

Geographies of Sainthood: Christian Pilgrimage from the Middle Ages to the Present Day

By the tenth century, Muslim tolerance of Jews and Christians in Jerusalem had given way to militancy and violence. The caliph al-Hakim even ordered the rock of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre to be destroyed, although his attempt at desecration was foiled by the hardness of the rock and the fragility of his workmen's chisels. Deprived of easy access to the Holy Land, Christian pilgrims were left to choose between two courses of action. One was to attempt to take back the sacred sites by force, as we saw in Chapter 4. However, the relief provided by military means was always to be intermittent, and Jerusalem remained largely under Muslim rule until the twentieth century. A different solution could be found in the creation of a sacred landscape in Europe. Sanctified sites could, in effect, duplicate the shrines of the Holy Land, either through imitation, the appropriation of relics from Palestine itself or the generation of indigenous local relics. Of course, many holy sites had existed in Europe for hundreds of years, such as the church of St Martin at Tours, an important pilgrimage site since the fifth century. Nevertheless, the great increase in pilgrimage centres, churches and shrines in eleventh- and twelfth-century Europe can be seen in part as a response to the loss of the Holy Land.

Rome claimed pre-eminence as a site of pilgrimage in the western Mediterranean, combining its status as a seat of empire with its access to spiritual authority. The city boasted not only the tombs of St Peter (the rock of the Church) and St Paul (apostle to the Gentiles), and indeed fragments of the True Cross, but also the presence of Peter's living embodiment, the Pope. The pious traveller could leave the city with a token depicting the keys of the apostle – a symbol which asserted the continuity of the Church. In addition to these prime attractions, Rome boasted numerous 'marvels' from the tombs of the martyrs, such as St Lawrence, to the great and ancient churches built by Constantine (himself venerated as a saint) and a plethora of ancient ruins. Medieval pilgrims' guide books, such as the *Mirabilia Urbis Romae* (written by a canon of St Peter's in the twelfth century) laid stress on all these aspects, giving visitors not only directions but also potted histories of the significance of different sites. In the *Mirabilia*, Rome becomes a city originally founded by Noah in his wanderings.¹

34 OPPOSITE Santiago de Compostela, west front, 18th-century replacement of the original Romanesque façade. The tomb of St James the Great, venerated at Compostela in Galicia since the 9th century, became the single most important pilgrimage venue in western Christendom.



Santiago de Compostela, located in north-west Spain, emerged as a principal site of pilgrimage in western Christendom during the Middle Ages. The fact that the area was difficult and dangerous to reach increased its attractions to those who regarded perilous journeys as meritorious. Compostela's rise in importance also had distinct political and military implications. Its reputation as a holy place rested on the somewhat dubious claim that the remains of St James (Santiago in Spanish) had been carried to Spain from the Holy Land and discovered at the site in the ninth century. Such remains were important because they apparently belonged to an apostle and blood relative of Christ. They were located at the church behind the reliquary statue of the saint, and would be kissed by pilgrims at the culmination of the pilgrimage.

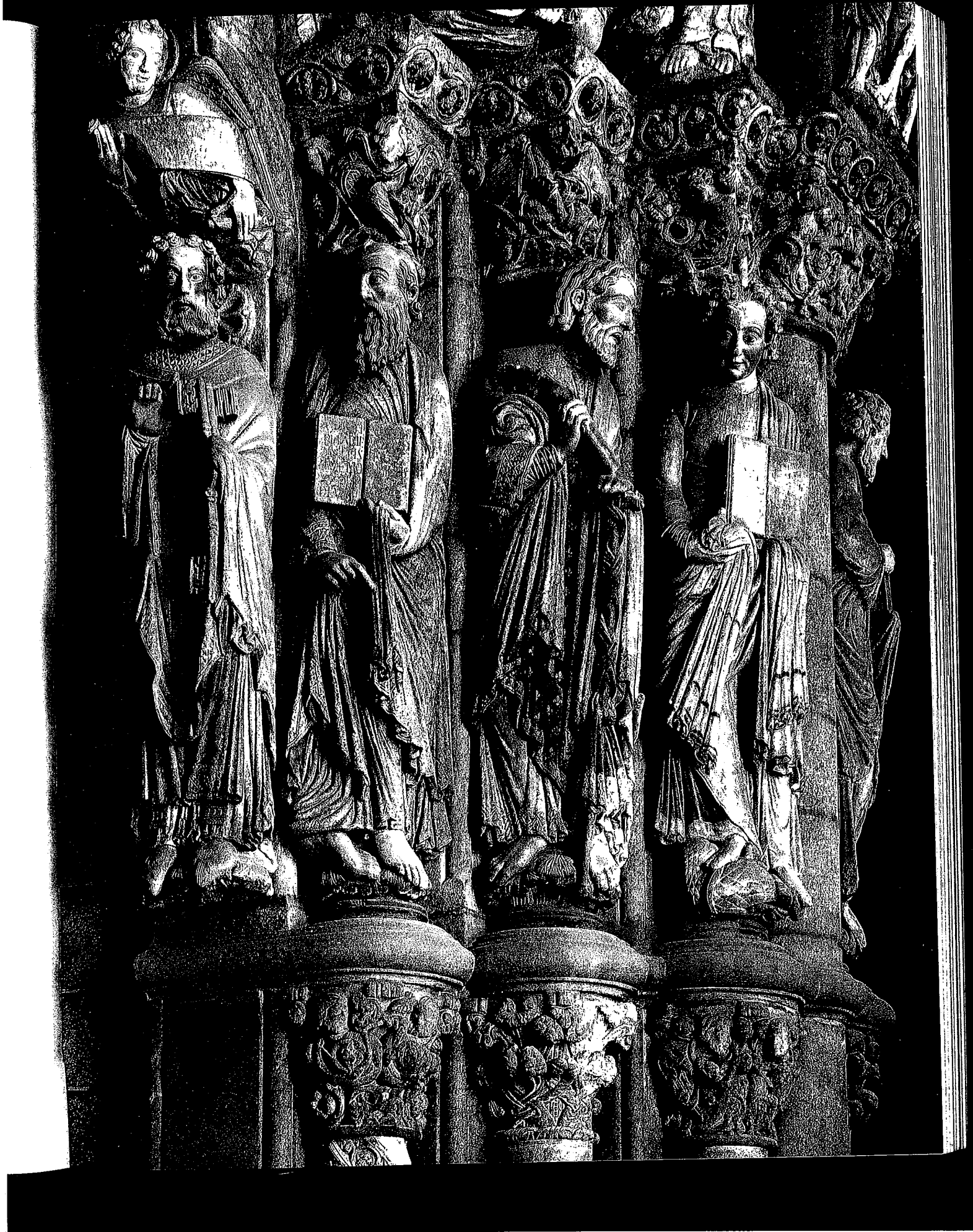
More significantly, however, the journey of the apostle from the Holy Land had appeared to transform him from a gentle fisherman into Matamoros (the Moor slayer), a powerful, patriotic symbol of Christian opposition to contemporary Muslim expansion. While the traditional representation of St James in painting and sculpture is that of the Pilgrim, dressed in broad-brimmed hat and cape and carrying a staff and scallop shell, in Spain he is depicted as a galloping knight, sword in one hand and cross in the other.² The great days of the site were to be during the years of the Crusades, when European Christianity was at its most aggressive towards Islam.³

Many other, smaller, sites proliferated throughout the continent, as the geography of Catholic pilgrimage became increasingly Europeanised. Walsingham in Norfolk, for instance, emerged as a shrine around 1061. Unlike Compostela, its reputation did not rely on the presence of relics. However, its founding myth revealed a desire to evoke some of the spiritual authority of Palestine. Richeldis, a local aristocrat, was said to have had a vision during which she was transported to Nazareth and the house where the angel Gabriel had announced the coming birth of Jesus to the Virgin (and where Jesus himself lived as a child). Obeying Mary's orders, conveniently conveyed to a person with sufficient resources to carry them out, Richeldis instructed her carpenters to build an exact replica of the holy house. The place became known as England's Nazareth and emerged as an international centre of pilgrimage. Visitors to the site were called palmers, a name usually reserved for those who had been to the Holy Land. A fifteenth-century ballad published by Richard Pynson records:⁴

O England great cause thou hast glad for to be
Compared to the Land of Promise, Sion . . .
In thee is builded New Nazareth.

