexts in which the varied practices arose.

A Greco-Roman Late Antiquity

After George of Cappadocia, Bishop of Alexandria from 356-361, was martyred, Roman soldier and historian Ammianus Marcellinus remarked at how his murderers destroyed his corpse and the corpses of fellow martyrs for fear of what Christians would do with them. “The inhuman mob loaded the mutilated bodies of the slain men upon camels and carried them to the shore,” wrote Ammianus, “there they burned them on a fire and threw the ashes into the sea, fearing, as they shouted, that their remains (*reliquiae*) might be collected and a shrine (*aedes*) built for them.”⁵³ The mob’s behavior exposes two critical facets of Late Antique Roman culture: the Christian practice of collecting relics from slain martyrs was a notable aspect of Christianity at that time and that the practice was viewed as deeply antithetical to Roman cultural norms of burial.

In the Greco-Roman world, there was an insistence on swift burial and limited contact with corpses. In terms of ancient Greek funerary practices, whose relevance is found in a continued Hellenistic cultural influence through Late Antiquity, there existed a profound discomfort with dead bodies. In Greek heroic literature, the significance of a proper burial of the

⁵² Freeman, 95.

⁵³ Wiśniewski, 24.

entire corpse is evident in the practice of leaving an enemy's body exposed and unburied after death in order to curse them. The deeply held need to bury one's comrades was also historically evident: "We read many a battle where a truce is called so that each side can bury its dead before resuming the slaughter."⁵⁴ The belief that one's life would not come to a natural close until burial was pervasive; denial of burial was thus a punishment reserved only for the worst of enemies. Centuries later, the Roman Emperor Julian (who embraced Neoplatonic Hellenism overtly over Christianity), for example, opposed even the practice of carrying corpses through the streets in procession, arguing that "this practice pollutes the eyes of men by its ill-omened aspect." Even Roman Emperor Theodosius the Great, a Christian, advocated against contact with corpses, explaining how the presence of human remains "violates the sanctity of the home."⁵⁵ His position also reveals the extent to which there was no uniform "Christian" doctrine at the time – the outlined beliefs belonged only to certain Christians throughout this period. Amidst the culturally pluralistic Late Antique Mediterranean world, in which early Christian beliefs and practices were heavily influenced by the cultural milieu in which they arose, classical sensibilities had an undeniable role in shaping commonly held attitudes around death and burial practices. The Christian comfort with corpses and body parts was thus a cultural oddity.

There are a number of intervening theological factors that could explain the emergent Christian practice of venerating unburied remains. The Christian belief in the resurrection of the body, an opposition to the idea of ritual impurity, and a belief in death as being a source of victory all mitigated cultural fears of touching corpses.⁵⁶ Arguably, it was the pervasive belief in

⁵⁴ Wortley, 8.

⁵⁵ Wortley, 9.

⁵⁶ Wiśniewski, 127.

the spiritual power of sacred bodies that superseded any discomfort with corpses, considering how it was in victorious death that they enjoyed close intimacy with God, the *sine qua non* of their ability to intercede for fellow humans.⁵⁷ Moreover, the remains of martyrs and ascetics were taken as tangible evidence for resurrection, with their bodies offering proof of continuing life in their continued working of miracles and evocation of divine presence.⁵⁸

Augustine played a pivotal role in developing this line of thought. In connecting resurrection theology with the miraculous acts performed by sacred bodies, Augustine established a theological basis for the veneration of relics: the miracles performed by martyrs in life and through their bodies in death testify to the validity of their faith in God, in resurrection, and in God's ability to intercede in the world. He wrote:

To what do these miracles witness, but to this faith which preaches Christ risen in the flesh, and ascended with the same into heaven? For the martyrs themselves were martyrs, that is to say, witnesses of this faith ... and conquering the world not by resisting it, but by dying. For this faith they died and can now ask these benefits from the Lord in whose name they were slain ... He wrought [miracles] by servants, and if so, whether he made use of the spirits of martyrs as He uses men who are still in the body ... what is said to be done by the martyrs is done not by their operation, but only by their prayer and request.⁵⁹

Augustine argues that through death, martyrs shared in Christ's victory over death; as such, they gained the capacity to serve as intercessory figures ("what is said to be done ... is done not by their operation, but only by their prayer and request"). Martyrs' ability to perform the miraculous in death is attributed by Augustine to their spirit – they are able to intercede on behalf of God as men "who are still in the body" (i.e., healers detailed in the Bible).

⁵⁷ Brown, 6.

⁵⁸ Clark, 54-55.

⁵⁹ Augustine, 793-794.

In the relic's capacity to intercede on behalf of its venerator, it served as a symbolic synthesis of grave and altar, a conjoining of heaven and earth in sacred bones, offering an encapsulation of resurrection theology in a clear assertion of victory over death, abnegating Greco-Roman cultural attitudes towards corpses. Thus, belief in relics transformed macabre sites of death into venerable, luminescent ones, bringing "the still light of the Milky Way to within a few feet of the grave."⁶⁰ A key facet of this transformation was the act of veneration itself, an action that necessitated the coalescing of belief and the body – venerators embarked on pilgrimages to view body relics in somatically charged rituals, as will be further examined in the second chapter. As articulated by fourth-century bishop Gregory of Nyssa, these acts of veneration served a multitude of functions, ranging from the verificatory (one's physical response to the relic verified it as authentically divine) to the intercessory (the relic enabled one to direct prayers to God through the saint):

Those who behold them embrace, as it were, the living body in full flower: they bring eye, mouth, ear, all the senses into play, and then, shedding tears of reverence and passion, they address to the martyr their prayers of intercession as though he were present.⁶¹

Gregory's words illuminate how the tombs of martyrs and ascetics, as biblically sanctioned sites of veneration, facilitated encounters with the real presence of saints. He described acts of veneration as sensorially laden events, reflecting the emotional intensity expected to be evoked by encounters with divine presence. His exposition also recalls the Book of Revelation: "I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God and the testimony which they held,"⁶² reflecting the idea that sites housing relics functioned as a bridge between devotee

⁶⁰ Brown, 4.

⁶¹ Brown, 11.

⁶² Book of Revelation 6:9.

and divine – channels of communion with God were enacted as pilgrims physically venerated the real presence of God.⁶³

The practice of Christian pilgrimage to holy sites has roots extending into Greek traditions, reinforcing the importance of cultural precedent and historical lineage in the belief-oriented practice of relic veneration. Pilgrimage to shrines in the pagan world, such as to the healing sanctuaries of Asclepius, oracle sites at Delphi, or sanctuaries of Artemis offer a clear antecedent to Christian commemorative rituals and journeys centered around relics.⁶⁴ Centuries later towards the end of Late Antiquity, there existed a holy topography nestled amidst the ancient landscapes of the Near East, rife with sites where biblical stories and martyrdoms were thought to have taken place. Christians traveled to these sacred sites associated with the lives of saints and biblical figures, foreshadowing the “cult geography,” the placing of a layer of consciousness of the sacred onto the medieval landscape, that was to develop in Europe – Christian pilgrimage first was centered around the Near East, but as relics were relocated to shrines in western Europe, pilgrimage routes developed, connecting monasteries and cathedrals throughout Europe.⁶⁵ In the Christianized Roman Empire, groups of pilgrims regularly traveled to the tombs of martyrs to mark the anniversaries of their deaths with unique liturgies and veneration. Pilgrims left objects like glass medallions and gold leaf bowls at these makeshift graveyard altars while celebrating memorial feasts (*refregerium*).⁶⁶ These memorials developed

⁶³ Benedicta Ward, “Relics and the Medieval Mind,” *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 10, no. 4 (2010), 282.

⁶⁴ Freeman, 10.

⁶⁵ Hans Belting, “Statues, Vessels, and Signs: Medieval Images and Relics in the West,” in *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), pp. 144–63, 298.

⁶⁶ Derek Krueger, “The Religion of Relics in Late Antiquity and Byzantium,” in *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe*, ed. Martina Bagnoli, (Baltimore: Walters Art Museum, 2010), pp. 144–63, 6.

into extensive annual feasts organized around liturgical calendars that formally marked the lives of Christian martyrs and ascetics, placing the locus of relics' spiritual power onto holy sites upon which churches were built. The deposition of relics within a church rendered it holy space; the rituals of dedication, referred to in Greek as *enkainia* (dedication), included the washing, anointing, and covering of the altar and a procession bringing the relics to the church.⁶⁷ The sacred bones of martyrs thus collectively formed a skeletal geography in which churches throughout the Roman Empire developed into established sites for pilgrimage, remembrance, and ritual. Belief in relics as a source of religious authority, a byproduct of their divine and intercessory powers, enabled this process of the ritualized activation of space that pilgrimage and veneration relied on.

The travel journal of Egeria, an ascetic woman from southern France or Spain who journeyed through the Holy Land in the year 381 CE, is demonstrative of the purpose of pilgrimage and the relevance of sites made holy by the presence of sacred objects.⁶⁸ In her account, the significance of place becomes apparent; there is a marked emphasis on the divine presence encountered at sacred sites. There is also a spiritual significance attributed to storied objects, both organic and inorganic, such as the spring in which John the Baptist baptized and a sycamore tree planted by the patriarchs of the Old Testament, reflective of the Christian belief in the sacred potentiality of earthly things. In the account, Egeria enters Rameses, a city near Arabia, and is told about a distinctive tree:

⁶⁷ Krueger, 10.

⁶⁸ "Egeria: Travel Journal." In *Christianity in Late Antiquity: 300-450: A Reader*, ed. Bart D. Ehrman and Andrew S. Jacobs, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 333-347, 333.

There is a sycamore tree there, which they say was planted by the patriarchs; even though it is very, very old and rather modest in size, nonetheless it seems to bear fruit. Whoever has an injury comes there and picks up its [fallen] branches, and it benefits them.⁶⁹

In another instance in the city of Nebo, Egeria encountered a community of ascetics who led her to a spring. Egeria writes:

Right there, between the church and the monastery, an enormous amount of water flows from a rock, very beautiful and clear, extremely tasty. Then we also asked those monks who lived there what kind of water was of such quality and so tasty. They replied: “This is the water that holy Moses gave to the Israelites in this desert.”⁷⁰

Egeria also recounts her desire to see the martyrdom of Thomas and to pray in its presence:

I wanted, as God willed, to go to Syrian Mesopotamia to see the holy monks who were said to be numerous and to live such extraordinary lives ... what’s more, to go, for the sake of prayer, to the martyrdom of the holy apostle Thomas, where his untouched body was laid out, in Edessa ... there is no Christian among those who have come all the way to the holy places, to Jerusalem, who has not gone there too, for the sake of prayer.⁷¹

In these three accounts, Egeria’s belief in the presence held in these spaces (all of which can be understood to contain relics directly associated with biblical events) demonstrates the pervasiveness of relic theology in Late Antiquity – it propelled devotees like Egeria to embark on pilgrimage and to engage with holy sites and objects. Egeria’s narratives focus on the effects of sacrality – healing trees, tasty water, and prayer-begetting corpses offer examples of the divine presence similarly present in body relics. It was the belief in the potentiality of these spaces to be sites of heaven on earth that led Egeria to the Holy Land, and it was the divine presence she encountered that fully confirmed her beliefs. Egeria’s narrative is centered around the generative relationship between divine encounters and belief – it is not wholly clear which precedes which, an ambiguity central to this thesis. The stark emphasis on sight in Egeria’s account – she insists on visually witnessing biblical sites and holy figures – provides a locus to examine this

⁶⁹ Egeria, 338.

⁷⁰ Egeria, 340.

⁷¹ Egeria, 343.

ambiguity and the interpenetration of belief and physical sight as facilitated by Christian visual culture.

Spiritual Sight: Cognition and Belief in the Early and High Middle Ages

Egeria's ambiguous ordering of sight and belief directly challenges notions of divine immediacy being fully attributable to affective (bodily, sensory) experiences or to previously held beliefs. As our focus shifts to the relics and reliquaries of the early medieval period, an examination of the central theories of sight and cognition offered by the theologians most revered in the period (ranging from Augustine to Bruno of Segni) will help parse the role of the body and of belief as understood in the Middle Ages.

As cultural anthropologists and art historians like Cynthia Hahn and Herbert Kessler posit, pilgrims did not see in the same way we see. While certain sensory features are admittedly universal (such as the physiology of the eye), what is beheld is in the eye of the beholder: perception depends on the complex attitudes and beliefs held by the viewer.⁷² Thus, in elucidating the role belief plays in generating relics' suasive power, vision must be separated from visuality in the way articulated by late antique and medieval philosophers, given that reliquaries in the early Middle Ages were often centered around optical experience and providing visual, tangible access to the divine. Vision refers to the physiological and neurological processes involved in the sense of sight, whereas visuality refers to the meanings and values that a culture assigns to sight – in examining the ways in which symbols, myths, stories, and values are attached to sight, the visuality of medieval venerators can be comprehended, through their

⁷² Georgia Frank, *The Memory of the Eyes: Pilgrims to Living Saints in Christian Late Antiquity*, (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2008), 103.

acculturated eyes.⁷³ Through observing how these worshippers “saw” holy objects, it is obviated that the church intended early medieval Christians to believe in the sanctity of objects before they were apprehended as such, thus complicating the notion that Christian materiality engaged solely the affective or solely the belief-oriented realms of religion: its suasive power rested neither purely in the body nor purely in the mind. I argue that the lineage of belief detailed in this chapter was thoroughly attached to sight, generating a unique Christian visuality that guided the worship and veneration of relics in the early Middle Ages, thus conflating belief and bodies in encounters with sacred objects.

