

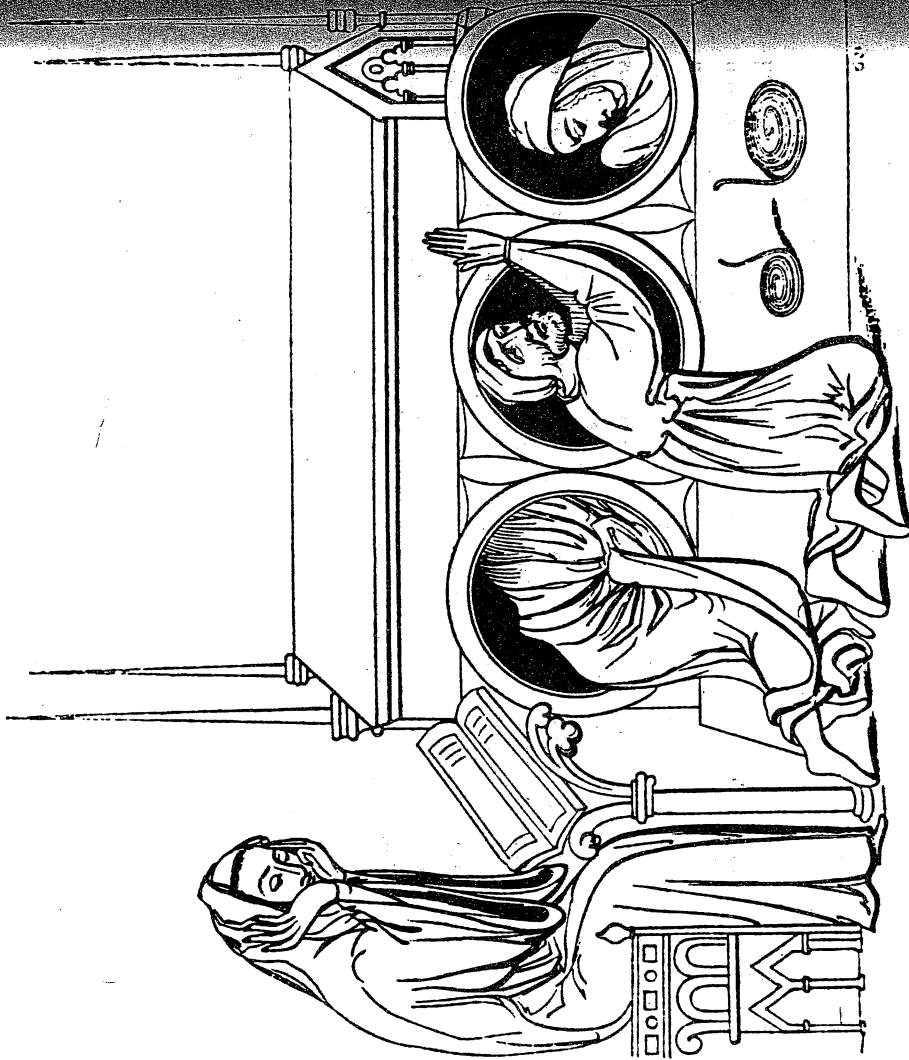
### 13.2. RELICS AT DURHAM CATHEDRAL (1303)

Every church had a least one saint's relic embedded in its altar stone; but larger churches — especially cathedrals — amassed collections of dozens, sometimes hundreds, of relics. Where a church boasted the relics of a particularly famous or powerful saint, pilgrims were sure to throng (though typically the spiritual and material fortunes of even famed shrines waxed and waned). The monastic cathedral at Durham housed the shrine of the tireless Northumbrian missionary and bishop St. Cuthbert (d. 687). Venerated in the chapel of the Nine Altars built to display it along with the cathedral's other treasured relics, it became the focus of one of the major pilgrim shrines of England, though never as famous as Canterbury or Walsingham. The abundance and variety of relics at Durham suggest how much grander these two more famous shrines must have been, but even Durham's shrine attracted enough pilgrims to require stewards standing guard for crowd control. This excerpt from a late fourteenth-century inventory conveys a fairly vivid picture of a medieval shrine with dozens of reliquaries arrayed around the steps to the saint's tomb. Its mix of local saints (in this case figures from Anglo-Saxon Northumbria), early Christian saints, and biblical notables is typical of the kinds of relics found in larger churches throughout Europe. The excerpt from the account book of the shrine's monk custodian both indicates the kinds of pious offerings left by pilgrims seeking favors or offering thanks for ones granted, and suggests the wealth that could accumulate at popular shrines. By the later Middle Ages most relics had indulgences attached to them which increased their allure even more. Though the cult of relics may seem a quintessentially medieval preoccupation, it is worth remembering its enduring appeal. Martin Luther's staunch patron Elector Frederick the Wise of Saxony kept a treasure trove of relics in his castle at Wittenberg. Three years into the German Reformation, a 1520 inventory of his collection listed 19,013 relics — including a wisp of Jesus's beard and bread from the Last Supper — with a total of 1,902,202 years and 270 days of indulgences attached to them! Modern readers bothered by some of the obviously spurious objects in Durham's collection might consider the degree to which medieval piety was driven by a different standard of what was genuine.