The legend of Walsingham reveals how Nazareth could be symbolically translated to Norfolk through the intercession of a holy figure and imitation of a holy place. Unlike the warlike St James, Mary proved an appropriate mediator for pilgrims seeking forgiveness and mercy. Throughout Europe as a whole, the tombs of saints and martyrs became sacred and powerful places, often appropriating the sites and the charisma of pagan predecessors. The creation of a sacred landscape in the

35 OPPOSITE Santiago de Compostela, figure sculpture from the right-hand jambs of the central doorway, Portico de la Gloria, 12th century. The great west entrance was sculpted between 1168-88, later than the construction of the rest of the cathedral. The figures represented here are all New Testament saints - from left to right, St Peter with the key, St Paul, St James himself and St John the Evangelist.



continent was reinforced by material manifestations of the divine such as tombs, relics and images, and sometimes the bodies of saints were even broken up for distribution to various sites.⁵ According to theological orthodoxy, of course, veneration was due to God through the mediation of the Virgin or a saint represented by an image or embodied in a relic, rather than to the specific object itself. However, popular beliefs were often rather more parochial in implication. For instance, a story is told in the *Miracles of Our Lady of Chartres* of a lady who was apparently cured of a skin disease by praying to the Virgin.⁶ When she set off for Notre-Dame de Soissons to give thanks for her deliverance, the Virgin appeared to inform her that she had in fact been healed by Notre-Dame de Chartres.

Often, it was important not only to view sacred objects, but also to touch them in order that their power be realised and made personally applicable in the prevention of plague, protection against war, assistance in religious conflicts, and so on. A small aperture called a *confessio* might be built on the top of a tomb so that the faithful could thrust in a piece of cloth to make contact with the remains. Tombs might even be scraped and the fragments consumed, or water drunk which had been used to wash the holy places. Such beliefs could claim biblical sanction by recalling episodes of healing associated with touching the garments of Jesus (although, of course, officially saints only acquired such power after death), but also gained force because they provided tangible, ritual enactments of ideas of mediation and intercession.

Although supposedly transcending the world of humanity, exemplary figures such as saints and martyrs tended to echo some of the characteristics of worldly hierarchy: a high proportion were both male and aristocratic. (In the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, more men than women appeared to go on pilgrimage, and the practice was common among aristocrats, but over time increasing numbers of women, and people of lower status, began to visit holy sites.) The relationship of saints and their festivals with ordinary mortals also had other, distinctly mundane aspects. Holy sites were associated with fairs, and matchmaking could be arranged at large gatherings, not least because pilgrimages provided opportunities for courtship. In addition, saints could almost be seen as engaging in a relationship of exchange or patronage with humans, offering favours in return for honour and worship. At Compostela, pilgrims were expected to make offerings to the saint in the form of cash or jewellery, and such offerings helped provide the funds necessary to embellish the architecture of the shrine. According to one theory, the feudal system of acknowledging fealty to a lord was easily transferred to the relationship between saints and living Christians – even if the allegiance of pilgrims to their lords was often suspended during the time of the pilgrimage.⁷

One way of giving thanks for the granting of a favour was by leaving behind *ex-votos* – wax models of parts of the body which had been cured, crutches, model ships of those who had survived shipwrecks, and so on. These both propitiated the saint and, of course, advertised the efficacy of the site. Some saints even specialised in curing particular ailments. St Clare of France, for instance, became known (appropriately, given her

name) for her ability to produce clarity of vision. The association of a saint with power over a particular illness or scourge lent them a somewhat double-edged character, however, since it was often assumed that the holy figure might, if displeased, cause the very problems for which he or she normally provided the cure.

While tombs embodied permanent places of worship, relics provided more portable vehicles of the sacred. They could be worn as charms or talismans, or even carried into battle in an attempt to ensure victory. Such objects might even be kept in a reliquary shaped in the form of the relic itself, such as a finger or an arm. Holy sites competed to gain power and attention through their collections of sacred objects, and every consecrated church was required to have a relic played on its altar. As the demand for relics increased, so the methods of obtaining them became more ruthless. The bodies of saints, once 'discovered', were likely to be dismembered and spread with considerable alacrity. Not long after the discovery of St James in Spain, for instance, one of his hands appeared in Reading, and part of his arm in Liège. In the twelfth century, the pilgrims' guide to Compostela explicitly contested such claims from elsewhere, declaring 'let the folk beyond the mountains blush when they claim to have any part of it, or relics of him. For the entire body of the Apostle is there.'⁸ Jesus's Cross, garments and blood also appeared to be spread across the continent. Such demands could lead to a kind of holy inflation: so much wood appeared to have come from the Cross that a theory developed that the holy wood had powers of self-reproduction.

The production of relics for the gullible was a tempting occupation, as satirised in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, which features a Father Cipolla ('Onion'), who returns from Jerusalem carrying a bottle allegedly containing the sound of the bells of Solomon's temple. Already authenticated relics might also be obtained by underhand means. The institution of *furta sacra* ('pious thefts') developed, whereby the remains of a saint could be stolen and transported to another site by ambitious clerics, as in the case of the movement of the body of St Mark to Venice. Such conduct was rationalised with impressive theological ease by those who argued that saints were so powerful that they would not allow themselves to be moved against their will. A successful theft was thus argued to be a morally justifiable action – indeed, the success proved the action was justified.

If pilgrimages were a source of prestige for the guardians of sacred sites, and a potential provider of cures and miracles for many of their worshippers, they could also play a part in determining the nature of salvation. Through the system of 'indulgences' a pious act such as pilgrimage received a reward from the Church in the form of remission of punishments for sin, so that time spent in purgatory after death could be shortened dramatically. The system reinforced both the importance of the Church and the idea of pilgrimage as a transaction. It could also be used as an incentive, as Pope Urban II realised in granting such favours to crusaders to the Holy Land. However, like relics, indulgences were subject to destructive forces of supply and demand as competition between providers increased. By the end of the thirteenth century,

shrines were outbidding each other in the length of remission they could offer, and professional pardoners (sellers of indulgences) had appeared throughout Europe. *Libri indulgentiarum* – texts whose purpose was to list the respective benefits to be found at sites – also began to appear.

Sacred places were sites of various forms of authority and power in the medieval world, and secular and religious institutions sometimes co-operated in providing legal protection as well as hospitality for pilgrims. One author goes so far as to claim that pilgrimages and their organisation constituted a collective phenomenon that structured the whole of western Christianity.⁹ Abbeys, which at the time served as important centres of Christendom, supported religious voyages: Cluny, for instance, organised pilgrimages to Compostela. Many Romanesque churches also acted as important stopping-points along pilgrimage routes. In turn, a series of other organisations emerged, partially in order to service pilgrimages, such as military orders which protected the roads, and hostleries or hospices located at important transit points.

The institutionalised administration of the Church attempted, not always successfully, to co-opt and control the charisma of saints. The ability to designate such holy figures was of considerable importance, and although from the early Middle Ages this privilege was granted to bishops and synods, it was subsequently taken over by the Pope – a possible explanation for the preponderance of Italian saints. Political and religious authorities also incorporated pilgrimages into systems of discipline; indeed, this was a method employed by St Augustine himself as a form of sanction. Although sometimes self-imposed, these often involved punishment for some offence against God or the state, so that the pilgrimage became a contemporary equivalent of the exile of Cain. Penance could be demonstrated by methods of travel. Pilgrims might approach a holy site barefoot, on their knees, enduring a fast or a vow of silence, or possibly carrying stones around their neck. More generally, journeys to major sites were punctuated by visits to the shrines of lesser saints and the buildings of religious orders, thus turning the pilgrimage as a whole into a form of extended ritual. By carrying particular objects – a staff and scrip (or satchel) – the traveller could also copy religious functionaries who displayed their special status through their dress.