To probe this idea, we return to pilgrims like Egeria who sought visual access to God in the Holy Land, foreshadowing the medieval seeking of the same through relics. Helena, mother of Constantine, was one of the earliest pilgrims to Judaea, collecting relics of the True Cross from Golgotha, encasing them in silver, gold, and jewels, and spreading them throughout Jerusalem, Rome, and Constantinople.⁷⁴ Paulinus, bishop of Nola, described her journey as being sight-oriented, remarking how she “avidly visited all the places ... which bore the marks of God’s presence. She was eager to absorb through her eyes the faith which she had gained by devoted listening and reading.”⁷⁵ This absorption of faith through sight was a common refrain among early church theologians, in whose accounts of pilgrimage a descriptive absence of what was actually seen is notable. Instead, the accounts focus on *spiritual sight*, the real perception of biblical events through the sight of their physical, holy place. Scholar of religion Georgia Frank refers to this spiritual sight as “biblical realism,” suggesting how a Christian visuality enabled

⁷³ Ibid

⁷⁴ Cynthia J. Hahn, *Passion Relics and the Medieval Imagination: Art, Architecture, and Society*, (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2020), 7-8.

⁷⁵ Frank, 105.

the immediacy of Christ's presence to be perceived through the witnessing of holy sites and objects – realism referring to the encounters with true representations of biblical narratives, in the eyes of pilgrims.⁷⁶ Spiritual sight also enabled a deeper understanding of God and scripture, as the experience of biblical realism established a direct bond with the perceived divine presence, transcending time and space in the union of devotee and divine. As fourth-century bishop Asterius of Amasea wrote, “When perceiving the entire creation accurately, and from this activity perceiving the crafter, [the eye] explains even God to me. Thus, from visible things it explains the invisible things to the soul.”⁷⁷ Asterius's observation that through seeing God in objects one gleans a deeper spiritual understanding is one that preoccupied later philosophers and theologians in their efforts to understand bodily senses. Well-developed theories of the interaction between objects, the senses, and the soul, from figures including Augustine, guided medieval understandings of the roles of the body and of belief in the inherent visuality of relic veneration.

The overarching medieval understanding of cognition was that memory guided sensory experience. The visual understanding/interpretation of art, for example, was different for a literate Christian than for an illiterate Christian, for a priest than for a layperson, for a lord than for a peasant. This relational difference in visuality derived from the understanding that one's imagination, informed and guided by faith, would convert things perceived by the senses into things spiritually worthy of contemplation and apprehension.⁷⁸ *De spiritu et anima*, a thirteenth-century visual diagram from the Cambridge, Trinity College Library, concisely demonstrates the

⁷⁶ Frank, 111.

⁷⁷ Frank, 115.

⁷⁸ Herbert L. Kessler, *Experiencing Medieval Art*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 209.

Augustinian conceptualization of this cognitive and spiritual process. It describes the mind as taking in impressions from the senses (fingers, nose, tongue, ears, and eyes), a process controlled by the cognitive faculty (*imaginativa*) and judgment (*estimativa*) that ends with impressions being stored in the memory (*memoria sensualitatis ut retentiva*) and monitored by an inner sense of imagination that retains a semblance of divine wisdom (*phantasia*).⁷⁹ The concept of *phantasia* is the key to “spiritual sight” – in witnessing a sacred object, that Christian visuality was understood to result in a conjoining of one’s soul with God akin to how one’s eye joins with an object in corporeal vision.⁸⁰ Augustine argued that humans possess both spiritual senses and bodily senses; the latter were thought to be corrupted by the Fall of Man and were thus untrustworthy. The spiritual senses, however, could be honed by the learning of scripture and the cultivation of faith. Only through this prism of belief could material objects be fully “sensed,” enabling a deeper understanding of and connection to God. One could know God’s immaterial presence in material things through the apprehension of his image in sacred objects, gleaned through the spiritual senses that counterbalanced the corrupting influence of one’s bodily senses. Thus, matter could elicit its memory in a faithful worshipper’s mind, leading to deeper spiritual knowledge and an experience of immediate divine presence. Examples abound of this understanding. Bruno of Segni, an eleventh-century bishop, wrote in a sermon that “without the gleam of apostolic teaching, no ornament is truly beautiful or instructive.”⁸¹ In other words, without possessing spiritual knowledge of/belief in the scriptures one could not understand the religious significance or experience the presence of a sacred object. Bruno continues:

Heretics, pagans, philosophers, and Jews, seem to wear the very same ornaments as those worn by the Spouse of Christ. But their ornaments differ in this: however much they may

⁷⁹ Kessler, 207.

⁸⁰ Matthew Lootens, “Augustine,” in *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*, ed. Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 56–70, 60.

⁸¹ Kessler, 207.

look like gold, they are not gold, for no other wisdom is golden except that which the teaching of the Gospel and the Apostle authenticates.⁸²

As Bruno suggests, apprehension of materiality depended on the filtering effect of belief. If one lacked Christian faith, objects “may look like gold, [but] they are not gold.”⁸³ Art historian Herbert Kessler provides a helpful summary of this sensory theology,

A [Christian] culture that read Hebrew scripture as prophecy of Jesus, accepted the Eucharistic species as Christ’s body and blood, and put faith in the power of things to ward off invisible evil forces believed that *subjects* transformed inert things into *objects* by filtering sensual perception through learning and memory ... both outer and inner eyes must work together in an instructive process analogous to apprehending religious truth in the visible sacraments.⁸⁴

Informed by the learning and memory of Christian beliefs, one’s ability to fully perceive sacred objects depended on one’s ability to filter with their inner, spiritual, belief-based eyes. The immediacy of Christ’s presence as felt by devotees thus cannot be attributed fully to the affective ways in which sacred objects engaged their senses, nor can it be attributed fully to their beliefs. In the immediacy of apprehension, in which venerators visually engaged with reliquaries, both affect and belief played an interpenetrative role.

The beliefs that formed early medieval worshippers’ inner eyes, broadly speaking, were as such: Christ was God incarnate, a man whose body was holy and whose life and death were blueprints for those who sought to earn for themselves the same bodily sanctity. Those who did (the martyrs, ascetics, and saints whose stories fill the pages of a rich compendium of early Christian history), earned also for themselves the ability to perform the miraculous in life and in death, analogous to the miracles Christ was purported to have performed in the New Testament.

⁸² Kessler, 209.

⁸³ Ibid

⁸⁴ Kessler, 208.

Their bones were collected and scattered across Europe, creating sites of ritual veneration and pilgrimage in a landscape far from the Holy Land. Housed in golden reliquaries studded with glass jewels and rock crystals, the relics of holy Christian figures were made alive by the laity who venerated them. “Christendom” in medieval Western Europe developed into a “map of bones,” with shrines dedicated to martyrs, ascetics, and saints as sites of devotion, oftentimes directly over previously revered ancient pagan sites, creating sites of heaven on earth that interwove Europe’s pre-Christian past with its Late Antique Christian heritage.⁸⁵ The real, immediate presence of God was experienced at these sites and through the veneration of the relics they housed; this was the relic theology as understood in the early medieval period. The ways in which art objects looked, and thus how they may have spoken for themselves in materializing God’s presence, will be examined in the subsequent chapter, but the work of historian and scholar of religion Robert Orsi will help to illuminate Christian understandings of divine presence and spiritual senses. To understand how belief informed this presence – how it molded the contours of venerated realities, the forms of their salvific hopes, and the objects of their devotion – one must enter the realms of faith, one occupied by Egeria as she sought to confirm the beliefs that propelled her journey, and one characterized by a reality that perennially exists in a time and place outside of our own: a spiritual reality between heaven and earth.

In France, the tomb of Saint Martin of Tours was inscribed with the words “Here lies Martin the bishop, of holy memory, whose soul is in the hand of God; but he is fully present here, present and made plain by miracles of every kind.”⁸⁶ To his medieval venerated, his presence was real, as were the miracles that occurred at his tomb. The belief that lies behind this

⁸⁵ Robert Orsi, *History and Presence*, (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018), 21.

⁸⁶ Orsi, 22.

medieval understanding explains theologically why Martin was thought to have been fully present and capable of performing miracles at his tomb – the same full presence and capability of all body relics as perceived through one’s spiritual senses. As Orsi writes, “The literalness of the real presence [of God] was performed and displayed in public rituals and private devotions; in the shrines, objects, practices, prayers, and stories of the cult of saints.”⁸⁷ In performing and embracing real presence, medieval worshippers engaged with God through the apprehension of divinity by the spiritual senses – the inner mind of a medieval Christian, cultivated through the learning of belief, liberated the believer from their carnality, enabling them to engage with a spiritual reality in which saints dwelled and could intercede, and the bones of martyrs could disperse the healing power of God.

The moments that defined the lives of relics depended on a spiritual reality as they were “abundant events” – defined by Orsi as moments “when supernatural figures who were *known before* come to humans and make their presence more immediately known and felt.” Thus, in alignment with medieval theories of cognition, previously held knowledge and belief in supernatural figures enabled their presence to be felt. Abundant events (for instance, a worshipper being healed through the veneration of a relic), often induced the collapsing of temporal and spatial categories. As Orsi writes,

In the presence of [God], people’s imaginations become larger and more efficacious in their actions upon the world. In the unlocked environment of the devotional relationship there develops ‘a separate sense that reaches through the barriers exercised by the limits of consciousness.’ Much becomes possible that otherwise was not. Time may become fluid. Past / present / future, as they are, as they are hoped for, and as they are dreaded, may converge. Spatial boundaries ... may give way. Relationships also come under the power of the unlocked imagination, relationships between heaven and earth, between the living and the dead, among persons as they are and persons as they desired to be ... A certain kind of intersubjective receptivity and recognition may become possible [between

⁸⁷ Orsi, 21-22.

devotee and divine], on earth and between heaven and earth, an awareness of being seen and known, of seeing and knowing ... Objects come alive.⁸⁸

The spiritual senses, grounded in belief, rendered the miraculous possible – the sight of sacred objects and the transcendent experiences they elicited bridged heaven and earth, uniting devotee and divine, bringing forth Christ’s immediate presence, and providing a space for the working of miracles. The interaction of matter (a reliquary) and spirit (the mind of its beholder), and the relationship between art objects and the way they were perceived will be explored in subsequent chapters. However, to begin to understand stories of religious phenomenon occurring due to this relationship, we must first acknowledge the betwixt-and-betweenness of the medieval Christian spiritual reality. As Orsi argues, contemporary explorations into stories of healing, miracles, and divine presence must retain an understanding of what it meant to operate in a spiritual reality:

The imagination takes hold of the world as the world takes hold of the imagination ... [a narrative of religious experience is never a] secure medium of world making or meaning making, subject formation, or power because the narratives of this experience are never free of the interplay of the known and unknown, conscious and unconscious ... the experience arises on the shadowy and dissolving floe of blue ice.⁸⁹

Relic theology rests securely on an extensive lineage of Christian belief, but moments rife with phenomena of healing and of divine presence were highly elusive and ephemeral, intelligible only to those operating within the boundaries of belief. In excerpt above, one could substitute Augustine’s *phantasia* for Orsi’s “imagination” – in seeing materialized divinity, one’s inner imagination/spiritual sense took hold of the world while the world took hold of it. Here, the semblance of divinity retained in the minds of Christians did its work, filtering carnal vision in a process that could never be described as being “free of the interplay of the ... conscious and unconscious.” In other words, matter and belief were intertwined; object implicated subject.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Orsi, 51-67.

⁸⁹ Orsi, 62.

⁹⁰ Kessler, 207.

While relic veneration challenges the notion that Christian materiality engaged solely the affective or solely the belief-oriented realms of religion, the inherent interconnectedness of affect and belief complicates the very separation of two. Thus, as will be further argued in chapter three, veneration of the medieval cult of relics provides a point of synthesis between religious affect theory and belief-centered theories of religion.

Conclusion

An answer posed to this chapter's initial question ("What distinguished an unremarkable bone from a sacred one having belonged to a martyr?") was that the bone's backstory and that backstory's theological context enabled a distinction between non-sacred and sacred bones – belief in the spiritual power of the martyrs' bone preceded its treatment as such. Other answers to the question speak to the ways in which matter was utilized to communicate the presence of divinity, and the ways in which this art interacted with the bodies of veneration, generating pre-cognitive affects. In the Bible, there is a clear emphasis on utilizing the body to verify the veracity of its text; through hearing, seeing, and touching, "the word of life"⁹¹ was verified as true.

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life – this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us.⁹²

In medieval Europe, reliquaries evolved to serve a similar verificatory function. By housing relics in solid gold and silver and bejeweling them with rock crystals and gems, medieval artisans utilized gilded vessels to suggest the presence of the divine, thereby verifying that the

⁹¹ 1 John 1:1-3

⁹² Ibid

enclosed bone was indeed sacred in the eyes of medieval worshippers. As Peter Robert Brown argued, “The martyrs had triumphed over death ... the imagery of a martyr’s relics is never in any case an imagery of the *memento mori*; rather it strives by all means in its power to proclaim the suppression of the fact of death.”⁹³ In their proclamation, reliquaries were transmogrified from containers of death into salvific vessels, the luminosity of their silvers and golds proclaiming the truth of salvation and announcing the presence of God. The sumptuous materiality of reliquaries aided immaterial visions of salvation, guided encounters with the miraculous, and generated sensations of the divine. It is within this Christian materiality that questions of visual representation, artistry, and the spiritual significance of matter, as well as their relation to the body and to religious experience, emerge.

⁹³ Brown, 75.