Source: trans. J. Shinnars from *Extracts from the Account Rolls of the Abbey of Durham*, ed. J. T. Fowler, Surtees Society v. 100 (Durham: Andrews & Co, 1898), v. II, pp. 425-430, 450-452. Latin.

AD. 1383. This book is an account of the relics at the shrine of St. Cuthbert, compiled by Dom Richard de Segbruck, then custodian of the shrine, to describe what kind of relics there are and on what step of the shrine they are kept.

To begin, on the first or highest step at the south there is a gilded silver statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Next, a gilded silver statue of St. Oswald with one of his ribs contained in the statue's breast. Next there is one black



Pilgrims at a shrine

Three pilgrims seek cures at St. Edward the Confessor's shrine in Westminster Abbey. Two have squeezed into the niches often cut into the sides of shrines to allow pilgrims to get closer to the relics. On the floor are two "trindles" — thin wax tapers measured to the length of the petitioners' bodies, rolled into a coil, and offered to the saint in exchange for a miracle. A custodian monk rests before a book, perhaps a record of miracles wrought at the tomb. A nineteenth-century copy of a thirteenth-century drawing from a French translation of Aelred of Rievaulx's *Life of St. Edward*; reproduced in Daniel Rock's *Church of Our Fathers* (London: C. Dolman, 1852) v. 3, pt. 1, p. 418 after University of Cambridge Library MS Ee. iii, 59, fol. 65r.

bone of St. Christopher, the finger joint of St. Stephen, some of the bread that the Lord blessed, some of St. Peter's skull bone, some of St. Helena's and St. Lawrence's bones, and from the tunic of St. Gregory, and from the Lord's Cross, and a bone from St. Giles. Next, a small gilded silver reliquary with the finger bone of St. Firmin the martyr.

Next, a crystal vial with the vestment of St. John the Evangelist and the rib of St. Edward the king. Next, teeth and bones from the martyr St. Cyriac in a white samite purse. Next, one pyx embellished with crystal stones containing flesh and fat from St. Thomas the martyr, and some of the clothes in which he was buried.

Next, the hauberk of St. Oswald the king . . . [gap in the ms] and from the cross that he erected in battle in one reliquary. Next, one black crystal pyx containing the sponge from Good Friday [i.e., the sponge dipped in gall and vinegar offered to Jesus on the cross] and some of the Lord's sepulcher, and a piece of the stone on which Jesus sat in Herod's palace. Next, some of the tree under which the three angels sat with Abraham. Next, a marvelously big, white, carved pearl.

Next, a silver cross with wood from the Cross inside. Next, some of St. Barbara the virgin's skirt in an ivory pyx. Next, three of St. Aidan the bishop's teeth with some other relics in a red muslin purse. Next, some of St. Nicholas's jawbone, hair shirt, and vestment, and some of his oil, bones, and tomb in a small silver enameled box. . . .

Next, a piece from the rock on which Christ stood when he ascended into heaven, and pieces from his manger and crib, and from Mount Calvary, from the rock on which Christ was born, from the place where he was crucified, and from the Lord's manger, and from his tunic, and from rocks from across the Jordan, and from his handkerchief [i.e., Veronica's veil imprinted with Jesus' face], with other relics of our Lord Jesus Christ in a crystal vial with four feet trimmed with copper. Next, the same sort of relics in a small red purse with a large label. Next, St. Dunstan's ivory comb in a multicolored silk purse.