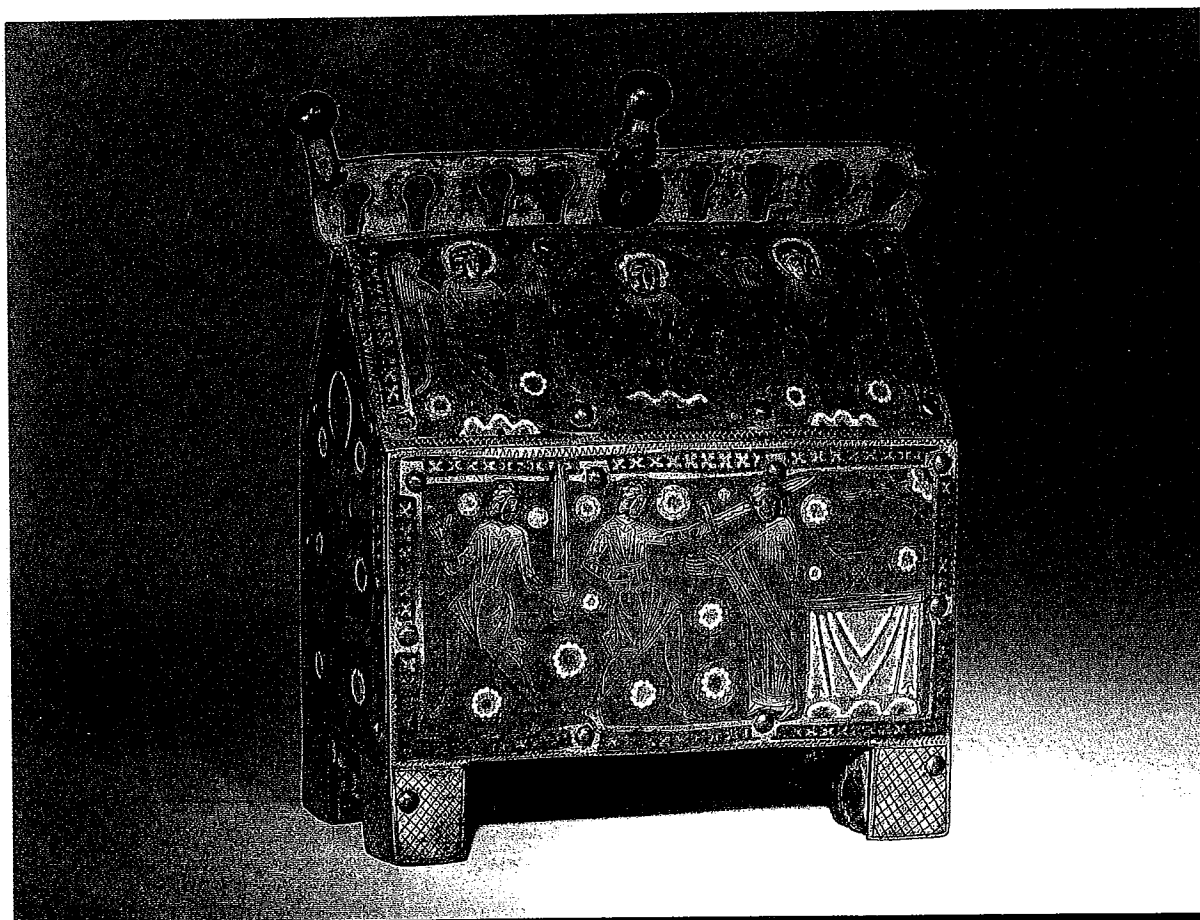
However, if the management of a shrine could bolster the authority of the Church, pilgrimage could also incorporate elements of popular religion whose implications were far from orthodox. The example of medieval Regensburg illustrates such a mixture of ecclesiastical control and popular enthusiasm. On 21 February 1519 the city expelled its large community of Jews. A workman engaged in pulling down the synagogue was badly injured, but recovered – an apparent miracle which encouraged contributions for a chapel on the site dedicated to the Virgin, incorporating a picture and statue of the Madonna. Thousands of people began to visit the site:¹⁰

... clothes that touched the statue were particularly good for curing sick cattle. On 1 June, Pope Leo X issued a bull granting indulgences of a hundred days to properly conducted pilgrimages to the chapel. In 1520 it became more and more the irrational and uncontrolled kind of movement that worried contemporary

churchmen a good deal. The pilgrims came in thousands, often whole villages together; some elected to come naked, others on their knees; visions and wonders increased . . . crowds danced howling around the statue.

This description appears to reinforce one theory as to the nature of medieval pilgrimage: that in a society based on feudal economic and political structures, it could provide an opportunity not only to break the bounds of one's immediate locality but also the constraints of everyday behaviour. However, its subversive nature might also take on a more explicitly political character, depending on the nature of the holy figure commemorated at the holy site. An example is provided by a shrine that came to rival Walsingham amongst the pre-eminent English sites of pilgrimage: Canterbury. Here, the figure who received veneration was a martyr who had risen to the peak of ecclesiastical and political authority, only to oppose and be destroyed by the forces of temporal power once he had begun to incur the king's displeasure. Born to Norman settlers, Thomas Becket had become the chancellor of Henry II, and then in 1162 Archbishop of Canterbury. On 29 December 1170 four knights first tried to entice him out of the cathedral, but were eventually forced to kill him near the Lady Chapel. Many faithful were said to have dipped cloth in his blood as if he were already a saint, and miracles soon began to be recorded in his name. A mere three years later he was canonised as a result of popular pressure. The site became not only a memorial to Becket, but also a scene of regal humiliation, as Henry came to Canterbury, walked barefoot to the cathedral and was scourged at Becket's tomb as a sign of his apparent penitence. Henry VIII later destroyed the shrine, partly to

36 Enamelled reliquary casket from Limoges depicting the martyrdom of St Thomas Becket, 13th century, British Museum. Becket is shown on the main body of the casket performing mass at an altar over which hovers the hand of God. He is attacked by two knights (in reality there were four). Above, the saint's soul is shown ascending into heaven with angels.



ensure that no chance remained of the Becket cult continuing to symbolise resistance to the sovereign's authority.

STAGING THE SACRED: ART AND ARCHITECTURE AS THE SETTING FOR PILGRIMAGE

The fact that pilgrimages often provided arenas for assertions of and challenges to religious and secular authority in the medieval period is revealed not only in historical texts, but also in the architecture of pilgrimage sites. Let us take as an example one of the prime pilgrimage sites of the high Middle Ages. While Chartres was not quite as important a pilgrimage venue as Santiago or Rome, it was one of the principal centres for sacred travel in France – along with the shrines of St Michael on the Mont-St-Michel and Mary Magdalene at Vézelay. Moreover, it proved an important stopping-off point (like Vézelay) on the way to Compostela or Rome. Here is the thirteenth-century poet Guillaume le Breton on the cathedral of Chartres:¹¹

City of Chartres, enriched not by numerous burghers,
Likewise also enriched by its clergy so mighty, so splendid,
And by its beautiful church, for none can be found in the whole world,
None that would equal its structure, its size and decor in my judgment.
Countless the signs and the favours of grace by which the Blessed Virgin
Shows that the Mother of Christ has a special love for this one church,
Granting a minor place, as it were, to all other churches,
Deeming it right to be frequently called the Lady of Chartres.
This is also the place where every one worships the tunic
Worn on the day of the birth of the Lamb, by the Virgin as garment. . . .

This quotation is from a poem completed within a few decades of the rebuilding of the cathedral at Chartres after the terrible fire of 1194 which demolished all the twelfth-century church but the west façade. Above all, Guillaume remarks on Chartres' great relic (which 'every one worships') and the 'countless signs and favours of grace' bestowed there by the Virgin. In fact, by the later Middle Ages, the Virgin's tunic (a 16-foot [5 m] long piece of silk) was but one of the many treasures possessed by the cathedral. In addition there were several hundred miraculous statues, a miraculous well containing the relics of local martyrs,¹² even the head of St Anne, the Virgin's mother,¹³ purchased by Louis the Count of Chartres from the sacred booty looted from Constantinople in 1204 by the crusaders.

The pilgrim at Chartres was confronted with a dazzling display of medieval splendour in architecture, sculpture and stained glass. The nave floor boasted a huge labyrinth (whose diameter was as wide as the nave itself), a symbol of the pilgrim's path in this life and of the road to salvation in the next (see illustration on p. 169). The images in glass and stone were a complex doctrinal testament to the religion which pilgrimage to Chartres reaffirmed. Such imagery not only supported spiritual awe with all the emotional effects that early Gothic could muster; it also embodied a theological commentary on the Incarnation, redemption of humankind, and the possibility for salvation offered to the individual

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pilgrim as he or she arrived at the church. In a sense such art replaced texts as the 'book for the illiterate', and it functioned alongside the readings, liturgies and services whose setting it formed by providing them with a visual commentary.

One key element of the imagery – something implied also in Guillaume le Breton's reference to burghers and clergy – is the representation in the arts of Chartres of all the social stations to which its pilgrims would have belonged. From the royal arms of France and Castille in the North Rose (the rose window celebrating the Virgin) to images of peasants (such as the harvesters in the labours of the month sculptures of the Royal Porch at the west entrance or the peasant and cart represented in the stained-glass window of St Lubin, donated by the wine merchants), the art of Chartres framed all its pilgrims within the world of its own imagery. Many windows were given by local gentry or nobles, for instance that of the Clément family, depicting St Denis, the patron saint of France, with the youthful marshall Jean Clément in the south-east transept. Dressed as a crusader, with a cross on his tunic, the marshall stands as a figure of knighthood idealised, as well as a representative of the local nobility. Still more windows were donated by the merchants, guilds and burghers of the town of Chartres, including clothiers, drapers, furriers, haberdashers, tanners, sculptors, armourers, bakers, butchers, cartwrights, coopers, masons, stone-cutters, bankers, apothecaries, fishmongers, water-carriers and vintners. These tradesmen signed their dedications by having their professions portrayed in glass. Together they provide a comprehensive portrayal, a cross-section, of medieval burgher life.