II. Christian Materiality and the Affective Presence of Medieval Reliquaries

The relic theology outlined in the previous chapter speaks to the frame through which pilgrims and venerators were intended to interpret and interact with relics and their reliquaries. But how did these objects speak for themselves in producing senses of *reverentia* (reverence, wonder)? Reliquaries embraced the central paradox of Christian materiality: they materialized the immaterial. They sought to make permanent that which was ephemeral, shrouding Christian soteriology in the gilded garments of paradise. In doing so, they relied on the elision of multiple categories: of overt materiality and immaterial presence, of metaphor and metonym, of what is represented and what is contained within, and of their insistence on directing the mind while admittedly engaging the senses. These semantically charged objects, so dependent on the beliefs that justified their existence, invited viewers to haptically and visually engage with them as worshippers simultaneously sought to utilize their mind's eye instead. Within this tension, religious affect theory provides a language to describe how reliquaries may have spoken for themselves prior to the intervention of a theologically proscribed interpretive mode. It offers, then, a critical perspective into the ways in which sacred objects relied on both the body and the mind in their exercise of spiritual power, while also demonstrating the limits of affect theory's application in a pre-modern, belief-oriented period. Three reliquaries will be examined to test this framework: the Reliquary of Ste. Foy de Conques, the Reliquary of the Rib of St. Peter, and the reliquary ring from the Thame Hoard.

Affectivity is Compulsory: The Body and its Senses

In his book *The Cult of Saints*, Peter Robert Brown details the rise of saints in Western Europe as sacred, intercessory figures. He describes the closeness of the relationships that had formed between venerators and their saints, arguing that experiences of real, divine presence engaged all the senses, and that reliquaries developed to aid this relational process. He quotes Gregory of Nyssa, who described interactions between venerators and saints in the fourth century, as saying

Those who behold [the relics of martyrs] embrace, as it were, the living body in full flower: they bring eye, mouth, ear, all the senses into play, and then, shedding tears of reverence and passion, they address to the martyr their prayers of intercession as though he were present.¹

Gregory's emphasis on the sensorial aspects of devotion complicates the Augustinian notion of the spiritual senses/spiritual sight, which abnegate the carnal senses and center the mind's eye. Moreover, the very materiality of early medieval reliquaries challenges Augustine's understanding of cognition and apprehension: the physical eyes and bodies of medieval worshippers overtly interacted with reliquaries. To fully examine the ways in which relics derived their suasive power (their spiritual authority, their performance of the miraculous, their functionality as conduits to the divine), Augustinian texts and church doctrine from the early medieval period admittedly must be given preeminence in contemporary studies of medieval spiritual experiences, considering, as argued in the previous chapter, that what is beheld is in the acculturated eye of the beholder. However, not examining the ways in which matter and the senses interacted in contributing to spiritual experience eliminates a possible vein of inquiry into the lives of relics and their venerators. This chapter argues that the language of affect offers a

¹ Peter Robert Lamont Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, (The University of Chicago Press, (1981), 11.

novel window into the material lives of early medieval venerators, and as such the materiality of reliquaries and its interactions with the bodies of venerators in a belief-centered early medieval world warrant exploration.

If Augustinian notions of cognition were centered wholly around belief (and thus prioritized language and reason), affect theory embodies its complete inverse. Scholar of religion Donovan Schaefer defines affect as “the flow of forces through bodies outside of, prior to, or underneath language.”² He defines this in opposition to belief (“the cognitive manipulation and the autonomous affirmation of a set of propositional assertions about the nature of reality”³), arguing that religion is not exclusively cognitive and should be typologized based on affective configurations experienced by all animal bodies, not just on propositional beliefs. His initial example is the exhibition of religiosity by chimpanzees, as observed and interpreted by primatologists. In her essay “Primate Spirituality”, Jane Goodall documented chimpanzees’ embodied responses to a lush and magnificent waterfall. She described their intricate dance, detailing how it involved a specific sequence of displays oriented towards the moving water. She identified these dances as elemental displays of religious ritual, an affective reaction “over and above” a rationally organized response.⁴ In other words, pre-cognitive/pre-linguistic bodies displayed an embodied, affective response to a sensorially stimulating sight. With Goodall’s observations in mind, Schaefer asks us to question the ways in which religion contains an animalistic character, challenging us to consider that religious experience may be more about “the way things feel, the things we want, the way our bodies are guided through thickly textured,

² Donovan Schaefer, *Religious Affects: Animality, Evolution, and Power*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 4.

³ Schaefer, 3.

⁴ Schaefer, 2-3.

magnetized worlds ... the way our bodies flow into relationships with other bodies,” and less about belief-oriented, sovereign reason.⁵ In centering affect, scholars of religion avoid the presupposition that humans are devoid of animal instincts, desires, and feelings and center the mobile materiality of the body, thematizing the ways that the world “prompts us to move before the interventions of language.”⁶ Schaefer writes, “Affect theory suggests that our animal intimacy with the world precedes constitution inside a linguistic frame ... there are Proustian nooks that pull us into the world without the application of language,” meaning that affective forces stimulate unconscious memories, moods, and desires that pervade and give structure to religious experience.⁷

Affect speaks to something akin to the universal physiology of the eye: one cannot abjure oneself from the flow of pre-cognitive forces generated by moving and feeling through the world, the same way eyes cannot abjure themselves of the intake of visual stimuli. Succinctly put, “affectivity is not optional, but compulsory.”⁸ This chapter does not seek to affirm the applicability of affect theory to the medieval sensorium. Indeed, the limits of affect theory’s reach may be encountered in a medieval world in which the mind was held to be supreme to the body – the philosophy that affect theory directly challenges is deeply embedded in, and originates partially from, Augustinian theology and theories of cognition. However, in recognizing Schaefer’s claims to the universality of affect, religious affect theory can be used as a theoretical paradigm through which the subtleties of early medieval worship can be further probed; it provides a useful language to describe the ways medieval materials interacted with

⁵ Schaefer, 3-9.

⁶ Schaefer, 9.

⁷ Schaefer, 15.

⁸ Schaefer, 14.

bodies. Through its framing of religion as a pre-cognitive experience, affect enables objects to speak for themselves by providing a framework for the interpretation of the raw exchange of pre-cognitive forces that occurs between object and subject.

If we are to accept Goodall's interpretation, reliquaries were to medieval worshippers what waterfalls are to chimpanzees – somatically charged sources of beauty worthy of reverence. What attributes of reliquaries “prompt us to move before the interventions of language”?⁹ If it was the vitality of the falling river, the sublimity of witnessing the life breath of the forest, or the synesthetic qualities of water in motion that elicited an affective response in the chimpanzees, what qualities of reliquaries sensorially engaged early medieval venerators? Answers may be found in the central paradox of reliquaries: the transcendence of their own materiality through their overt expression of it. Their gold and gems were indeed Proustian hooks, tugging on the bodies of venerators in insisting that they both be seen and not be seen. The dual insistence of reliquaries provides insight into how they engaged both the mind and the body, with the latter being the subject of this chapter. An exploration of the material symbolism and the rhetorical strategies utilized in the construction of reliquaries, from the medieval perspective, will lead into a discussion of how these elements could be framed in the contemporary language of affect.

Dematerialized Matter: Reliquaries' Affective Strategies

Reliquaries were pragmatic objects whose essential purpose was to house relics, but whose essential goal was to project ephemerality (and thus not be literally seen) by way of their visual appearance. In his *Flores epytaphii sanctorum* (Flowers Strewn Over the Tombs of the

⁹ Schaefer, 9.

Saints), Thiofrid of Echternach, twelfth-century abbot and relic theorist, succinctly explained the role of a reliquary, writing that “the enclosure of the relic is essential, but only the means to an end.”¹⁰ The means were *aureus atque gemmis* (gold and gems), and the end was instructional and elevating. Reliquaries were instructional in that they helped viewers know where to look and what to feel, guiding them in presenting a proper disposition towards the divine. They were elevating in their use of materials that were laden with immense spiritual symbolism and functioned as visual signposts of sacrality. Reliquaries formed a core facet of early medieval piety, an era that has been characterized as deeply materialistic, with a clear emphasis on apotropaic, labile objects used in worship.¹¹ These objects and the matter that they were composed of were defined by their ability to change, akin to the bread and wine of the Eucharist. The changeability of objects can be attributed to the Incarnation (the embodiment of God in human flesh through Jesus Christ) and philosophical traditions that sought to grapple with the doctrine. As such, medieval understandings of matter (*materia*) were heavily intertwined with conceptions of the body (*corpus*) – art objects were described in bodily terms and vice versa. An extensive natural-philosophical tradition informed this conceptualization, as it often defined a “body” as any changeable thing, a product, at least in part, of the doctrine of the Incarnation.¹²

If God was fully embodied in Christ while remaining fully divine, all matter had the potential to be transformed to embody God’s presence, so the medieval reasoning goes. However, matter’s potential for changeability also made it morally dubious – salvation could not

¹⁰ Cynthia J. Hahn, *Strange Beauty: Issues in the Making and Meaning of Reliquaries, 400-circa 1204*, (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015), 26.

¹¹ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe*, (New York: Zone Books, 2011), 27.

¹² Bynum, 32.

be achieved on the shifting sands of labile, corruptible earth. Thus, matter was paradoxically both “the changeable stuff of not-God and the locus of a God revealed.”¹³ Reliquaries, composed of this dual-natured matter, were firmly situated in this paradox. As such, they were liminal objects that sublimated and emphasized what they were made of in a rhetoric of opposing simultaneities: they were both not-God and God revealed, both material and immaterial, both resolutely permanent and avowedly ephemeral. I argue that it was this rhetoric that enabled them to exercise their suasive, affective power. It is a truism of artful objects that they do not demand the resolution of the paradoxes they create. Instead, they generate a space for the interpretation of contradicting and conflated symbols. In the medieval context, reliquaries did just that in their embrace of overt materiality, as it rested on the spiritual prowess of the viewer to look past the material and “see” what it represented. Bynum writes:

[Christian materiality] entailed both a radical awareness of the corruption and transience of all that is not God and a radical conviction that God, immanent and immediate in the stuff of the world, might for a moment lift that stuff to exactly the eternity and transcendence it could by definition never fully be.¹⁴

The conviction Bynum describes could be attributed to systems of Christian belief in operation at the time and to Augustinian theology, but the paradoxical realities presented by reliquaries insisted that they be interpreted by their viewers, whose job it was to prioritize their mind’s eye in their apprehension of the objects. So, what of the literal, physical image placed on the retina of the viewer? Originating in the material world and entering into the eye, enacting pervasive pre-cognitive sensations of the deeply physical essence of reality, these reliquaries looked the way they did to generate a suasive rhetoric that aided the viewer in filtering what was seen.

¹³ Bynum, 35.

¹⁴ Bynum, 265.

Prior to the thirteenth century, as detailed in the previous chapter, spiritual sight was privileged over physical sight. Artisans utilized a spiritually significant aesthetic that circumvented the physical sight that had been corrupted by the Fall of Man: their job was to construct objects directed principally at the mind's eye. Before the revival of the Aristotelian theory of intromission in the thirteenth century, in which there was an increased theological emphasis on the ability of physical sight to lead directly to knowledge, reliquaries primarily hid what they held within.¹⁵ Their presence was communicated not through their literal, pictorial representation but by the use of precious materials that implied their presence, thereby assisting the viewer to utilize the mind's eye and not their carnal eyes in apprehending the object and gleaning its spiritual truths. The circumventing of the physical eye was achieved, again paradoxically, by the use of overt materiality. Kessler notes this paradox, arguing that in a reliquary, "the constitutive substances usually do not vanish from sight through the mimicking of the perception of other things; to the contrary, their very physicality calls attention to a work's essential artifice and interrogates the fact of materiality."¹⁶ By calling attention to the artifice of matter, reliquaries challenged the realness of what was seen by instead emphasizing the symbolically spiritual elements of the matter itself. In other words, they abnegated what the physical eye saw by drawing attention to what was supposed to be seen by the mind's: a divine presence.

In *Flores epytaphii sanctorum*, Thiofrid of Echternach explained this concealment of relics by analogizing a reliquary to a body:

¹⁵ Martina Bagnoli, "The Stuff of Heaven: Materials and Craftsmanship in Medieval Reliquaries," in *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe*, ed. Martina Bagnoli, (Baltimore: Walters Art Museum, 2010), pp. 137–147, 141.

¹⁶ Herbert L. Kessler, *Experiencing Medieval Art*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 31.

As the soul itself in the body cannot be seen and yet works its wonders therein, so the precious treasury of [relics] works unseen ... Who with fast faith touches the outside of the container whether in gold, silver, gems, or fabric, bronze, marble, or wood, he will be touched by that which is concealed inside.¹⁷

In Thiofrid's interpretation, the relic is the soul, the reliquary its body. Visually, taken as a synergistic whole, the soul of relic and reliquary is its immaterial presence and the spiritual symbolism of the bone, whereas its body is the materiality used to express it, and the literal bone inside. Here we note the elision of what is represented and what is contained within: like the saints whose bones they housed, reliquaries rejected corrupted matter and embraced incorruptible divine flesh through their projection of specific visual qualities. They expressed through radiance, luminescence, and incorruptibility (the same qualities possessed by the incorruptible, sacred flesh of ascetics and martyrs) an immaterial presence. Thus, reliquaries did not demand the resolution of the many paradoxes they inhabited. Indeed, their religious authority was firmly situated within them. The dematerialization of matter, the elision of categories, and the embrace of paradox provided an affective locus of power for these objects.