Next, pieces from St. Godric's beard and hauberk, and from the bones of Saints Paula and Eustochium, her daughter, in a gilded silver reliquary. Next, one gilded silver cross with a crystal between the cross and its stand and with other precious stones of various colors. Next, some of the wood from the Lord's Cross and from his sepulcher, and from the stone that laid at the Lord's head in the sepulcher, and some wood from the tree in the Garden of Paradise, and from Mount Calvary in a crystal pyx. Next, one thorn from the crown of our Lord Jesus Christ donated by Lord Thomas Hatfield, Bishop of Durham, in a golden vial encased in a leather cover. . . .

*Dom Thomas de Lythe took up his duties as feretrarius, or custodian of the shrine, in 1398. The account below records items left at the shrine over the course of his three-year term as custodian. In addition to these items, pilgrims left money offerings of about £30 a year in a collection box near the shrine.*

Account of the custodian of the shrine rendered by Dom Thomas de Lythe on the feast of St. Edmund the Archbishop A.D. 1401.

First, on the western gable of the shrine is attached that precious stone called "le Emeraud" (which the custodian had previously kept among the relics), estimated value: £3,000. Next, two good brooches donated by the reigning King Henry [IV], estimated value [blank space]. Next, two good brooches donated Duke Mowbray, estimated value: [blank space]. Next, one good brooch donated by the Earl of Rutland, value [blank space]. Next one good brooch donated by Lord Neville and another good brooch donated by his wife, the Countess Neville, estimated value: 20 marks. Next, one good brooch donated by Lord Henry Percy, estimated value: £10. Next, one good brooch donated by the Countess of Kent, estimated value: [blank space] marks. Next, one good brooch donated by the Earl of Salisbury, estimated value: 100s. Next, one brooch donated by Dom John of Charterton, monk, value 20s. Next, one brooch donated by one of the squires of Bishop John Fordham, value: 40s. Next, five brooches and six gilded silver buttons bought by the said Thomas de Lythe, value: 40s. Next, one gold pair of beads with a gold pendant donated by the wife of John de Killingall, value: 100s. Next, two good gold rings with diamonds donated by the knight, Sir Ralph Ferrers, estimated value: 40s. Next, two old lockets with two rings donated by Richard Redworth, value: 20s. Next, one old pendant donated by some woman, value 6s. 8p. Next, hanging there is a silver [model] boat which was gilded in the time of Thomas, value: 13s. 4p. Next, hanging there are various rings offered by anonymous pilgrims, value 40s. Next, one small pendant purchased by Thomas from William Cawood, value 6s. 8p. Next, one small gilded cross, value: 6s. 8p. Next, hanging there are five small gold rings with gemstones and silver chains which were previously in the keeping of the shrine's custodian, value: 5 marks. Next, one gold cross with various gemstones, value: 40s.

Sum of the estimates value of the offerings attached to the shrine's west gable during the term of office of Thomas de Lythe, custodian: £3,463 10s.

Next on the south side there is a gold statue of the Blessed Virgin with the coat of arms of the Bishop of Durham which the bishop acquired through the mediation of Thomas de Lythe in exchange for a precious jewel offered at the shrine of St. Cuthbert during the term of office of the said

bone of St. Christopher, the finger joint of St. Stephen, some of the bread that the Lord blessed, some of St. Peter's skull bone, some of St. Helena's and St. Lawrence's bones, and from the tunic of St. Gregory, and from the Lord's Cross, and a bone from St. Giles. Next, a small gilded silver reliquary with the finger bone of St. Firmin the martyr.

Next, a crystal vial with the vestment of St. John the Evangelist and the rib of St. Edward the king. Next, teeth and bones from the martyr St. Cyriac in a white samite purse. Next, one pyx embellished with crystal stones containing flesh and fat from St. Thomas the martyr, and some of the clothes in which he was buried.

Next, the hauberk of St. Oswald the king . . . [gap in the ms] and from the cross that he erected in battle in one reliquary. Next, one black crystal pyx containing the sponge from Good Friday [i.e., the sponge dipped in gall and vinegar offered to Jesus on the cross] and some of the Lord's sepulcher, and a piece of the stone on which Jesus sat in Herod's palace. Next, some of the tree under which the three angels sat with Abraham. Next, a marvelously big, white, carved pearl.