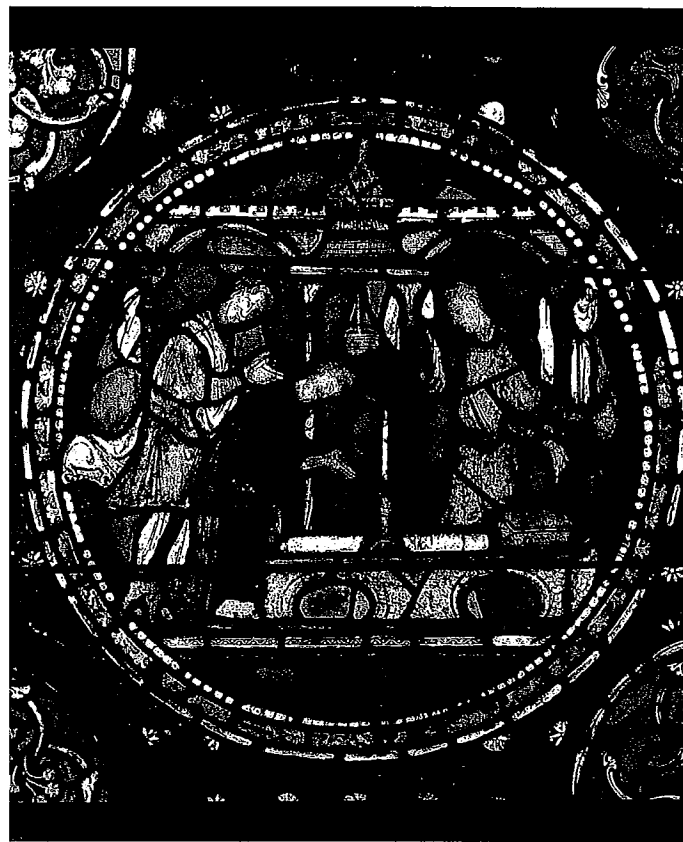
37 Chartres, sculptural detail from the left door, Royal Porch, late 12th century. The carving depicts a peasant harvesting grain, one of the Labours of the Months, representing July.



38 Chartres, window from the clerestory of the south transept, 13th century. Marshall Jean Clément receives the oriflamme from St Denis (Dionisius), the patron saint of France.

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Combined with the images of royalty, aristocracy and the priesthood, the iconography of Chartres provides an idealised image of the whole social order, made up of groups with complementary but different roles and statuses. And yet it incorporated all the contestations and competitions of medieval culture, as local aristocratic families and tradesmen's guilds vied with each other to donate windows. The signatures of the tradesmen in fact functioned as permanent advertisements, since they were carefully placed at the bottom of windows so as not to impede the sacred narratives which the main imagery recounts, but also to be as close as possible to the viewer's eye.

The lives and professions of pilgrims and donors are therefore tied to the sacred histories which these windows record and to the total narrative of holy doctrine which the cathedral itself embodies. Moreover, the church becomes a visual representation of the totality of medieval society itself, placed symbolically as the foundation on which the sacred stories of Christ and the saints are told. The whole hierarchy of medieval culture is not only enshrined and reinforced by its representation in the images of the cathedral, but comes to underlie a sacred hierarchy of saints, the Virgin and Christ. The pilgrim at Chartres saw not only a theological narrative, but also – perhaps most crucially – an ideal portrait of him or herself (whether peasant, knight or burgher, king, priest or bishop) represented within that story.

39 ABOVE LEFT and 40 ABOVE RIGHT
Canterbury Cathedral, stained glass showing pilgrims travelling to the shrine of St Thomas and pilgrims praying at the tomb of St Thomas. These panels were part of a spectacular series completed in the early 13th century and placed in the low windows of the Trinity Chapel which surrounded the shrine to which Becket's body was transferred in 1220. They were physically very close to the pilgrims as they circled the shrine and more visible in detail than most medieval glass.

The art of Chartres thus incorporated the viewer – the pilgrim – into its network of meanings. Furthermore, the windows allude not only to local saints (such as St Chéron) or to those venerated specifically at Chartres (the Virgin or Christ), but also to other pilgrimage targets, whose worship spanned the geography of Europe. For instance, the choir windows include stories of St Martin of Tours, St Thomas Becket and St James. In alluding to such figures, Chartres incorporates, on one level of its meaning, a sacred geography of medieval pilgrimage in western Christendom, as well as a sacred history and a sociology of medieval society.

Chartres is unique – perhaps above all because it has survived so little harmed. Here, more than in any other Gothic church, we can experience the 'feel' of a pilgrimage centre in much the same form as it had in the Middle Ages. Yet the art of Chartres did not emphasise and re-emphasise the theme of pilgrimage in precisely the same way as the windows of other cathedrals. At Canterbury, as at Chartres, there is a great cycle of the genealogy of Christ, as well as windows reflecting local saints like Dunstan and Alphege.¹⁴ Similarly, there are hagiographical cycles of other saints with important shrines, such as St Martin of Tours. But by far the most extended cycle – of windows placed remarkably close to eye level in the cathedral's great corona at the east – represents the miracles of St Thomas. Martyred in 1170, just four years before his cathedral happened to be (some have thought purposely) burnt to the ground, and only ten years before the great new edifice in the early Gothic style was being glazed, St Thomas turned Canterbury into a pilgrimage centre of the first rank. The Becket windows show not only the saint's life, but the miracles performed by him after his death. Many of these miracles took place at Canterbury itself, at the tomb which the windows were designed to surround.

In the early years of the thirteenth century, when St Thomas's relics were still in a shrine in the crypt of his new church (before being moved, on the completion of the choir, to the high altar in 1220), accounts of his miracles were read to pilgrims in the chapter house.¹⁵ Thus the monks of Canterbury provided a verbal support to the visual message being conveyed by the glass. The Becket windows emphasise not only his life but the very pilgrimage to his tomb where the miracles took place. This was the pilgrimage which a viewer had to have undertaken in order to be looking at these windows. Like the social portraits at Chartres, the Canterbury windows show knights, burghers, peasants, priests and abbots being healed at the shrine of St Thomas. They show pilgrims riding to the tomb, arriving there, venerating it. They show the outcasts of medieval society – lepers, the insane – brought to the sacred centre and cured. In a still more active and dramatic way than the glass of Chartres, these windows map contemporary concerns – the activities of the recently martyred Thomas and of the pilgrims present at his tomb (of which every viewer was one) – upon the sacred narrative of the Incarnation and salvation of humankind. They depict a society healed through the Church, whose divisions are brought together in the unifying action of pilgrimage and divine grace through the mediation of the sainted

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Thomas, who bestows blessings on king and pauper alike. In the high Middle Ages, it was the art of the pilgrimage centre that explained the significance of the place to its visitors and that incorporated them as pilgrims into Christendom's complete and ideal vision of a divine order informing and governing the human realm.