Relics and their reliquaries held an imaginal potential for those who believed in the realness of their spiritual presence. Admittedly, they also had an effect on the body, as evidenced by the very fact of their material presence. To explicate the ways in which dematerialized matter accomplished this effect in another way, reliquaries' elision of both metaphor and metonym will be explored. Literary theorist Ladina Bezzola Lambert offers a useful definition of metaphor in the context of art historical analysis:

Metaphors exceed the purpose of mere illustration and come to serve as structures for thought, as works for the imagination ... Metaphor transcends the scope of its constituting images and points to a potential beyond them. It is here that the most radically creative power of the imagination lies. In order to trace it, we need to rid the

¹⁷ Hahn, *Strange Beauty*, 24.

metaphorical images of their pictorial quality and consider them only as frameworks of relations.¹⁸

In the context of the medieval cult of relics, reliquaries were a metaphor for all that they contained (the salvific, immediate presence of God), and thus possessed a potentiality that extended beyond their visual, material form. Phenomenologist Paul Ricoeur also explains how “the theory of metaphor is not one of substitution – one thing standing for another – but a theory of tension – one thing standing in relation to another and calling for interpretation.”¹⁹ With both Lambert and Ricoeur in mind, metaphor speaks directly to the imaginative potential that reliquaries’ immaterial presence unleashed – the tension they possessed was one felt between their materiality and immateriality, meant to be resolved by the venerator’s spiritual senses, which, within the strictures of their beliefs, guided their interpretation of the presented metaphor. Metonym, conversely, is defined by a closer association with the thing being substituted; it is not an imaginative allusion (gold as recalling a set of Christian beliefs and enacting imaginative potentials), but rather a more literal representation (gold as visually representing divinity). In a reliquary, a metonymic quality is found in its being visually representational of a certain presence, compelling its viewers to visually apprehend it.²⁰ Thus, as Ricoeur notes, reliquaries’ metaphorical nature asks that viewers look through them, while their metonymic nature insists that viewers look at them. They insist that they both be seen and not be seen. Pope Gregory VII (d. 1085) connected this visual tension to Christ’s Incarnation, arguing that the Christian belief that God became flesh “made possible the eye’s oscillation between matter and spirit in art.” This tension in viewing matter and spirit recalls the dual nature of reliquaries, with their metaphorical nature relying on the realms of belief and Augustinian theories of cognition and

¹⁸ Hahn, *Strange Beauty*, 109.

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Hahn, *Strange Beauty*, 110.

their metonymic quality on one's visual apprehension of and affective response to the material, revealing again how Christian materiality engaged both the belief-oriented and affective realms of religion.

Reliquaries' dual nature relied on the materials used to construct them. The formal qualities of reliquaries (their shapes, colors, textures, and other visual qualities) recalled a lineage of art historical precedents; certain materials and forms held specific spiritual and cultural capital. For example, the Ark of the Covenant was the prototypical reliquary, where, akin to the Temple, its materiality enveloped the presence of Mosaic law.²¹ The biblical description of the Ark details the materials used to construct it, revealing the importance of both function and appearance: "They shall make an ark of acacia wood; it shall be two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high. You shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and outside you shall overlay it, and you shall make a molding of gold upon it all around."²² Reliquaries, since even the time of the Exodus narrative, insisted on possessing a dual nature, drawing the eye toward abject materiality while also denying material reality and redirecting attention heavenward. Later reliquaries (especially those from Late Antiquity) imitated the shape of the Ark or had ornamentation that recalled its story, revealing the ways in which spiritual authority was vested in formal qualities that connected an object to its historical antecedents.

Valued for possessing specific qualities that held religious and historic significance, the materials of reliquaries contributed to their interactions with venerators. Peter Brown described

²¹ Cynthia J. Hahn, *Passion Relics and the Medieval Imagination: Art, Architecture, and Society*, (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2020), 11.

²² Exodus 25:10-11

the artfulness of reliquaries as “a carefully maintained crescendo of beauty in poetry, in ceremonial, and in shimmering art around a new and obsessive theme ... a theme into which all that was most beautiful and refined in their age could be compressed.”²³ This crescendo of beauty was accomplished by the fusing of precious metals and gems into salvific objects. These materials were valued in the production of Christian art for their cost, luminosity, and purity. Gold was especially treasured for its incorruptible nature, as evidenced by its resistance to flame, its being found in a perfect state in the natural world, and its immunity to rust and decay. It also held a unique ability to represent Christ’s dual nature – it allowed for both a signification of his full humanity and a rendering of his divinity.²⁴ There also existed an extensive biblical foundation for the valuing of gold and gems as precious materials. In the Book of Revelation, the heavenly city of Jerusalem is described in material terms:

The wall is built of jasper, while the city is pure gold, clear as glass. The foundations of the wall of the city are adorned with every jewel ... And the twelve gates are twelve pearls, each of the gates is a single pearl, and the street of the city is pure gold, transparent as glass.²⁵

The Garden of Eden is described in similar terms:

You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, carnelian, chrysolite, and moonstone, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, turquoise, and emerald; and worked in gold were your settings and your engravings.²⁶

These materials were used to both depict a lost paradise and to imagine its promised replacement. In these descriptions of heavenly sites, the visual qualities of the enumerated materials communicate spiritual meaning. As it is written in Matthew, “The righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”²⁷ Luminescence, radiance, and purity – precious

²³ Hahn, *Strange Beauty*, 27.

²⁴ Kessler, 33.

²⁵ Book of Revelation 21:18-21

²⁶ Ezekiel 28:13

²⁷ Matthew 13:43

metals and jewels harbored these qualities, and in doing so emitted a salvific light and shone like a righteous soul. The formal qualities of reliquaries conferred them spiritual merit and served to authenticate and elevate the real value of what was held within – as the souls of the saints emitted light, so too did the containers that housed their remains, lending further credence to the claim that reliquaries elided the material and immaterial to exercise suasive power.

Paulinus of Nola (d. 431 CE), a Roman senator and poet, wrote about the elevation of matter towards spiritual ends. In his writings, a clear corollary emerges between understandings of cultivated bodily sanctity and the sacred potentiality of matter – specific materials connote moral value and the potential for sacrality due to their luminescent qualities.

But as we build, we must consider what we can erect from our frail and earthly material to be worthy of the divine foundation ... Let us fuse together the gold of our thoughts and the silver of our speech in Christ, so that once we are cleansed in the furnace of this world, He who approves the souls that please Him may transform us into gold tried by fire, worthy of the stamp of His image, and we by reason of our enlightened works may offer ourselves as precious stones to Him.²⁸

Here, gold is an aspirational entity; it is incorruptible, like the flesh of a body and soul transformed by God. The remains of saints were frequently referred to as *vasa auri excelsa et eminentia* (exalted and distinguished vessels of gold).²⁹ In the mind of Thiofrid of Echternach, gold also served a more practical function – it transformed macabre human bones into objects able to be comfortably venerated.

Knowing that man cannot see and touch rotten flesh without being nauseated, he hid his body and his blood in the bread and the wine, to which men are accustomed. Similarly, he has persuaded the sons of the Church to conceal and shelter the relics of the saint's happy flesh in gold and in the most precious of natural materials so that they will not be horrified by looking at a cruel and bloody thing.³⁰

²⁸ Hahn, *Strange Beauty*, 44.

²⁹ Bagnoli, 138.

³⁰ Bagnoli, 137.

Just as the eucharist obfuscates the actual bloody body of Christ, a reliquary obscures the fact of death by its use of lustrous materials. Paulinus described this gilding as “ennobling” the relics, encasing them in gold to create an “enhanced light” that better honored their sacred origin.³¹

A new look gleams on the outside of the walls while the antiquity is hidden, enclosed within ... They are the same yet not the same as they depict the shape of future and present blessings ... So it will be on the day when men are permitted to rise again with life renewed. Amongst those who rise, precedence will be given to the group whose flesh is covered with a shining garment.³²

This gleaming “new look” of reliquaries is again equated in bodily terms to sacred flesh. Both flesh and matter are lustrous, demonstrating a consistent sacred visuality centered around the qualities of light and radiance.

In addition to being compared to gold, holy figures were also likened to precious gems – Bruno of Segni, Thiofrid of Echternach, and Honorius of Autun all described apostles and martyrs as resembling specific precious stones.³³ Their comparisons also had a biblical basis, with saints being compared to living stones: “Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house.”³⁴ Medieval lapidaries also describe gems as having a quality of aliveness, resulting from their being created from cosmic processes influenced by the stars and astrological signs. Early medieval reliquaries were frequently covered with precious gems and stones representative of the relics (and thus the saints) contained within, reflecting the cyclical analogizing of saints to gems and gems to saints that relied on a medieval understanding of stones’ aliveness and sacrality, again derived from their visual qualities. As Thiofrid wrote,

³¹ Hahn, *Strange Beauty*, 10.

³² Ibid

³³ Bagnoli, 138.

³⁴ 1 Peter 2:4-5

“Because the saints have been transformed from earthly to heavenly clarity, they are able to emit celestial light and cause their earthly remains to shine. They illuminate their dead bodies from above.”³⁵ Precious stones, akin to the celestial light emitted from the heavenly flesh of saints, engaged with light in a way reminiscent of the language used to describe the luster of incorruptible flesh. Even more so, as materials that elide the organic and inorganic (gems are unrefined, translucent, natural creations that appeared to be crystalized light), gems were prized for the ambivalence of their materiality – they suggested an amalgam of matter and spirit.³⁶ Thus, the same paradox that existed in the whole of a reliquary also resided in its compositional parts: the materials transcended their own materiality by overtly expressing it due to their visual qualities of radiant light.

William of Auxerre, a twelfth-century French theologian, wrote that “knowledge of God proceeds from an affirmation of creedal doctrines, through a deeper understanding of their meaning and coherence, to a direct and experiential perception of divine realities.”³⁷ Here, William links spiritual discernment and experiences of divine presence directly to the senses. Spiritual experiences are experiential perceptions, he argues, asserting that sensations provide a knowable phenomenon that enables the communication of complex theological arguments or concepts, as filtered through the lens of previously held beliefs.³⁸ The language Schaefer provides us speaks directly to the sensations, not to the filtering – he would argue that the sensorial presence of these objects communicated a divine reality in a non-linguistic way, prior

³⁵ Arnold Angenendt, “Relics and Their Veneration,” in *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe*, ed. Martina Bagnoli, (Baltimore: Walters Art Museum, 2010), pp. 19–26, 20.

³⁶ Kessler, 48.

³⁷ John Arnold, “Problems of Sensory History and the Medieval Laity,” in *Sensing the Sacred in Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, ed. Robin Macdonald, Emilie K.M. Murphy, and Elizabeth L. Swann, (New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 19–38, 22.

³⁸ Arnold, 25.

to any intervention from belief. Describing encounters with visual sanctity in Schaefer's terms (as existing "before language, before cosmology, even before 'thought'"³⁹) helps us to conceptualize the way viewers may have apprehended spiritual presence in a pre-linguistic way, nuancing Augustinian theories of cognition. The writings of twelfth-century historian William of Malmesbury also lend credence to this claim. William wrote that "The more grandly constructed a church is, the more likely it is to entice the dullest minds to prayer and to bend the most stubborn to supplication," revealing how the affective, visual presence of sacred spaces was utilized to engage the minds of medieval venerators and direct them towards prayer, and thus acted before belief.⁴⁰ We turn now to examples of reliquaries from the early Middle Ages to probe how the language of affect and this paradigm of pre-cognitive experience may be used in interpreting encounters with relics and reliquaries.

The Reliquary Bust of Sainte Foy de Conques

Perhaps nowhere else is the dual-natured work of reliquaries more evident than in the reliquary bust of Sainte Foy de Conques (Appendix, Figure 1). A key example of Christian religious statuary, the reliquary bust (a type of three-dimensional, bodily reliquary) of Ste. Foy partook in an indigenous tradition of Christian sculpture that had originated in southern France in the ninth century.⁴¹ The speaking reliquary contained the body relics of Foy, a young female martyred in Agen, France, by Roman authorities. As chronicled in a Late Antique martyrology, Foy was forced to either renounce her Christian faith or face death at the hands of the Roman prefect. She chose the latter and was publicly tortured and executed in a method similar to that

³⁹ Schaefer, 9.

⁴⁰ Charles Freeman, *Holy Bones, Holy Dust: How Relics Shaped the History of Medieval Europe*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 108.

⁴¹ Pamela Sheingorn, trans. *The Book of Sainte Foy*, (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 10.

used on the martyrs Polycarp and Barbara (reflecting a consistent martyrial rhetoric). In the account of her death, Saint Caprais is depicted praying for Foy as she suffered, and as he did so, he

Saw above Sainte Foy a crown, decorated with bright, glittering gems and celestial pearls ... and he saw the blessed martyr adorned with a brilliant snow-white garment radiant with bright light. Then he understood that she had already attained the palm of triumph and the prize of victory, which was eternal salvation. And when Caprais had seen all the miraculous power of God manifestly in his own sight, he rejoiced because of the joys of eternity.⁴²

There are two operational elements of this excerpt. The first is the visual appearance of Foy during her martyrdom. She is described as emitting a radiant light, as being adorned with a bejeweled crown, and as being clothed in a celestial garment. This description is synchronous with the formal qualities of St. Foy's reliquary, which had been constructed by the end of the ninth century, centuries after her martyrdom had occurred. A piece of Foy's skull had been enshrined within the head of a golden reliquary statue that presented the saint in a seated, frontal posture. The statue was made of yew wood and had a sculpted golden head affixed to a cylindrical opening in its neck; the head was originally part of a late imperial portrait bust from the fifth century, most likely of a man. In the late tenth century, as Foy's fame reached its zenith, the statute was renovated – the entire body was gilded and bejeweled and she was given a crown, ecclesiastical garb, and a throne.⁴³

The resulting reliquary was both hypnotic and hieratic – it was visually halting, deeply transfixing, and imbued with the sartorial authority of a priestly figure. Most notably, its unique bodily presence lent animacy and potency to the image it projected, with its three-dimensionality

⁴² Sheingorn, 35.