Next, a silver cross with wood from the Cross inside. Next, some of St. Barbara the virgin's skirt in an ivory pyx. Next, three of St. Aidan the bishop's teeth with some other relics in a red muslin purse. Next, some of St. Nicholas's jawbone, hair shirt, and vestment, and some of his oil, bones, and tomb in a small silver enameled box. . . .

Next, a piece from the rock on which Christ stood when he ascended into heaven, and pieces from his manger and crib, and from Mount Calvary, from the rock on which Christ was born, from the place where he was crucified, and from the Lord's manger, and from his tunic, and from rocks from across the Jordan, and from his handkerchief [i.e., Veronica's veil imprinted with Jesus' face], with other relics of our Lord Jesus Christ in a crystal vial with four feet trimmed with copper. Next, the same sort of relics in a small red purse with a large label. Next, St. Dunstan's ivory comb in a multicolored silk purse.

Next, pieces from St. Godric's beard and hauberk, and from the bones of Saints Paula and Eustochium, her daughter, in a gilded silver reliquary. Next, one gilded silver cross with a crystal between the cross and its stand and with other precious stones of various colors. Next, some of the wood from the Lord's Cross and from his sepulcher, and from the stone that laid at the Lord's head in the sepulcher, and some wood from the tree in the Garden of Paradise, and from Mount Calvary in a crystal pyx. Next, one thorn from the crown of our Lord Jesus Christ donated by Lord Thomas Hatfield, Bishop of Durham, in a golden vial encased in a leather cover. . . .

*Dom Thomas de Lythe took up his duties as feretrarius, or custodian of the shrine, in 1398. The account below records items left at the shrine over the course of his three-year term as custodian. In addition to these items, pilgrims left money offerings of about £30 a year in a collection box near the shrine.*

Account of the custodian of the shrine rendered by Dom Thomas de Lythe on the feast of St. Edmund the Archbishop A.D. 1401.

First, on the western gable of the shrine is attached that precious stone called "le Emeraud" (which the custodian had previously kept among the relics), estimated value: £3,000. Next, two good brooches donated by the reigning King Henry [IV], estimated value [blank space]. Next, two good brooches donated Duke Mowbray, estimated value: [blank space]. Next, one good brooch donated by the Earl of Rutland, value [blank space]. Next, one good brooch donated by Lord Neville and another good brooch donated by his wife, the Countess Neville, estimated value: 20 marks. Next, one good brooch donated by Lord Henry Percy, estimated value: £10. Next, one good brooch donated by the Countess of Kent, estimated value: [blank space] marks. Next, one good brooch donated by the Earl of Salisbury, estimated value: 100s. Next, one brooch donated by Dom John of Charteron, monk, value 20s. Next, one brooch donated by one of the squires of Bishop John Fordham, value: 40s. Next, five brooches and six gilded silver buttons bought by the said Thomas de Lythe, value: 40s. Next, one gold pair of beads with a gold pendant donated by the wife of John de Killingall, value: 100s. Next, two good gold rings with diamonds donated by the knight, Sir Ralph Ferers, estimated value: 40s. Next, two old lockets with two rings donated by Richard Redworth, value: 20s. Next, one old pendant donated by some woman, value 6s. 8p. Next, hanging there is a silver [model] boat which was gilded in the time of Thomas, value: 13s. 4p. Next, hanging there are various rings offered by anonymous pilgrims, value 40s. Next, one small pendant purchased by Thomas from William Cawood, value 6s. 8p. Next, one small gilded cross, value: 6s. 8p.. Next, hanging there are five small gold rings with gemstones and silver chains which were previously in the keeping of the shrine's custodian, value: 5 marks. Next, one gold cross with various gemstones, value: 40s.

Sum of the estimates value of the offerings attached to the shrine's west gable during the term of office of Thomas de Lythe, custodian: £3,463 10s.