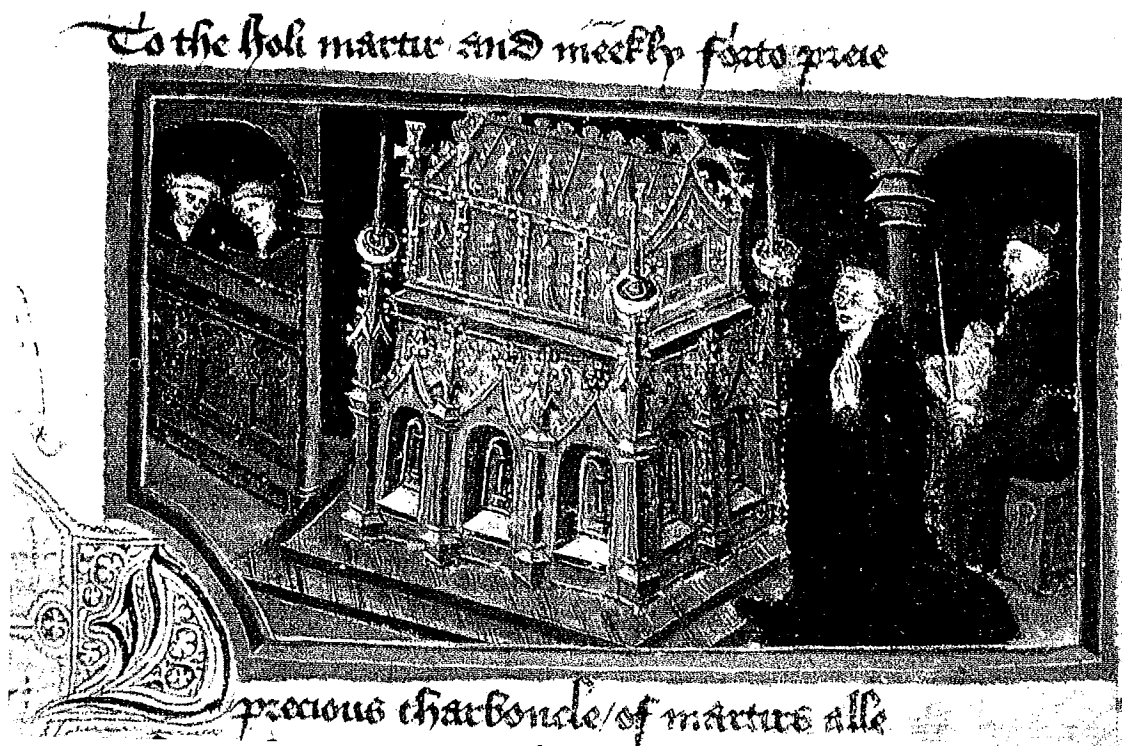
Such imagery, and the very act of pilgrimage which looking at such images involved, was a formidable affirmation of the power of the Church. St Thomas represented the triumph of the Church's authority – the spiritual rather than the temporal world – over that of his enemy, the king of England. Henry II's pilgrimage and self-abasement before the shrine of his erstwhile rival proved the supremacy of the Church over the king. But Canterbury's imagery of a sick society brought to health and harmony at the tomb of the saint could also be used to reinforce the king's authority. Henry's pilgrimage was a way of acquiring spiritual endorsement from a saint whom he had himself created. In later years, other English royal figures, such as the Black Prince and Henry IV, would be buried in the choir of Canterbury by the tomb of the saint. A figure whose initial distinction lay in his and the Church's resistance to temporal power came to bestow his spiritual aid upon the interests of the English monarchy.

OPPOSITION TO PILGRIMAGE: ICONOCLASM AND REFORMATION

The art and architecture of some pilgrimage sites could thus serve to reflect and thereby reinforce the image of an ordered, hierarchical, medieval society. Yet, as a widespread and popular phenomenon, involving the mass movement of the poor as well as the rich through the landscape, medieval pilgrimage always contained a potential threat to the authorities of Church and State. The Church's habit of granting the pilgrim special privileges, such as immunity both from taxes and from the threat of being arrested, also provided incentives for the less than spiritually pure to undertake the journey. As Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* illustrated, those who chose to undertake a journey might do so with other than pious intentions. Thus, the Pardoner boasts in his prologue of his attitude to his profession:¹⁶

I wol nat do no labour with myne handes . . .
Nay, I wol drynke licour of the vyne
And have a joly wenche in every toun.

Other, more specifically theological, reasons for resisting pilgrimage as a ritual practice were also evident. The Lollards, followers of John Wycliffe (c.1329–84), came up with a comprehensive and damning summary of criticisms in their opposition to the expense of undertaking long journeys (which used money that could have been given to the poor), the hypocrisy involved in granting indulgences and the idolatry involved in the apparent worship of images. Erasmus (c.1466–1536), a Dutch Catholic scholar of great international reputation, attacked the practice as a form of superstition which discouraged the internal



41 Worshippers before the tomb of St Edmund, King and Martyr, Harley MS 2278, fol. 9, 15th century, British Library. This image comes from a lavish manuscript of *The Lives of St Edmund and Fremund*, written by John Lydgate and presented to Henry VI in commemoration of his pilgrimage to the shrine of St Edmund in 1433–4. Lydgate himself is depicted in prayer before the shrine. Royal tombs were important destinations of pilgrimage in the Middle Ages.

cultivation of faith and increased the power of corrupt religious orders. He visited Walsingham in 1511–12 and possibly again in 1514. His 'colloquy' on the subject was first printed in 1526 in Basel, and later published in England as *The Pilgrimage of Pure Devotion*. The work consists of a dialogue between two men, and Erasmus chooses to let the defender of pilgrimage, Ogygius, condemn himself out of his own mouth. Here is the latter describing his innocent questioning of a custodian of the shrine at Walsingham:¹⁷

Inspecting everything carefully, I inquired how many years it was since the little house had been brought there. 'Some ages,' he replied. 'In any event,' I said, 'the walls don't look old.' He didn't deny that they had been placed there recently, and the fact was self-evident. 'Then,' I said, 'the roof and thatch of the house seem rather recent.' He agreed. 'Not even these crossbeams, nor the very rafters supporting the roof, appear to have been put here many years ago.' He nodded. 'But since no part of the building has survived, how is it known for certain,' I asked, 'that this is the cottage brought here from so far away?'

Ogygius clearly has the ability to ask the right question, but lacks the insight or desire to grasp the consequences of his interrogation:

... [the custodian] hurriedly showed us an old, worn-out bearskin fastened to posts and almost laughed at us for our dullness in being slow to see such a clear proof. So, being persuaded, and excusing our stupidity, we turned to the heavenly milk of the Blessed Virgin.

As part of a more general opposition to the traditional practices of the Roman Catholic Church, waves of iconoclasm emerged in Europe throughout the sixteenth century. Martin Luther had been on a pilgrimage to Rome in 1510. However, he came explicitly to oppose the

system of indulgences, and argued against what he saw as the over-emphasis on 'good works' and consequent denial of justification by faith implied by such acts as pilgrimage. Luther, who, like Erasmus, criticised the excesses of the Roman Church but went further and broke with Papal authority, adopted a relatively conservative view compared with other reformers. Calvin, for instance, came to regard pilgrimage as a vain attempt to gain salvation through mere action and emphasised instead an interiorisation of faith which came to be seen as characteristically Protestant. As Jesus was to be the sole mediator to the divine (by contrast with the host of saints), so the universally applicable word was to take precedence over visual and tangible representations of particular images and objects.¹⁸

To make material images of the uncircumscribable all-creating creator, when the real images were already around (in the form of our fellow beings and in the manifestation of Christ as flesh), was terrible idolatry.

In England, theological arguments for reform combined easily with the politically motivated desire to appropriate the influence and wealth of monasteries and shrines. The abuse of images was often felt to be most prevalent at Marian shrines; accordingly, statues of the Virgin were burned in London in 1538, such violence almost constituting a ritual reversal of the reverence previously paid to images. At Boxley Rood, in Kent, a figure of Christ on the cross had been constructed which used wires to allow the eyes to move, the mouth to open, and the hands to make a gesture of blessing. This was made to perform to the crowd by Henry VIII's men before being broken into pieces.

As a source of considerable wealth and the site of the 'Virgin by the Sea', Walsingham was extremely vulnerable to the destructive attention of the reformers. Indeed, in 1537 it was alleged by Henry's spies that rebellion against the threat of dissolution was being planned at the shrine. A layman, George Gysborough, and the sub-prior were hung, drawn and quartered, and the priory and shrine destroyed in 1538. The site's brutal and apparently conclusive fate was lamented in an elegy attributed to Philip Howard, Earl of Arundel:¹⁹

Weepe, weepe, O Walsingham
whose dayes are nightes
Blessings turned to blasphemies,
holy deedes to dispites.
Sinne is wher Our Ladie sate,
heaven turned is to hell,
Sathan sittes wher Our Lord did swaye,
Walsingham, oh farewell.