⁴³ Sheingorn, 16.

blurring the distinction between memorialization and real presence. “To many pilgrims, the reliquary statute *was* the living saint who could hear and see them and, most important of all, could grant their petitions,” wrote Sheingorn.⁴⁴ Definitionally, the sculpture (and other speaking reliquaries like it) was intercessory: its faciality was both starkly human and strikingly divine, displaying Foy in her human form, albeit with the incorruptible, golden flesh she had earned through her martyrdom. Importantly, the sculpture did not partake in realism, revealing how speaking reliquaries purposefully relied on a mode of subtle individuation, not pure representation. As Hahn writes, “the heads are not effective because they represent individual saints, but instead precisely because of their typicality. Each represents a soldier, a virgin, a bishop – a spiritual not a particular personality.”⁴⁵ In the reliquary, then, one sees Foy, Christ, and the potentiality of oneself earning the same gilded status. These visual qualities lead to the second operational element of the excerpt above from the *Book of Sainte Foy*. It was the act of sight, the witnessing of St. Foy’s radiant qualities, that led Caprais to comprehend God’s miraculous power, Foy’s transformed status, and her miracle-granting potential. While it can be safely assumed that Caprais held an extensive set of Christian beliefs that would have enabled Augustine to attribute this newly gained knowledge to Caprais’s capacity for spiritual sight, the clear emphasis on visual evidence and direct sensation speaks to an affective element in this narrative that belies a purely belief-based account. This affective element is also notable in Foy’s book of miracles.

The *Liber miraculorum sancta Fidis* (The Book of Sainte Foy’s Miracles) was written by Bernard of Angers, a curate sent to Conques to investigate accusations of idolatry against

⁴⁴ Sheingorn, 17.

⁴⁵ Hahn, *Strange Beauty*, 122.

pilgrims who had been venerating a golden, bejeweled statue. Instead of condemning venerators for idol worship, Bernard compiled an extensive record of miracles he classified as real and true, the most famous of which involved the restoration of sight to a pilgrim named Guibert. Two elements of Guibert's miraculous recovery warrant attention. The first is, again, Foy's visual appearance in the account. The second is the miracle itself, the restoration of a carnal sense. In Bernard's account, Foy first appeared to Guibert in his sleep. "Her appearance was angelic and quite serene," wrote Bernard, "and her countenance was a dazzling white, besprinkled drop by drop with a rosy blush."⁴⁶ He continued, writing that

If we are to accept her clothes exceeding the measure of her person as the armor or protection of abounding faith, then the golden radiance of her clothing figures overtly the illumination of spiritual grace ... On the principal part of the body, that is, on the head, four gems were seen, through which we are able to observe the quadrivium of the cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance.⁴⁷

As detailed in preceding paragraphs, the gold and gems used to describe the appearance of holy figures connected them to biblical virtues and to an imagined image of Jerusalem. It is no coincidence that the first miracle chronicled by Bernard includes a lengthy description of the saint's visual qualities that were shared by her reliquary. The reliquary was studded with an unenumerable number of precious stones, adding an element of refraction and dimensionality to an already rusticated surface – the hand of the forger is evident in the dimpled recesses of Foy's face and body, belying any notion of it being an *acheiropoieton*, serving to reinforce the dual-nature of matter (exposing the mechanisms of making conveys the fiction of material presence and representation). Foy sits enthroned and encased in a rectilinear array of rock crystal orbs, visually centering her body with spheres described by Bynum as the "nondecaying quintessence

⁴⁶ Sheingorn, 46.

⁴⁷ Ibid

of heaven.”⁴⁸ There are two cynosures of the reliquary. The first is Foy’s chest, upon which rests an architectonic form recalling the structure of a cathedral, lending even more ecclesiastical authority to the bust while symbolically transforming Foy into her own church-like sanctuary, an architectural repository of the sacred. The second is Foy’s eyes – they are immediately engaging. Gazing into them, one feels a certain degree of relationality with Foy while simultaneously looking through her, creating a depth of spiritual connection that was instantaneously felt (Appendix, Figure 2).⁴⁹ Bernard writes:

When [venerators] saw [the reliquary] for the first time, all in gold and sparkling with precious stones and looking like a human face, the majority of the peasants thought that the statue was really looking at them and answering their prayers with her eyes.⁵⁰

Akin to the biblical realism experienced by pilgrims in the Holy Land upon witnessing sacred sites, the substratum of instantaneity present within Foy’s gilded form was facilitated by the reliquaries’ visual, formal qualities. Projecting both an imperial fortitude and a divine aura, the reliquary of Ste. Foy can be read to express the dual nature of Christ, of Foy, and of matter, as well as the dual purpose of reliquaries.

By projecting immaterial qualities and virtues associated with the saint and with the sacrality of her remains, the reliquary channeled sensations of divine presence, as is evident in the work of Guibert’s miracle. Foy instructs Guibert to go to Conques, to purchase candles, and place one in front of the altar and one in front of her reliquary; his sight would then be restored. He followed these instructions, and “at about midnight it seemed to Guibert that he saw two light-filled globes like berries, scarcely larger than the fruit of the laurel tree, which were sent

⁴⁸ Bynum, 28.

⁴⁹ Frank, 111.

⁵⁰ Freeman, Catalogue.

from above and driven deeply into the sockets of his excised eyes.”⁵¹ His sight had been restored only in the presence of Foy’s reliquary.

In the *Translatio* (The Translation of Sainte Foy, Virgin and Martyr, to the Conques Monastery), a prayerful, exuberant proclamation is found.

O exceedingly happy land of Conques, adorned with the relic of such a gem and of such a lantern, you shine brightly with her lightning; rejoice and applaud, clothed with such a light, which gleams above the ether like the sun among stars. O sublime ornament of the earth, crown of martyrs, lustrous among virgins, shining with a countenance as beautiful as the brightest star, you come forth from the bridal chamber of the King as fair as the rosy dawn.⁵²

In this outpouring of affective energy – it is a deeply and intensely emotive passage – the medieval author relies on a mode of visual praise. The very land that St. Foy’s reliquary inhabited was imbued with her own radiant qualities, pulsating with the radiant presence Caprais and Guibert had felt. Her reliquary was a kaleidoscopic amalgamation of color, light, and meaning capable of eliciting responses whose emotional underpinnings escaped the confines of language. In aligning the appearance of Foy and the reliquary with the materials of Jerusalem, it is no surprise that “within a short time pious assemblies of people frequently came together at her tomb, and great crowds of people with various afflictions were brought from all around.”⁵³ Taken as a whole, the *Book of Sainte Foy* lends credence to Thiofrid of Echternach’s claims in *Flores epytaphii sanctorum*, in which he argues that reliquaries were defined by, apprehended by, and designed “to quicken” the senses.⁵⁴ I argue that because of this textual reliance on the senses (made clear in Caprais’s account and Guibert’s miraculous recovery), there was an

⁵¹ Sheingorn, 48.

⁵² Sheingorn, 273.

⁵³ Sheingorn, 265.

⁵⁴ Éric Palazzo, “Relics, Liturgical Space, and the Theology of the Church,” in *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe*, ed. Martina Bagnoli, (Baltimore: Walters Art Museum, 2010), pp. 99–107, 103.

affective reality that existed prior to the intervention of a relic theology in the mind's eye. Sensory experience and affect are inherently intertwined; while the reliquary may have functioned as Augustine hoped it would (bypassing carnal sight and being viewed solely by the mind's eye), it undoubtedly generated precognitive moods that guided viewers' experiences with the miraculous. Guibert's affective response to the miraculous speaks directly to the deep flow of emotional forces that Schaefer argues undergird religious experience: "There was unutterable joy, unimaginable gladness, incredible bewilderment."⁵⁵

The Reliquary of the Rib of St. Peter and the Thame Hoard Ring

The Reliquary of the Rib of Saint Peter provides another window into the affective presence and dual nature of reliquaries (Appendix, Figure 3). St. Peter was one of the twelve apostles of Christ and an early leader of the church; he figured prominently in the Gospels of the New Testament and was ultimately crucified under Emperor Nero. Jacques de Vitry (d. 1240), bishop of Acre (once the capital of the Kingdom of Jerusalem) and cardinal of Tusculum, was gifted the relic of St. Peter's rib during his travels through the Holy Land and Italy. De Vitry donated this relic to the priory of Oignies, in France's northern Calais region. Here, it was enshrined in an elaborately sumptuous reliquary by Hugo of Oignies, one of the foremost Mosan goldsmiths of the thirteenth century, in 1238 CE in the valley of the Meuse.⁵⁶ The reliquary was made primarily of silver gilt, with Hugo expertly utilizing the techniques of filigree (the delicate tracery of silver and gold) and repoussé (the hammering into relief from the reverse side). Bronze gilt, niello, gems, topaz, garnet, beryl, pearls, and rock crystal were also used. The shape of the

⁵⁵ Sheingorn, 49.

⁵⁶ "Reliquary of the Rib of St. Peter," In *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe*, ed. Martina Bagnoli, (Baltimore: Walters Art Museum, 2010), 197.

reliquary mimics that of a human rib, reinforcing the idea that reliquaries projected an idealized image of what was contained within while obfuscating its true nature. Inscribed on the reliquary are the words *IN HOC VASE HABETUR COSTA PETRI APP* (this vessel contains the rib of Saint Peter).⁵⁷ The body relic itself was wrapped in a piece of red silk, encased in rock crystal, and placed in the center of the reliquary. The foot of the pedestal was decorated with engravings of an enthroned Virgin Mary and four bishops relevant to the Oignies community: Lambert (the patron saint of Liège), Nicholas (the patron saint of the Oignies priory), Augustin (whose rule was followed by the priory's canons), and Servatius (the first bishop of Tongres).⁵⁸

Compared to the reliquary of Ste. Foy de Conques, there are scantier textual sources describing the rituals and miracles surrounding this reliquary. However, the reliquary's visual presence still contains a degree of textuality – its formal qualities can be read to parse its rhetorical use of opposing simultaneities (its existence as both not-God and God revealed, both material and immaterial, both resolutely permanent and avowedly ephemeral). The rib of St. Peter is hidden from view within a transparent container – this strategy of concealing a relic in a translucent material was a common practice (as is evident in reliquaries from the same period, such as the Cross of St. Nikomedes of Borghorst and the Reliquary Casket of the Cathedral of Moûtiers-en-Tarentaise). As a visual quality, transparency (and the refraction of light endemic to rock crystal) held immense generative potential, reminding viewers to think twice about what was actually seen and collapsing distinctions between surface and substance, form and matter. As art historian Anne Feng writes,

Divine presence could ... be lodged in the qualities of translucent matter, which visualizes the instability of material form, thus allowing for a reconceptualization of what

⁵⁷ "Reliquary of the Rib of St. Peter," 198.

⁵⁸ Ibid

constitutes pictorial space ... [transparency is] the meeting of matter and imaginations, the place where opposites take refuge from their perpetual strife.⁵⁹

In presenting a vision of the ambivalence of materiality, the rock crystal surrounding St. Peter's rib embraced the dematerialization of matter while symbolically shrouding the relic in a crimson red evocative of the blood of crucifixion. This reliquary's divine essence was found in this combination – a visual presence centering a Christian narrative of crucifixion by way of materials that generated visual instability, creating a space for the negotiation between what was seen (earthly materials) and what the viewer should see (a salvific truth evidenced by the life and death of St. Peter). This motif is continued throughout the reliquary, with narratives inscribed in words and images across its foot and central arc reinforcing the conflation of physical sight and spiritual sight (was one intended to read these images or read through them?). Similar to the way in which the reliquary bust of Ste. Foy de Conques presented a subtlety individuated image of Foy in her golden, idealized form, the Reliquary of the Rib of St. Peter presents the incorruptible body of the saint in his gilded, resurrected form. Hugo utilizes filigree to this end to construct a highly ornamented and dimensional surface. The patterned organicity of the gilded leaves produces a scintillating vitality characteristic of incorruptible flesh, evident also in Hugo's use of niello in the reliquary's columnar, architectonic components. Taken as a whole, the reliquary aroused aesthetic empathy (or, as Bernard of Clairvaux wrote, it aroused "affective piety"⁶⁰) through its memorialization of crucifixion, its luminescent qualities, and its visual rhetorical strategies.

⁵⁹ Anne Feng, "Luminescent Visions: Transparency and Transformation in Medieval China," in *The Allure of Matter: Materiality across Chinese Art*, ed. Orianna Cacchione and Wei-Cheng Lin, (Chicago: Published by the University of Chicago's Center for the Art of East Asia and Smart Museum of Art, 2021), pp. 64-91, 66.

⁶⁰ Hahn, *Strange Beauty*, 133.

Amuletic pendants and rings were an additional, major component of the medieval cult of relics. Suited especially for pilgrimage, these objects were prized for their portability and the efficacy of their healing powers. These small, jeweled reliquaries were intended to be worn, reflecting their reliance on contact healing and the necessitated tangibility of Christian thaumaturgy. Worn close to the skin, amuletic reliquaries often took the form of pilgrim's ampulla (a type of souvenir from pilgrimage to sacred sites). They were frequently handled and gazed at in private contexts and personal rituals, with great importance attributed to the jewels used to decorate them.⁶¹ The magical agency of these reliquaries was often located in their precious stones – wearers invoked the magical qualities of gems in direct ways to facilitate acts of healing. The reliquary ring from the Thame Hoard presumably served a similar function. The ring, dating from fourteenth-century England, is made of solid gold, featuring a hoop set with five table-cut amethysts (Appendix, Figure 4). The bezel is decorated with a double-arm cross stylistically reminiscent of Byzantine cross reliquaries. The front-facing bezel opened outward, revealing a hollow cavity that would have held a relic. Now missing, the relic was likely a fragment of the True Cross. The reverse side of the bezel is engraved with a representation of the Crucifixion against a background of red enamel, a stark portrayal of the blood of his Passion (Appendix, Figure 5). Inscribed with the plea “Memento Mei Domine” (Remember me, O Lord), the ring encapsulates yet another facet of reliquaries’ dual purpose: it compelled the wearer to remember the sacrifice of Christ while inviting Christ to recognize and remember the wearer.⁶² Inscriptions from this period and in this form often had the effects of charms or incantations that,

⁶¹ James Robinson, “From Altar to Amulet: Relics, Portability, and Devotion,” in *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe*, ed. Martina Bagnoli, (Baltimore: Walters Art Museum, 2010), pp. 111-116, 113.