Next on the south side there is a gold statue of the Blessed Virgin with the coat of arms of the Bishop of Durham which the bishop acquired through the mediation of Thomas de Lythe in exchange for a precious jewel offered at the shrine of St. Cuthbert during the term of office of the said

Thomas by the knight William Scrope for a certain transgression he made against the liberty of Durham, estimated value: £300. Next, on the same side of the shrine, one leg bone of the earl Warenne which was gilded during the term of office of the same Thomas, value: 13s. 4p. Next, attached there is one jewel shaped like a lancet donated by the smithy William Prentice, value 10s. Next, two pendants with two rings donated by two pilgrims, value: 13s. 4p. Next, one pendant donated by William Pencher, value 6s 8p. Next, one pendant donated by the sister of John Todd, value: 10s. Next, two pendants donated by two women pilgrims, value 10s.

Sum of the estimated value of offerings attached to the shrine's south side during the term of office of Thomas de Lythe, custodian: £503 3s. 4d.

Next during the term of office of the aforesaid Thomas there were attached to the north side of the shrine on the left side one gold noble donated by the wife of Henry Hastiler. And one gold noble with a gold half-penny donated by a certain citizen of Berwick. Next, one quarter of a gold noble donated by Lord Henry Percy. Next on the same northern side two rings donated by the chaplain Thomas de Lomley, value: 10s. Next one gilded silver tabernacle with a picture of the Blessed Virgin donated by the Lady of Ross, value: 5 marks. Next, one gilded silver statue donated by the Countess Douglas, value: 5 marks. next, one gilded silver scallop shell and one model boat donated by some pilgrim, value: 5s. Next, one gold half-penny donated by the knight Robert Conyers. Next, one gold half-penny donated by some pilgrim. Next, one pair of white beads with a silver locket donated by the wife of Henry Hastiler, value: 10s. Next, one pair amber beads donated by an anonymous woman, value: 6s 8p. Excluding these things, various other things were offered and attached to the shrine during the term of office of Dom Thomas, which do not come to memory at the moment. Moreover, the ironwork with lights around the shrine with making and painting a room for the custodian, and the work on the pavement, doors, and other things around the shrine beyond the value of 20 marks, were done at the urging and the personal expense of the said Dom Thomas.

Sum of the estimated value of the offerings made and attached to the north side of the shrine during the term of office of Thomas de Lythe, custodian: £23 20p.

### 33. THOMAS MORE'S DIALOGUE ON SAINTS AND THEIR SHRINES (1529)

*Though he perched on the cusp of the English Reformation and was imbued with the ideals of the Northern Renaissance humanists, Thomas More's (1478-1535) basic religious instincts were still deeply embedded in the late medieval world. As chancellor of England, for instance, he was a tireless prosecutor of heretics; and the last works he wrote while imprisoned in the Tower before his execution — including his treatises on Christ's passion and sadness, several prayers, and his famous Dialogue on Comfort — were essentially medieval in thought and tone. In his Dialogue Concerning Heresies (1529), undertaken at the request of the bishop of London to combat the rising tide of Lutheranism in England, More holds a fictional conversation with a young schoolmaster of Protestant sympathies called "the Messenger," grappling with him over a range of issues at the heart of the Reformation. Justification by faith, the nature of the church, translating the Bible, and saints and their shrines are some of the subjects covered in the four-book treatise, written in English to make it more accessible. Though late in date, it is an excellent summary of the salient features of medieval devotion to saints. In its critique of the abuses surrounding popular veneration of saints, it mirrors More's good friend Erasmus's lampooning colloquy called "A Pilgrimage for Religion's Sake." Yet despite the devotional excesses to which the cult of saints was prone, More argued that the abuse of it did not mean it was itself evil.*

Source: modernized by J. Shinnars from *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies in The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, ed. T. N. C. Lawler, G. Marc'hadour, R. C. Marius (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), v. 6, pt. 1, pp. 226-234. English.

#### Book II, Chapter 10

*The messenger raises many objections against pilgrimages, relics, and the worshipping of saints because of many superstitious practices they use, unlawful petitions asked of them, and the harm growing therefrom.*

"Sir," [the Messenger] said, "you have to my mind very nicely treated the matter that it is not in vain to pray to saints or to worship them and hold their relics in some reverence. But sir, all this misses the main abuse, for though saints may hear us and help us too, and are glad and willing to do so, and God is contented also that they and their relics and images are held in honor, yet neither he nor they can be content with the manner of the worship. First, because it takes away worship from him since we offer them the