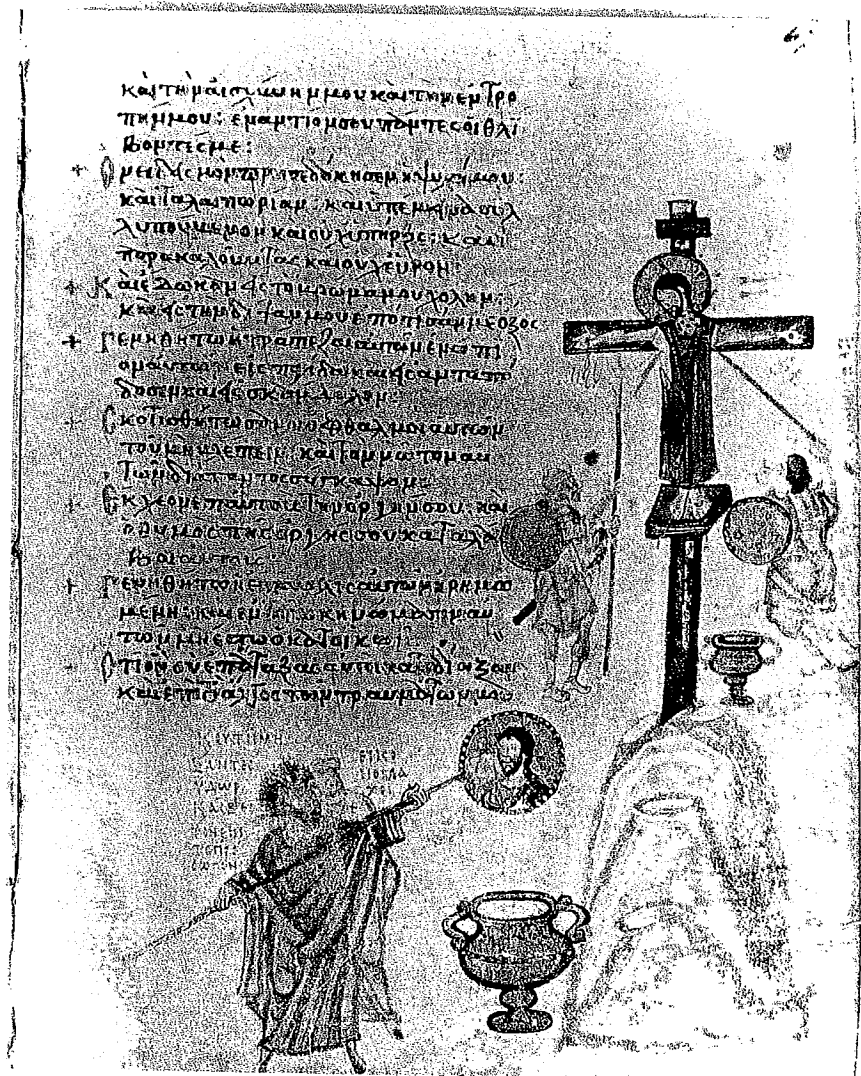
Bouts of iconoclasm took place throughout Protestant Europe during the Reformation. They were directed not only at the 'idolatrous' images of the Roman Catholics, but also against other practices, rituals and sacraments sanctioned by the Catholic Church. Reforming theologians such as Karlstadt and Zwingli proclaimed that the Eucharist itself was an idol and, like other 'carnal' or material objects including relics and icons, could not contain the transcendence of God. In the second half of the sixteenth

century, fierce outbursts of image-smashing and church desecration occurred in waves through northern Europe—in Scotland in the 1550s and 1560s, in France in the 1560s, and above all in the Netherlands in 1565–6. Such violence was a symptom of a new Christianity which asserted a transcendent God who disdained all the fripperies of the world and detested such 'Popish' activities as pilgrimage, relic worship and elaborate ritual.²⁰

PILGRIMAGE IN THE ORTHODOX WORLD

The Orthodox Church had confronted much earlier many of the issues which came to a head in western Christianity during the Reformation. Byzantine Iconoclasm, a long period of theological and political crisis in the whole Orthodox world which lasted between AD 726 and 843, had faced many problems inherent in the veneration of images and relics, as well as the question of what material objects could be accepted in worship. The Byzantine solution, as formulated by the great eighth- and

42 Miniature from the Khludov Psalter, Moscow Historical Museum, codex 129, fol. 67r., 9th century. This illumination from a psalter produced shortly after the end of Iconoclasm in AD 843 illustrates a passage from Psalm 68: 'They gave me also gall for my food, and made me drink vinegar for my thirst'. The Crucifixion, and the offering of vinegar to Christ on a sponge, is paralleled with an image of the iconoclasts whitewashing an icon of Christ, the clear implication being that the sins of the iconoclasts are on a level with the sins of those who executed Christ.





ninth-century theologians John of Damascus and Theodore the Studite, was a full-scale acceptance of everything in the created world as in principle an image of the Incarnate God. In the words of St John of Damascus:

Sun and light and brightness, the running waters of a perennial fountain, our own mind and language and spirit, the sweet fragrance of a flowering rose, are images of the Holy and Eternal Trinity.²¹

The immediate result of this theology was a full-blown cult of icons and relics of remarkable intensity and longevity.²²

With the loss of Jerusalem to the Muslims, and the split between the eastern and western Churches which developed through the Middle

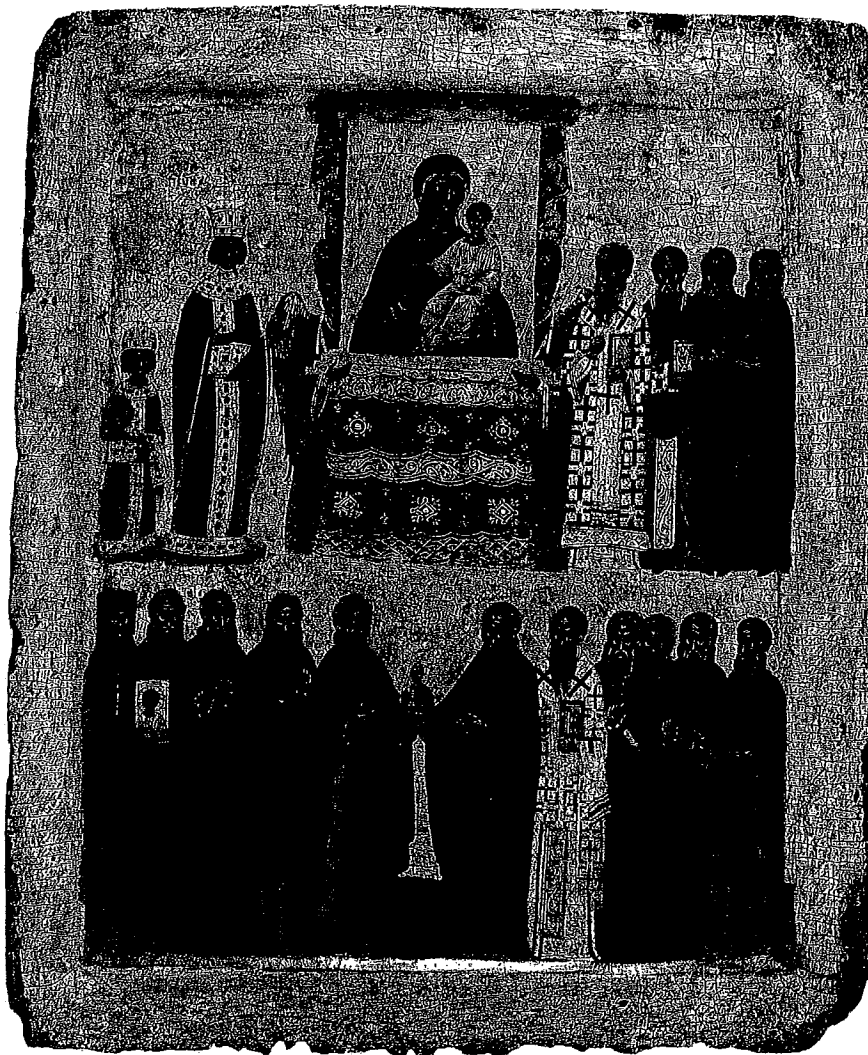
43 Interior of the Church of St Sophia, Istanbul, looking east. The greatest church of the Byzantine empire, St Sophia was constructed under the emperor Justinian in 532–37 and swiftly became one of the principal pilgrimage centres in the Orthodox world. It was converted into a mosque in 1453, following the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks, and in 1930 it became a museum.

44 The Virgin and Child, mosaic from the apse of the Church of St Sophia, 9th century. This image was the first to be erected in St Sophia after the end of Iconoclasm in 843.



Ages on grounds of theology and around disputes about Papal authority, both Palestine and the great shrines of western Europe became somewhat inaccessible to Orthodox pilgrims. Instead the Orthodox Churches developed new patterns of pilgrimage, focused especially on the great churches, relics and icons in Constantinople, but also on the tombs of many Orthodox saints in remote monastic settlements like Mount Athos or Meteora in Greece. With the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453, the Orthodox Churches lost not only their empire but also St Sophia, 'the great Church' built by the emperor Justinian in the sixth century AD, which had become the centre of Byzantine liturgy and perhaps the major goal of eastern Christian pilgrimage. The Ottomans turned it into their imperial mosque. In the years after the fall of Byzantium, Orthodox pilgrimage became increasingly focused around

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45 Icon representing the Triumph of Orthodoxy, Byzantine (probably from Constantinople), 14th century, British Museum. The panel celebrates the restoration of icons after the end of Iconoclasm. In the upper register two angels carry the famous Hodegetria icon of the Mother of God. To the left stands the empress Theodora, who ordered the restoration of icons, with her infant son, Michael III. To the right is a procession of monks and bishops led by the Patriarch Methodius. In the bottom row stand a number of saints and clerics famed for their defence of the cult of icons.

numerous local holy shrines and sites in the remaining Orthodox lands – principally Greece, Serbia and Russia.