⁶² “Reliquary Ring from the Thame Hoard,” in *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe*, ed. Martina Bagnoli, (Baltimore: Walters Art Museum, 2010), 115.

when said in prayer, were thought to hold healing powers in their own right. The five amethysts along the band of the ring also held immense material significance in the thirteenth century and aided the ring in disseminating its healing abilities, hence the stone's prominence in many amuletic reliquaries. Amethysts had well-advertised magical properties thought to improve complexion, to prevent drunkenness, gout, and bad dreams, and to offer protection from treason, deceit, blindness, and other maladies.⁶³ The stone's prominent use in amuletic reliquaries also derived from its classical Greek origin myth:

Amethyst was a maiden who incurred the wrath of the god of wine, Dionysos. She was saved from a terrible death by the goddess Diana, who turned her into quartz. The remorseful Dionysos then wept tears of wine upon the stone, staining it purple.⁶⁴

It was the Dionysian connection with wine (and therefore the Eucharist) that enabled this tale from classical mythology to be assimilated into a system of Christian beliefs, endowing the stone with the symbolism of Christ's crucifixion. Admittedly, the ring diverges from other relics and reliquaries explored in this thesis. Designed to hold a relic of the True Cross (the cross on which Christ was crucified), there was no "calcified sanctity" associated with this ring. Instead, the ring partook in a tradition of dominical relics, objects directly associated with Christ and the instruments used in his Passion.⁶⁵ As a symbol, the cross reinforced Christ's corporeality, evoking empathetic bodily responses in venerator's through eliciting an imagined suffering body – the presence of bodily sanctity was no less important in relics of the True Cross than in the remains of saints. As a relic, it relied on beliefs that justified its use of divine transference, similar to the flow of power detailed in Mark 5:25-34: the lineage of divine contact began with Christ and ended with the wearer of the ring. Relics of the True Cross relied on the affective

⁶³ Ibid

⁶⁴ Ibid

⁶⁵ Hahn, *Passion Relics and the Medieval Imagination*, 4.

presence lent to them by the visibility of their reliquaries. As goads for the imagination, reliquaries of the True Cross, such as the ring from the Thame Hoard, utilized their materiality in urging devotees to imagine the nearness of the Passion and of Christ. By the eleventh century, figures such as John of Fécamp encouraged the “imaginative reconstruction through vivid mental pictures of the events of the Passion”⁶⁶ to quicken one’s faith. Through the Thame Hoard ring’s use of refractive gold, its deeply red amethyst, and its inscribed supplication, the “imaginative reconstruction” of the Passion was visually facilitated. Importantly, it was also somatically conveyed – in placing the ring on one’s finger, a visual representation of the crucifixion was pressed into one’s flesh, physically asserting the presence of the event it sought to evoke. As Bruno of Segni wrote, “Touch is like faith, here we can hold and feel God.”⁶⁷ The ring’s affective presence was thus enacted through its inherent hapticity and its visual presence.

Conclusion

The stark visibility of these three reliquaries (Ste. Foy de Conques, the Rib of St. Peter, and the Thame Hoard ring) can be described in Schaefer’s terms – their material presence elicited pre-cognitive, bodily experiences that engaged the affective realities of medieval venerated. Conversely, their materiality could be read to function as Augustine had intended, as a facilitator to venerated’s spiritual sight, meant to aid the cognitive process of filtering carnal vision. In seeking to rectify these divergent theories of religious experience, a broader question must be asked: how were these objects made alive? Rituals formed the life-breath of the medieval cult of relics – the ritualized veneration of reliquaries (in corporate worship and in

⁶⁶ Hahn, *Passion Relics and the Medieval Imagination*, 103.

⁶⁷ Martina Bagnoli, “The Materiality of Sensation in the Art of the Late Middle Ages,” in *Knowing Bodies, Passionate Souls: Sense Perceptions in Byzantium*, ed. Susan Ashbrook Harvey and Margaret Mullett, (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2017), pp. 31–63, 39.

private prayer) formed the basis for devotional pilgrimages, daily liturgies, and instances of miraculous healing. In ritual, as will be argued in chapter three, the belief-oriented and the affective realms of religion coalesced, enabling the synergistic coupling of Augustine and Schaefer's theories in interpreting the ritual lives of relics.

III. An Integrated, Interpretive Mode: The Ritual Lives of Relics

Accounts of rituals involving relics from the early Middle Ages were rhetorically inflected. *The Book of Sainte Foy*, for example, was originally a *libellus*, an early medieval collection of *legenda* (stories) of saints. As Sheingorn writes,

[*The Book of Miracles*] presents itself as a work of edification, but also of propaganda, intended to spread the renown of the sanctuary where wondrous cures and miracles were effected. The descriptions of a multitude of pilgrims pressed into the narrow space where the statue was displayed were very likely intended to attract new devotees.¹

This thesis, however, does not engage questions of historicity. Whether or not these miracles and rituals actually happened is beside the point – regardless of their authenticity, these stories of Foy were circulating throughout northern France, coloring the expectations and imaginal possibilities of pilgrims and venerators, and providing instructions as to how to approach and engage sacred objects. It is here, in stories that illuminate how rituals would have been imagined and perhaps reenacted by pilgrims, that I seek to make my intervention, with written accounts of rituals and miracles forming the basis for both the relic pilgrimages of the early and high Middle Ages and for my argument. Rituals created a space where the miraculous could occur. They engaged both the body and the mind, shifting venerators' apprehension of objects as they denoted things greater than what they would normally denote. In the presence of relics and their reliquaries, experiences of divine immediacy were enabled by the dual nature of ritual. Here, Augustine's theories of cognition and Schaefer's religious affect theory could be simultaneously held – in ritual, belief and affect coalesced in an invocation of and engagement with the divinity held by relics.

¹ Pamela Sheingorn, trans. *The Book of Sainte Foy*, (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 23.

The *As-If* World of Ritual

In the late-eighth through early-ninth centuries, the emperor Charlemagne utilized the practice of gifting and receiving relics as a method of political diplomacy on an unprecedented scale. His gifting of relics (often just tiny fragments of bone or contact relics sourced from the Holy Land) to the abbot Angilbert at the monastery of Saint-Ricquier (originally Centula), for example, was well-documented. Once in Saint-Ricquier, the relics were distributed throughout a series of altars in the central church of the monastery, providing the locus for many liturgies. The rites were highly choreographed, with complex, ritualized itineraries engaging the bodies of monks and lay people in celebrations and processions on a yearly, weekly, and daily basis.² In regard to these practices, Cynthia Hahn notes that

It was the staging and ritual that demonstrated relics' personhood or agency, and therefore power. Relics were inserted into ceremonies and practices that treated them as if they actually were the saints they represented (a treatment entirely congruent with relic doctrine).³

In the first chapter of this thesis, the lineage of belief that formed a uniquely Christian visuality (spiritual sight, in the language of Augustine) was explored. The biblical stories of miraculous healing and later accounts of martyrs, ascetics, and pilgrims lent rhetorical weight to relics; these narratives in conjunction with Augustinian thought led to the idea that belief in the sacrality of bones preceded their treatment as such. In the second chapter of this thesis, the ways in which reliquaries may have spoken for themselves were examined. Through the language of affect theory, a rhetoric of Christian materiality articulated the idea that the bodies of venerators engaged with the sacrality of bones prior to the intervention of belief. Taken together, the divine

² Cynthia J. Hahn, *The Reliquary Effect: Enshrining the Sacred Object*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2017), 52.

³ Ibid

immediacy attributed to relics cannot be fully ascribed to belief (as Augustine would suggest) or to affect (as Schaefer would suggest). However, it can be attributed to ritual. The acts of veneration that generated moments of divine immediacy fully coalesced the cognitive realms of belief and the bodily reality of affect, providing a point of integration for two seemingly incongruous theories.

One strand of ritual theory seeks to investigate uniquely religious modes of acting in and upon the world. “Ritual” itself is often identified by its being set apart from the activities of daily life, its associations with ceremonial occasions, and its orientation around sensorial and cognitive cues. Scholars point to elements such as the extensive use of scripting, repetition, and highly mannered modes of speech and movement that all function to delineate a ritual event from an ordinary one.⁴ Specific architecture, dress, choreography, and other performative strategies are also used to communicate the symbolism and the metaphysical nature of ritual actions. Scholar of religion Robert Sharf, in an essay on ritual theory, writes that “Ritual action is not intended to alter the natural world as such, but rather to alter our cognitive and affective relationship to that world – our social and psychological being.”⁵ Through the use of specific performative cues and movements, rituals functioned not to literally change the physical world, but to change participants’ relationships to it in their construction of *as-if* worlds, as will be explained below. Here, Sharf includes one’s cognitive relationship to the world and one’s affective relationship to the world. Ritual’s work, then, encompasses both the cognitive and the affective, both the mind and the body. In terms of the former, ritual encourages the minds of participants to enter an *as-if*

⁴ Robert Sharf, “Ritual,” in *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 245–270, 248.

⁵ Sharf, 249.

world in a way reminiscent of Augustine's theories of cognition. In terms of the latter, ritual persuades the bodies of participants to somatically engage with the *as-if* world: "Ritual habituation indelibly inscribes the self with a set of perceptual orientations, affective dispositions, and autonomic responses that are, in effect, precognitive."⁶ Sharf's analysis mirrors Schaefer's articulation of religious affect theory, demonstrating how his theory of ritual can encompass the positions of both Augustine and Schaefer and thus can be used to interpret religious phenomena that are neither fully belief-oriented nor fully affective – such as the ritualized veneration of relics.

While Sharf's theory was intended to be used in studies of Buddhism, its framing proved markedly useful for examining the rituals of medieval Christianity. He frames his definition of ritual in the language of play (as in the way children play with objects and with one another). In delineating his theory, he argues that this framing avoids the difficulties encountered and inaccuracies propagated by scholars who, in attempting to define ritual, have tried to construct separate categories of religious actions and religious beliefs. While retaining core characteristics of ritual identified by scholars such as Catherine Bell (such as ritual's suasive power, its ability to naturalize seemingly arbitrary forms of life, and its maintenance, legitimation, and reproduction of a social and political order), Sharf's theory also seeks to avoid the imprecise moieties of alternative theories of ritual, such as thought/action, subjective/objective, private/public, and inner/outer, by not attempting to separate action from belief. "Play is precisely the arena in which names are first disaggregated from their 'natural' referents," writes Sharf, explaining how children, in playing with objects, learn to displace an object's sign onto

⁶ Ibid

something else, treating a stick, for example, *as if* it were a horse.⁷ He explains how the metalinguistic signals (language in relation to cultural behaviors) of play utilized by children when engaging in play say that “these actions, in which we now engage, do not denote what would be denoted by those actions which these actions denote.”⁸ In other words, in learning to denote objects as things that they are not and can never be, and therefore manipulate latent metalinguistic cues, children engage in the construction of an *as-if* world where things are treated as if they were something else. Sharf extends this facet of childhood development to religious rituals, arguing that ritual can be understood as a special form of adult play. He defines ritual as following:

[Ritual] entails the manipulation of metalinguistic framing rules that govern signs and meaning such that a given object or action does not denote what it would normally denote. In doing so, religious rituals may blur the map-territory relation.⁹

Map-territory relations refer to the relationship between an object and a representation of the object, encompassing the dichotomies of form/content, subject/object, and self/other. In ritual, those dichotomies are confounded, creating a transitional world that resides “neither inside the ‘mind’ nor outside in the ‘objective world’”¹⁰ – i.e., an *as-if* world, or, as argued in the first chapter, a spiritual reality between heaven and earth characterized by its liminality and betwixt-and-betweenness. Ritual’s construction of a transitional world (an *as-if* world, a spiritual reality), also insists on the realness of its reality: “Confounding the map-territory relationship results in paradox, since the metalinguistic cues that say ‘this is more than sign, this is real’ are themselves only intelligible as signs within a ritual frame.”¹¹ Most critically, Sharf writes that in ritual, “it is

⁷ Sharf, 255.

⁸ Sharf, 253.

⁹ Sharf, 256.

¹⁰ Sharf, 257.

¹¹ Sharf, 256.

not the ‘symbolism’ of the object that is altered but rather the apprehension of or orientation to the object itself.”¹² The child’s stick is still known to be a stick but is apprehended/oriented to be a horse. His theory’s relevance to medieval Christianity lies in its focus on the transformed apprehension/orientation towards objects. As Kessler notes, interchangeability was a key characteristic of medieval objects – with the Eucharist being the prime example of an object that, through ritualized consecration, was treated as if it were something else.¹³ Sharf’s definition may also seem language centric as it is centered around “metalinguistic framing rules,” and thus may appear to over-emphasize cognition and belief. However, the somatic elements of ritual are found in both the manipulated metalinguistic framing rules and in the elision of map-territory relations; both involve the ritualized habituation of the body, and both invoke and involve sensorial elements.