The accounts by medieval Russian pilgrims of their trips to Constantinople present a vivid picture of pilgrimage to what W. B. Yeats called 'the holy city of Byzantium'. Stephen of Novgorod, who journeyed to Constantinople from Russia in the 1340s, wrote of his urge 'to venerate the holy places and to kiss the bodies of the saints'.²³ Stephen's account has a vivid description of one of the great icon festivals of Constantinople, the procession of the famous miracle-working Hodegetria icon. This image, traditionally ascribed to the hand of St Luke himself, was placed at the Hodegetria monastery (already famous for a miraculous fountain which cured the blind) in the fifth century. Like the Blachernae Virgin (another miraculous icon in Constantinople), this image acquired a

number of relics of the Madonna and was frequently carried in procession through the city. In times of crisis it had a protective role and was carried around the walls during a siege and brought to the church of St Sophia and the imperial palace for prayers.²⁴ Stephen writes:

Since it was Tuesday, we went . . . to the procession of the holy Mother of God. Luke the Evangelist painted this icon while looking at Our Lady the Virgin Mother of God herself while she was still alive. They bring this icon out every Tuesday. It is quite wonderful to see. All the people from the city congregate. The icon is very large and highly ornamented and they sing a very beautiful chant in front of it, while all the people cry out with tears, '*kyrie eleison*' ['Lord, have mercy']. They place the icon on the shoulders of one man who is standing upright, and he stretches out his arms as if being crucified, and then they bind up his eyes. It is terrible to see how it pushes him this way and that around the monastery enclosure, and how forcefully it turns him about, for he does not understand where the icon is taking him. . . . Two deacons carry the flabella [canopy] in front of the icon, and others the canopy.²⁵

The drama of this procession, with its imitation of the Passion and the icon's remarkable effects, is emphasised in other Russian accounts of the Hodegetria. Later pilgrims reported that the icon performed miracles every Tuesday, healing the sick.²⁶ One effect of such civic processions of miraculous images and relics was the fusion of pilgrimage with traditions of urban festival going back to ancient times.

The man singled out to be the icon's bearer held out his arms in imitation of Christ's Passion. This quality of making present a holy world through imitation is characteristic of Orthodoxy. It was on the basis of their imitation of Christ's person and that of the saints that icons were considered holy by the Iconophile theologians. Likewise, Stephen of Novgorod's pilgrimage to the church of St Sophia (the seat of the Patriarch of Constantinople, whose hand Stephen kissed) took on the pattern of a trip to the Holy Land. After seeing 'the Lord's Passion relics which we sinful men kissed', Stephen and his party confronted an icon of 'the Saviour . . . depicted in mosaic on the wall . . .; holy water runs from the wounds of the nails in his feet'. At the eastern end of St Sophia, Stephen meets 'a truly magnificent icon of the holy Saviour. It is called the "Mount of Olives" because there is a similar one in Jerusalem.' In the main sanctuary is a fountain called the Jordan which was said to have appeared miraculously from the Jordan river in Palestine and still to be linked to it. Stephen tells of some Russian pilgrims who recognised a cup found in this fountain in St Sophia, which they had originally lost in the river Jordan in Galilee. Finally, Stephen mentions the stone table of Abraham, from Mamre where the three angels appeared to the Prophet.²⁷

The trip through St Sophia becomes in effect a trip through the Holy Land transposed in the imagination and through various material objects associated with the Bible into the space of a single church in Constantinople. The imitation of Palestine inside St Sophia is accomplished through relics actually from the Passion and from Old Testament events, through miraculous prodigies such as the Jordan Fountain and through images which not only suggest Jerusalem (the 'Mount of Olives' icon) but actually enact the Passion (the holy water flowing from the wounds in the

mosaic icon). Other churches in Constantinople also had the power to evoke Palestine, for instance the Church of the Holy Apostles (the burial church of the Byzantine emperors), which possessed the column to which Christ had been bound and that by which St Peter had wept bitterly.²⁸ But through their relics (all of which the Russian pilgrims kissed fervently) they could also recall other times, such as the golden age of Christian theology, monasticism and Orthodoxy in the fourth century (the Church of the Holy Apostles contained not only the tomb of Constantine but also those of the great Cappadocian fathers John Chrysostom and Gregory of Nazianzus).²⁹

While later Protestantism attempted to spiritualise religion by abolishing the material accoutrements of worship, and indeed frowning on pilgrimage itself, Orthodoxy never rejected the sensual world of icons, incense and liturgical drama. Instead, in the practice of pilgrimage as a way of life, many Russians (both lay and clergy) found a spiritual path in the imitation of Christ. People dressed in pilgrim's costume so that their social station could vanish in the face of their sacred vocation, and they would live by begging. In the words of the Russian religious writer Catherine de Hueck Doherty, 'to the Russian mind this begging was in imitation of Christ'.³⁰

A memorable self-portrait by such a pilgrim in nineteenth-century Russia is the famous spiritual diary *The Way of a Pilgrim*. The writer chooses to give up his life to saying the Jesus Prayer ceaselessly. Pilgrimage becomes the ideal way of life for someone employing this kind of spiritual practice:

I made up my mind to go to Siberia to the tomb of St Innocent of Irkutsk. My idea was that in the forests and steppes of Siberia I should travel in greater silence and therefore in a way that was better for prayer and reading. And this journey I undertook, all the while saying my oral Prayer without stopping.³¹

The diary, although essentially a private record of the pilgrim's inner life and experience, refers to a number of such journeys – to the shrines of the saints at Kiev in the Ukraine (p. 144) and to the 'wonder-working footprint of the most pure Mother of God' at Pochaev (p. 152). Getting to the goal is far less important for this pilgrim than the process of the journey itself. He sets out for Jerusalem but fails to leave Russia (p. 124):

Of course I fretted at first because I had not been able to carry out my wish to go to Jerusalem, but I reflected that even this had not happened without the providence of God, and I quieted myself with the hope that God, the lover of men, would take the will for the deed, and would not let my wretched journey be without edification and spiritual value. And so it turned out, for I came across the sort of people who showed me many things that I did not know and for my salvation brought light to my dark soul. If that necessity had not sent me on this journey I should not have met those spiritual benefactors of mine. . . .

What marks the value of this kind of pilgrimage and sets protective blessing upon it is not the outer quality of the destination, but the inner strength of the pilgrim's prayers. As a woman traveller explains to the pilgrim (p. 113):

I made up my mind to live unmarried, to go on pilgrimage to the shrines, and pray at them. However, I was afraid to travel all by myself, young as I was, I feared evil people might molest me. But an old woman-pilgrim whom I knew taught me wherever my road took me always to say the Jesus prayer without stopping, and told me for certain that if I did no misfortune of any sort could happen to me on my way. I proved the truth of this, for I walked even to far-off shrines, and never came to any harm.

Such pilgrims were a common feature of Russian life before the Revolution. Their faith was not always strictly what the Church hierarchy would have approved. In Tolstoy's late novel *Resurrection*, his hero Prince Nekhlyudov encounters such a pilgrim on a ferry:

'... Why is it there are different religions?', asked Nekhlyudov.

'There be different religions because people believe in other people, and don't believe in themselves. When I used to believe in other men I wandered about like I was in a swamp. I got so lost, I never thought I'd find me way out. There be Old Believers, an' New Believers, an' Sabbatarians, an' Sectarrians, an' them as 'as Parsons an' them as don't, an' Austrians, an' Malakans, an' them as castrates themselves. Every faith praises itself up only. An' so they all crawl about in different directions like blind puppies. Many faiths there be but the Spirit is one. In you an' in me an' in 'im. That means, if everyman of us believes in the Spirit within 'im, us'll all be united. Let everyone be 'imself, and us'll all be as one.'³²

PILGRIMAGE AND THE EXPANSION OF EMPIRE

Despite the strictures of the Protestant Reformers in western Europe, pilgrimage was continued by members of the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches, and the Counter-Reformation actually stimulated journeys to the Holy Land, to Rome and to the tombs of saints and martyrs. Furthermore, even if Catholicism were under attack in Europe, it could find new areas in which to flourish as the empires of Spain and Portugal expanded far from home. For the European missionaries, territories such as those of South America held out the prospect of encountering spiritually naïve peoples, on to whom 'pure' forms of the faith could be inscribed. Amongst the Conquistadors who journeyed to Mexico, St James was again to appear as a valuable ally – not in the role of defender against foreign invaders, as at Compostela, but instead helping the Christian soldiers to subdue the natives. However, the Europeans could not predict how their traditions would combine with indigenous beliefs, encouraging dynamic processes of syncretism that persist into the present day.