In the context of the medieval cult of relics, Sharf’s theory can be understood as follows: religious rituals involving relics and reliquaries manipulated metalinguistic framing rules that governed signs and meaning in their denotation of objects as things that they would not normally be – fragments of bones were treated as if they were the full saint alive and tiny pieces of wood as if they held Christ’s same physical sanctity. These rituals blurred the map-territory relation, constructing a transitional, *as-if* world – the spiritual reality entered into by venerators existed between heaven and earth, as the venerated objects exuded intercessory qualities and functioned as a bridge between devotee and divine. Critically, the rituals altered not the symbolism of the object, but the apprehension/orientation to the object – the fragment of bone was still known to be a fragment of bone but was apprehended/oriented to be the intercessory and miracle-granting

¹² Ibid

¹³ Herbert L. Kessler, *Experiencing Medieval Art*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 28.

saint. Reliquaries and their rituals facilitated the transformed apprehension of bone as denoting more than bone. As such, as Sharf observes, rituals sought to unite an ideal world with the actual lived world. In facilitating moments of divine immediacy, in which God's presence was real, tangible, and instantaneous, the ritualized lives of relics and their reliquaries sought to enact an idealized, Edenic world within the base reality of early medieval life. This ritual enactment depended on the bodies and minds of participants, engaging both their cognitive realms of belief and their physical, affective realities in an alteration of their relationship to the world, changing their apprehension of objects to denote more than what they normally denoted. As introduced in the second chapter, *The Book of Sainte Foy* provides a rare collection of accounts of rituals involving the relic, ranging from processions to prostrations. In addition to Ste. Foy, rituals involving relics from Chartres Cathedral and arm reliquaries from France and Germany provide additional examples. The variety of rituals surrounding these relics reflects their highly individuated nature: depending on the venerator's needs and personal narrative, the ritual method differs greatly. Despite this diversity (or perhaps because of it) the moments of interaction between devotee and divine as facilitated through relics can all be analyzed through Sharf's framework, providing insight into the ways in which divine immediacy was engaged with by both the body and the mind.

Rituals of the Reliquary Bust of Sainte Foy de Conques

One of the most central and consistent rituals involving the relics of Ste. Foy was the procession of her reliquary (Figure 1). In the *Liber miraculorum sancta Fidis* (The Book of Sainte Foy's Miracles), Bernard of Angers describes one such procession, in which the reliquary

of Sainte Foy was processed into Auvergne into an area called Molompize, over which the abbey that possessed Foy's reliquary held proprietary rights. As Bernard wrote:

It is a deeply rooted practice and firmly established custom that, if land given to Sainte Foy is unjustly appropriated by a usurper for any reason, the reliquary of the holy virgin is carried out to that land as a witness in regaining the right to her property.¹⁴

The ritualized procession of Foy thus held political and economic significance as well – Foy's divine authority (reinforced especially by her eyes and intense gaze, as noted by Bernard) was used to assist her monastic claimants in disputes over land and property. Bernard continues, describing the various elements of the procession:

The monks announce that there will be a solemn procession of clergy and laity, who move forward with great formality carrying candles and lamps. A processional cross goes in front of the holy relics, embellished all around with enamels and gold and studded with a great variety of gems flashing like stars. The novices serve by carrying a gospel book, holy water, clashing cymbals, and even trumpets made of ivory.¹⁵

As Sharf noted, rituals are set apart from daily life by dressing actions and speech in the garb of ceremonial mystique. Placing this procession within the context of the early medieval world, one could imagine how distinct it must have been from the everyday. Unhurried, deliberate steps carried forward a gilded statue with great formality and solemnity, her image lit by processional candles and framed by clergy and monks in ecclesiastical dress. Through the combination of its various elements, the procession fully engaged the medieval sensorium. In addition to the visuality of Foy and her processional accoutrements, sacrality was spread through the sprinkling of holy water and the creation of a unique soundscape – cymbals and trumpets announced the steady progression of Foy in her majesty as she processed through Auvergne. Bernard also alludes to an overt element of belief through his noting of the presence of the Gospel. In incorporating the literal word of God into the procession, a cognitive dimension of Christian

¹⁴ Sheingorn, 120.

¹⁵ Sheingorn, 121.

belief as grounded in text was utilized. Thus, the procession was both sensorially and theologically laden. Great efforts were made to announce the divine authority of Foy, creating a space for the laity to engage fully with the *as-if* world generated by the blurring of map-territory relations. Dichotomies such as form/content (the physical reliquary of Foy and what she represented), subject/object (the laity seeing the possibility of their own salvation in Foy and Foy herself), and self/other (the opening of a channel of communion between devotee and divine, collapsing any distance between the two) were confounded. Through treating matter as if it were an elevated substance (a substance akin to Godhead, as Saint Victricius argued¹⁶) in the broader context of a ritual designed to engage the bodies and minds of venerators (evidenced by Bernard's focus on both the sensorial qualities and the textual/belief-oriented qualities of the procession), the clergy of Conques created a world in which the miraculous was possible. The laity took notice:

On account of [the procession] the sick from all over swarmed along the route. Such great numbers of them were healed that if those who were there were not still living there is no way that it would be believed now.¹⁷

The evidence Bernard cites as proof of the efficaciousness of both Foy and her rituals is found in the multiple stories of miraculous healings he recounts. He writes,

For the whole day the monks had no opportunity to eat, because as soon as a miracle occurred it was their custom to chant a psalm, sound trumpets, and strike clanging cymbals ... lest in the absence of the usual formal celebration the publicly displayed power should pass by unregarded.¹⁸

¹⁶ Robert Wiśniewski, *The Beginnings of the Cult of Relics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 194.

¹⁷ Sheingorn, 121.

¹⁸ Ibid

Miracle after miracle was performed as Foy was processed through Auvergne, requiring the incessant ritual enactment of prayerful utterances and celebratory music making. “The divine work never stopped for the whole distance of the long journey,” observed Bernard.¹⁹

Bernard provides one example of a healing that illuminates the miraculous possibilities encountered in the *as-if* world of Foy’s procession. Stephen, a man born both deaf and mute approached the procession.

Stephen clung constantly to the arms of the bearers who usually carried the precious image on its golden throne. Finally, in response to some sensation – I don’t know what it was – he began to push his fingers into the passageways of his ears with great force and to rub them quite vigorously. Soon spouts of blood from these openings, along with a bloody stream that rose up from his throat, broke through the obstacles that were blocking his voice and his hearing.²⁰

Immediately, Stephen could hear and speak. To interpret this account through a Sharfian framework, the ritual actions of Stephen (his participation in the procession, his clinging onto the arms of those carrying Foy’s reliquary) can be viewed to have altered both his cognitive and affective relationship to the world. In the ritualized reality he engaged with, where an object (Stephen’s reliquary) was treated as if it were something else (the full, intercessory saint), his miraculous healing depended on both belief and affect. It was the belief in Foy’s capacity to heal that led Stephen to engage with the procession and (presumably) view the reliquary with belief-filtered, spiritual sight, and it was the embodied experience of the processional ritual and the acts of healing themselves that rendered Foy thaumaturgically efficacious. The physicality of the account also asserts the centrality of the body in Christian narratives of verification through healing – Bernard was in Conques, after all, to ensure the authenticity of Foy’s miracles.

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Sheingorn, 122.

Bernard's narrative is laden with immense biblical symbolism; the outpouring of blood from Stephen's ears and throat evokes the imagery of Christ's crucifixion, in which blood poured from his wounded side.²¹ His account thus implicitly includes elements of text-based beliefs that work in congruity with the evocative, bodily imagery of Stephen's healing to reinforce the importance of both body and mind, all centered around the artful object of the Reliquary of Ste. Foy. In an encapsulation of this coalescing of affect and belief in ritual, Bernard concludes "The miracle was perfect, for he recovered his senses and was sound both in mind and body."²²

Another account of a healing miracle further explicates the role of ritualized action in enacting the miraculous instantaneity of Ste. Foy's reliquary. Bernard recounts the following miracle of a boy brought to Foy's reliquary to be healed:

A boy, blind and lame, deaf and mute from birth, had been carried there by his parents and placed close beneath the image, which had been given an elevated and honorable position. After he had been left there for about an hour, he merited divine medicine.²³

With this example, the diversity of rituals surrounding Foy is obviated. The boy, placed beneath the reliquary, engaged with a stationary Foy within the confines of a monastic church, an admittedly different setting compared to the mobile procession through Auvergne. Foy's location invokes the scalability of the cult of relics – the ritualized placement of relics in symbolically laden spaces.²⁴ In housing a relic within multiple sacral layers of increasing scale (reliquary, altar, chapel, church), its dispersive power was increased through the sense of resonance felt between each sacred, architectural tier. As the reliquary of Ste. Foy was placed in an "elevated and honorable position," it encouraged a certain choreographed, bodily disposition – an object

²¹ John 19:34

²² Ibid

²³ Sheingorn, 98.

²⁴ Hahn, *The Reliquary Effect*, 57.

placed on an elevated surface requires viewers to physically look up at it, and in this case, to prostrate themselves before it while doing so. In this sense, the placement of the reliquary engendered a ritualized molding of viewers' bodies to attune them to the *as-if* world it enacted. The pre-cognitive affective forces Schaefer describes could be readily induced simply by this enforced choreography – deep feelings can be evoked by the “mobile materiality of the body,”²⁵ and physical acts of prostration, for example, can induce concomitant feelings of humility before the presence of the divine. Conversely, Augustine's interpretation of this event would be centered around the beliefs held by the boy and his parents who placed him in front of Foy. As Augustine wrote, “the spiritual senses allow embodied humans to know God and God's immaterial and ineffable presence in the world in an immediate and intimate way,” meaning that it was the proper holding of beliefs that would enable Foy's efficaciousness.²⁶ In the context of the ritualized action described by Bernard, Schaefer and Augustine's positions are not mutually exclusive. As previously argued, ritual engages both the body and mind – altering both the affective and cognitive relationships to the world. Here, there is room for both of their interpretations – belief propelled these pilgrims to venerate Foy in a certain way, while the bodily dispositions required by that veneration, and the sight and placement of the reliquary itself, engaged the pilgrims' affectivity. Bernard continues:

When he had received the grace of a complete cure, the boy stood up speaking, hearing, seeing, and even walking around happily, for he was no longer lame ... the common people responded to such an amazing event with uproarious joy ... Then all of them were flooded with both wonder and joy because of the exquisite miracle.²⁷

²⁵ Schaefer, 6.

²⁶ Matthew Lootens, “Augustine,” in *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*, ed. Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 56–70, 57.

²⁷ Sheingorn, 98.

The ebullience of the crowd reflects a profound spiritual reaction to the effectiveness of the ritualized veneration of a relic and the centrality such events held in the eyes of early medieval Christians. “What do these miracles attest but the faith which proclaims that Christ rose in the flesh and ascended into heaven with the flesh,”²⁸ writes Augustine. The reaction of the laity in response to the boy’s miraculous healing, while perhaps emblematic of a hagiographic literary trope, reinforces the idea presented to the laity that bodily miracles verified a Christian story of resurrection and salvation. At a broader level, *The Book of Miracles* itself helped to create the *as-if* world of relics, providing a textual basis for stories (*legenda*) of Ste. Foy’s miraculous works that function in a way analogous to earlier hagiographies.

A Plenitude of Relic Rituals

A description of the ritualized veneration of relics at Chartres Cathedral and two narratives involving arm reliquaries conclude this chapter. The three narratives reveal the diversity of ritualized actions engaged in within the medieval cult of relics; as the interpretative framework introduced over the course of this thesis is itself quite broad, its application to a variety of relics and reliquaries (ranging from the bust of Ste. Foy, the rib of St. Peter, a collection of relics from Chartres, and arm reliquaries from various saints) warrants exploration.

In the mid-twelfth century, Notre-Dame de Chartres Cathedral, in the Centre-Val-de-Loire region of France, was a primary destination for pilgrimages dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The cathedral held numerous relics, including the hair of the Virgin, the bones of St. Thomas,

²⁸ Ward, 227.

and contact relics of St. Stephen.²⁹ In 1145, as the cathedral was being rebuilt, a mass of donors arrived to offer corn, wine, and oil to the builders. Relics were brought out in procession to mark the arrival of their wagons, while the donors themselves invoked supplications for mercy and physical healing. The abbot Haimon noted how the donors (many of whom were seeking miraculous cures) entered the church and processed towards the high altar on their knees, “calling upon the Mother of Mercy in this new fashion of prayer” in the presence of the cathedral’s relics.³⁰ Haimon recounted:

Truly the Mother of Mercy is moved without delay to pious compassion on those who afflict themselves before her, and shows by the immediate efficacy of her healing hand how nearly she is touched and how truly she has heard their cries; for soon all the sick and infirm lead forth healed from wagon to wagon, casting away the staff on which they had hitherto leaned their crippled limbs, and hastening without support to render thanks at her altar.³¹

Haimon described the divine instantaneity felt in the presence of relics – the moment of fusion between inside and outside, of devotee and divine. Through an embodied, penitential stance, the donors processed into an *as-if* world facilitated by the visual presence of reliquaries and by a belief in what they represented. Chartres Cathedral and its reliquaries aroused the aesthetic empathy and affective piety of the donors – all of whom sought and received cures in response to their physical and prayerful supplications. In a ritualized procession, the Virgin and saints were treated as if they were present in the cathedral – a treatment that rendered the miraculous immediately possible. The sheer physicality of the donors’ ritual actions in conjunction with the sensorial environment of Chartres Cathedral suggest an engagement with the animalistic qualities of religion that acted before the intervention of belief, or as Schaefer wrote, before “the

²⁹ Charles Freeman, *Holy Bones, Holy Dust: How Relics Shaped the History of Medieval Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 114.

³⁰ Freeman, 114.

³¹ Freeman, 115.

grid of signification”³² – making palpable the flow of pre-cognitive forces through supplicants’ bodies. Conversely, as Augustine argues, “The human journey to God is a *via interior* to the depths of the self ... only this inner self can know God.”³³ In the supplicants’ invocations of divine intervention, their relationships with the Virgin Mary and the saints whose relics were present in Chartres enabled a full engagement with God, leading to their miraculous healings. Belief in the intercessory powers of the Virgin and the saints thus existed in conjunction with the affectivity elicited by their visual representations. In ritual, these opposing positions are conjoined, as the engagement with an *as-if* world depended on both belief and affect.

The liturgical use of arm reliquaries in the early Middle Ages offers another example of the *as-if* worlds created by rituals. One such reliquary is the arm reliquary of St. Fiacre. Made in Meaux, France in the thirteenth century (with fifteenth-century additions) with silver, rock crystal, and glass, the reliquary contains fragments of the bones of St. Fiacre, an Irish saint venerated for his healing of infirmities.³⁴ Arm reliquaries, and other body-shaped reliquaries like them, are referred to as “speaking” reliquaries, named for their speaking/revealing of their contents.³⁵ These reliquaries sought to express the fragmentation of the bodies they house, although they often did not house the bones of the body part they were shaped to represent.³⁶ The sight of a disjointed limb or a single arm called attention to the reality of a disjointed corpse, while the visual rhetorical strategies of the reliquary insist upon the imagined presence of a larger whole. The visual strategies of arm reliquaries were similar to those employed by the

³² Schaefer, 7.

³³ Lootens, 59.

³⁴ “Arm Reliquary: French.” The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Accessed April 5, 2023.

³⁵ Cynthia Hahn, “The Voices of the Saints: Speaking Reliquaries,” *Gesta* 36, no. 1, (1997), pp. 20–31, 20.

³⁶ Hahn, *The Voices of the Saints*, 20.

reliquaries examined in chapter two, ranging from the symbolism of the materials, the transparency of rock crystal, and the choice of ornamentation. For example, Fortunatus described the golden and bejeweled arm reliquary of St. Martin of Tours:

Suddenly, his nourishing hand sparkled with heavenly beauty, coruscating with the varied splendor of noble jewels, scattering rays of light in all directions as a wheel; His arms were vibrating lightning through ‘purple’ jewels; their brightness as well as the ruddy light of gold beamed even in the sunlight, through which the miraculous character of the event was even more believable.³⁷

Similar to how the reliquaries of Ste. Foy de Conques and of the rib of St. Peter depicted the resurrected forms of the saints (clothed in the golden, incorruptible garb of Jerusalem), speaking arm reliquaries utilized a similar mode of representation that was both visually transfixing and laden with rhetorical and referential qualities. Cynthia Hahn writes that arm reliquaries such as that of St. Fiacre express

A body enclosed, shrunken and radically dismembered but thereby set apart. By its dissociation from things of this world, this body is supplemented with power in life through the liturgy and granted power in death through a very real connection with paradise.³⁸

Thus, the fragmentation of the relic asserted its corporality, the artistry of the reliquary dissociated it from “this world,” and rituals engaging the relic granted its spiritual power. One such ritual took place within a normal liturgical setting. Numerous ordinaries from Rheims, Amiens, and Essen attest to the practice of priests lifting and using arm reliquaries to bless worshippers during liturgies, removing the arm reliquary from the altar and moving it in the shape of the cross before the congregation.³⁹ This ritualized motion was heavily dependent on the form and visual appearance of the arm reliquary itself. The reliquary of St. Fiacre is shaped into a blessing gesture – a posture of the hand referred to in Latin as *signaculum* and Greek as

³⁷ Hahn, *The Voices of the Saints*, 28.

³⁸ Hahn, *The Voices of the Saints*, 29.

³⁹ Hahn, *The Voices of the Saints*, 22.

sphragis, both referring to a gesture that communicates a spiritual seal with origins in the New Testament (Appendix, Figure 6). The use of three fingers (thumb, index, and middle) in anointing of the sign of the cross identified Christians to God (II Timothy 2:19) and sealed them by the Holy Spirit (II Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13). The gesture was also associated with the Roman *adlocutio*, imparting a sense of the logical and rhetorical powers attributed to God.⁴⁰ Rituals that literalized this blessing gesture by moving the reliquary as if it were a blessing hand made real the sacerdotal and intercessory powers the saint possessed in life, fully disseminating the spiritual power of the saint. Inscriptions on arm reliquaries reinforced this ritualized signification. An Arm reliquary from Copenhagen reads “*Dextera domini fecit virtutem*” (The right hand of God makes saintly power), and the Basilus arm reliquary of Essen reads “*Dextera Dei*” (again implying the presence of God’s right hand) (Appendix, Figure 7).⁴¹ Through the visual elements of these reliquaries and the beliefs that guided their ritual use, fragments of saints were treated as if they were living holy figures, with miracles propagated by them through their channeling of divinity.

Two documented instances of the use of arm reliquaries provide evidence for the interpretation of the veneration of relics through the lens of ritual. In Essen, Germany, amidst the Feast of the Circumcision, an Ordinary recounted how the arm reliquary of Basilus was removed from the high altar for the final benediction of the liturgy. As the officiants spoke the benediction, “*Benedictio Dei Patris omnipotentis descendat super vos et maneat semper, Amen*” (May the blessing of God the Father almighty descend upon you and remain with you forever,

⁴⁰ Hahn, *The Voices of the Saints*, 23.

⁴¹ Hahn, *The Voices of the Saints*, 25.

Amen), the reliquary was moved in the sign of the cross to bless worshippers.⁴² In the twelfth century, Benedictine theologian Guibert of Nogent described the miraculous healing of his ill, patrician cousin. The golden, bejeweled arm reliquary of St. Arnoul was laid on the body of Guibert's cousin. "Only after the touch of the holy arm pressed it hard," wrote Guibert, did the disease subside.⁴³ Arm reliquaries did not only gesture, but touch, as if the arm of the saint was reaching out from its paradisiacal abode to enact the healing its venerators so ardently desired. Similarities arise in both of these accounts. Both involve a mode of ritualized movement and mannered speech – the reliquary from Essen was moved ceremoniously from the altar to bless congregants, and the arm reliquary of St. Arnoul was put directly in contact with a sick body. Both retain the affective visuality of a bejeweled reliquary present in stories of Ste. Foy. Both are grounded in beliefs that preceded venerators' engagement. In the coalescing of these elements, we note again how in ritual, the object of devotion is treated as if it does not denote what it normally would denote. This shifted apprehension/orientation to the object was facilitated by both its visual presence and the beliefs that led to its veneration. As a result, akin to the sensorially and theologically laden spaces created by the ritualization of Ste. Foy's reliquary, it created an *as-if* world in which the miraculous potential of divine interactions was enabled.

Here the transcendent broke into time. The conjuncture of transcendence and temporality, the particularity of here and the no-place or beyond-all-places of transcendence ... In the unlocked environment of the devotional relationship there develops a separate sense that reaches through the barriers exercised by the limits of consciousness.⁴⁴

As map-territory relations and their concordant dichotomies were blurred and confounded, the liminal world that Orsi described was entered.

⁴² Hahn, *The Voices of the Saints*, 27.

⁴³ Hahn, *The Voices of the Saints*, 22.

⁴⁴ Robert Orsi, *History and Presence*, (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018), 51-67.

Conclusion

In the *as-if* world of ritual, where transcendence was injected into an otherwise quotidian reality, objects were freely venerated as things that they were normally would not be apprehended to be, unlocking a world of interactions and relationships that filled a corpus of miraculous events and narratives. Rituals belonged neither wholly to the belief-oriented realms of religion nor to the affective – instead, belief and affect worked synergistically to enable the veneration and apprehension of relics.

Conclusion

In its deep and mystical breast, [faith] can grasp what is the length and breadth and height and depth. ‘What eye has not seen nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived’ [1 Cor. 2:9] is borne within itself by faith, as if wrapped in a covering and kept under seal ... Why wish to touch what is ugly? ... You will touch me with the hand of faith, the finger of desire, the embrace of love; you will touch me with the mind’s eye.¹

“Why wish to touch what is ugly?” asks Bernard of Clairvaux. In touching the macabre reality of death, he responds, one touches heaven itself. The hand of faith, the finger of desire, the embrace of life: Bernard yearns for a tangible God, and he finds it in the relics of saints, whose bones form the material stuff of revelation. “What eye has not seen nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived” – the sacred remains of saints materialized the immaterial, ineffable, invisible presence of God, providing a locus of spiritual power for Bernard’s probing finger to feel, for his mind’s eye to apprehend, and for his body and mind to know.

What does this synergism of body and mind in ritual mean for studies of relics and of medieval religious experiences, broadly speaking? In creating space for both the beliefs of medieval venerators and the vitality of their material worlds through studies of rituals, the centrality of those rituals to the spiritual lives of early medieval Christians is obviated, as is the necessary conjoining of countervailing theories of religion to better probe the experiences of medieval worshippers. This thesis sought to examine the immediacy inherent in the suasive lives of relics, objects that rendered saints in their immortal essence of bone and spirit. It characterized these sacred objects as both belief laden and affectively assertive and their rituals as engaging both the mind and the body. Mediating between things as they were and things as they were hoped to be, relics and their rituals generated spaces for the miraculous to occur. In the ritualized

¹ Cynthia J. Hahn, *The Reliquary Effect: Enshrining the Sacred Object*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2017), 58.

veneration of relics, the substratum of instantaneity that underlaid the sacred objects was brought into the foreground of medieval spiritual life – belief and affect coalesced around a visual semantic of holy bones and stories of the miraculous. Divine immediacy was imagined, felt, and experienced in the presence that these objects contained and refracted.

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Appendix



Figure 1. Majesty of Ste. Foy, 2nd-10th centuries and later additions, gilded silver, copper, enamel, rock crystal and precious stones, cameos, wooden core, 85 x 36 x 24 cm, Abbey Church of Sainte-Foy de Conques, France



Figure 2. Detail of Majesty of Ste. Foy, head and Carolingian crown



Figure 3. Reliquary of the Rib of St. Peter, Hugo of Oignies (Mosan), 1238 CE, silver gilt (filigree, repoussé), bronze gilt, niello, gems, topaz, garnet, beryl, pearls, rock crystal, 50.5 x 35 cm, Tresor d'Oignies, Sœurs de Notre-Dame, Namur



Figure 4. Reliquary ring from the Thame Hoard, 14th century, English, gold, amethyst, The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford



Figure 5. Reverse of the Reliquary ring from the Thame Hoard, engraving of the Crucifixion in gold on amethyst

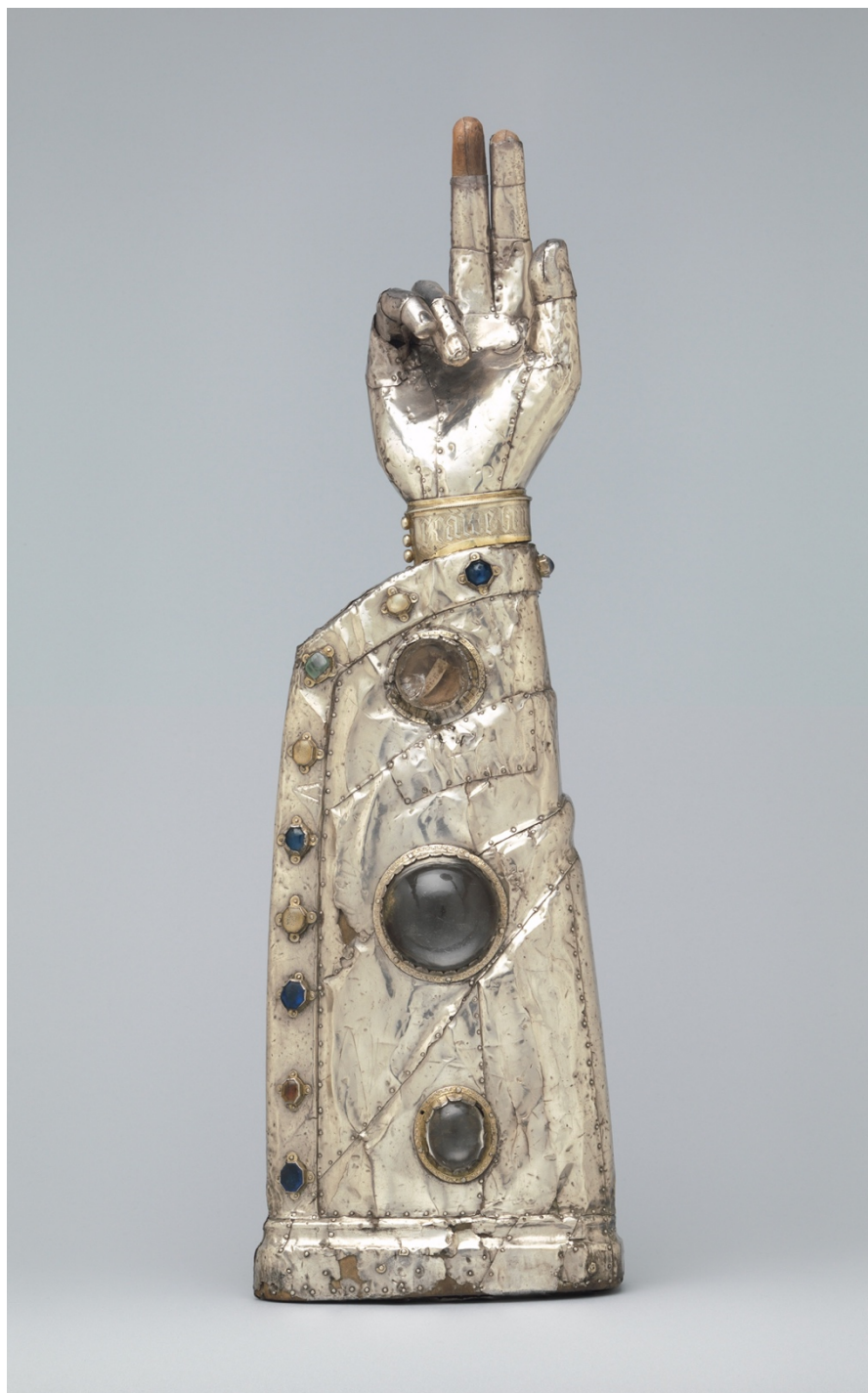


Figure 6. Arm Reliquary, bones of St. Fiacre, 13th century with 15th century additions, French, silver, silver-gilt, glass and rock crystal cabochons over wood core, 51.6 x 15.8 x 7.4 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art



Figure 7. Reliquary Arm of Basilus,
11th century, German, Essen,
Münsterschatz