Events in the Andes have been well documented, and illustrate vividly the effects of cultural contact and mixing.³³ Pilgrimage traditions in the region stretch back to between 1000 and 500 BC, although it was not until the second half of the first millennium AD that new inter-regional shrines arose, linked to the formation of the first Andean states. With the rise of the Inca empire in the fifteenth century, local shrines were incorporated into a centralised religious geography. Imperial rituals united all the shrines through the medium of human sacrificial blood, transported – either in its living victims or in sacred vessels – between Cusco and provincial centres.



46 Oaxaca Valley, Mexico.
Woman worshipping at a
popular shrine.

The Spanish conquest of the central Andes aimed to replace the local pilgrimage tradition with that of the western, Christian faith. Marian and saintly images were installed as the divine patrons of ethnic and territorial groups in the hope that loyalties to corresponding pagan deities would decline. Indeed, many shrines were established at or near indigenous sacred sites. As with the early Christianisation of Europe, missionaries hoped that allegiance would simply transfer from one religion to another, not least as statues and images began to be hailed as miraculous providers of cures or rain. However, if Andean deities were Christianised, the holy figures of Christianity were themselves subject to a form of 'Andeanisation'. Missionaries may have done their best to destroy pagan shrines, but they did not take into account the fact that, according to indigenous cosmology, the sacred quality of the landscape was more important than mere effigies. By planting crosses on pagan shrines and sites, Christians merely succeeded in confirming the sacred status of these places in the eyes of local peoples. Missionaries even fostered parallels between Inca and Christian deities, in the hope that this would help the cause of evangelisation. The Christian God could thus be identified with the sun, and Mary with nature spirits. For the Spaniards their successes proved that the conquest had been divinely inspired, while for native Andeans it indicated that the innate sacred powers of the landscape were now working out not only in the familiar spirits of mountains, crags and springs, but also via the imported gods.

The new-old gods of the Andean landscape became subject to competing definitions and understandings of the nature of divinity. These processes have continued throughout the history of the region, and are well illustrated by the case of a famous image situated in Cusco City, that of El Señor de los Temblores (Lord of the Earthquakes). The Señor became the focus of a cult after an earthquake in 1650, since he was seen as a protector against such disasters. With its carved wooden face, darkened by candle smoke, the image is said to have an authentic Andean complexion, unlike the Caucasian colouring of most religious images. It

therefore came to be seen as a suitable Christ for the urban poor, and an object of veneration and pilgrimage. In 1834, however, the cathedral authorities demonstrated their lack of appreciation of the ethnic identity of the god when they retouched the Temblores crucifix and cleaned off the smoke. These actions resulted in a near riot, since it was believed that a white figure would no longer work miracles for the local people.

PILGRIMAGE REGAINED: EUROPE IN THE CONTEMPORARY ERA

The scholar of religion Ingrid Lukatis has described how in post-Reformation Europe pilgrimages increasingly became symbols of Catholic renewal and a means to cure the soul.³⁴ During the Thirty Years' War, pilgrimages also gained new political significance as they became symbols of victory over opponents. Thus princes, the nobility, bishops and religious orders actively promoted religious journeys, and over time ever more splendid buildings were put up at significant sites.

By the nineteenth century Christianity had become widespread in the colonies of the old and new European empires, and the iconoclasm of the Protestant Reformation had long since faded. With improvements in travel, including the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, the Near East became the focus of many a Grand Tour, as pilgrimage and tourism were combined. Towards the end of the century, Thomas Cook even began to lead group expeditions to Palestine, and 1891 saw the publication of *Cook's Tourist Handbook for Palestine and Syria*. The print of the text was made especially clear so that it could be read on horseback or in the poor light of a tent, and contained copious lists of scriptural references.³⁵

Yet the century was also marked by forces which appeared to threaten the roots of Christianity itself. According to some, science (and in particular evolutionism) could replace religion as a basis for providing fundamental explanations concerning the nature of the universe, while the state could increasingly take over the educative and moral functions of the Church. Nevertheless, even if numbers attending churches declined, pilgrimage sites still provided centres of popular devotion whose extraordinary powers appeared to defy secular explanation. Between 1830 and 1933 the Virgin appeared at nine places in Europe, often proclaiming a millenarian and urgent message, thus establishing a genre of appearances suited to the concerns of post-Enlightenment Europe.

The case of Lourdes (situated on one of the main medieval pilgrimage roads of southern France, leading from Arles to Compostela) provided one of the most striking and telling examples of this phenomenon.³⁶ At the centre of the site's emergence was the figure of Bernadette Soubirous, born in 1844 to a poor family of nine children. When she was 14 years old, Bernadette reported having eighteen visions of the Virgin, who talked to her in the local dialect, revealed three secrets, and aided in the discovery of a spring which has since been credited with miraculous powers of healing. Similar elements were present in other visionary experiences manifested in the region, but the Lourdes story provided a particularly

powerful means by which the French Church could fight against contemporary political, scientific and social forces which threatened to weaken its power. The apparent presence of miracle cures could enable Christians to assert that they possessed a form of supernatural knowledge superior to that constructed by reason. Joseph Deery, who has written a book on Lourdes, attests vividly to the force of this argument:³⁷

Drunk with the sense of power, men in their proud self-sufficiency had no further use for God or the supernatural.

but:

... the Queen of Heaven forestalled them. By the Apparitions of Lourdes she lit up the darkness of the age as with a flash of lightning in which the actuality of the spiritual and supernatural was clearly seen, and proved by the production of effects which could not be explained by any scientific or natural process.

Other, more specific aspects of the visions made them, after a period of initial scepticism, particularly acceptable to Church authorities. According to Bernadette, the Virgin stated 'I am the Immaculate Conception', a claim that could be quoted by those who wished to argue that Mary was free of original sin at the moment of her conception. In contrast to visions that had been reported by children at nearby La Salette in 1846, strong criticisms of the French clergy were also avoided.

Once the site received approval, it had to be transformed in accordance with the demands of the Church. In 1858 there was no easy approach to the grotto where Bernadette had received her visions, but gradually the area was made convenient for pilgrims with the establishment of a broad avenue, the diversion of the river and the building of a railway to allow pilgrims to come from all over France and beyond. A statue of the Virgin was placed in a niche in the grotto, although ironically Bernadette herself never approved of it, since she felt it did not accurately reproduce the essence of her visions.

Today, the site continues to be enormously popular, attracting over four million visitors each year.³⁸ As in the nineteenth century, it acts as an arena for contemporary tensions over the role of the Church in relation both to secular society and its lay members. The many sick pilgrims who come to Lourdes and its baths seem to echo the bodily sufferings of Christ at the Passion, or even those of St Bernadette during her short lifetime. It is they who, in contrast with everyday practice, take centre stage at the shrine, as the able-bodied clamour to take care of total strangers who gain spiritual significance precisely because they are sick. The fact that cures may take place at the baths or elsewhere gives the Church the opportunity to proclaim the continuing function of the supernatural. Yet the Church requires stringent proofs provided by medical science to indicate that miracles are still possible. In addition, it often prefers to stress the spiritual rather than physical benefits to be gained from pilgrimage, since it feels uneasy with the magical implications of the latter. Bathing is therefore depicted in official literature as involving the purging of sins.

Other Marian sites in Europe have taken on more obviously political resonances in their perceived opposition to the forces of secular humanism. The presence of the Virgin at Fatima in Portugal, Czestochowa in



47 Lourdes, France. Statue of the Virgin at the grotto. No easy approach to the grotto existed in the 19th century when the site first became renowned, but access has since been provided by building a broad avenue and diverting the course of the river.

48 Fatima, Portugal. A mother circumambulates the shrine at Fatima on her knees, praying for the child she carries in her arms. In the early 1980s about one million people visited the site every year, many of them to participate in its annual festival.



Poland and Medjugorje in Croatia has, at certain points in history, symbolised opposition to Communist rule (as well, in the last case, as Christian renewal in the face of a perceived Islamic threat). At Medjugorje, where since 1981 the Virgin has been appearing regularly to six youngsters, the state authorities of the former Yugoslavia felt sufficiently threatened by the mass presence of Christians to keep the site under observation by helicopter.³⁹

Even Walsingham, seemingly destroyed by Henry's men in the sixteenth century, has experienced an upturn in its fortunes during the past hundred years. The site's 'revival' has served to transform its nature in the name, ironically, of tradition. In 1887, at a new church built in the Sussex village of Buxted, a Lady Chapel was constructed according to the exact proportions of the original wooden house visualised by Richeldis. A visitor to the chapel was a local boy, Alfred Hope Patten, who was later to serve as a priest at Buxted before becoming the Vicar of Walsingham from 1921 to the time of his death in 1958. Patten inherited the antiquarian interests of the late Victorian age and was heavily influenced by the Anglo-Catholic movement in his desire to imitate much that was believed to be part of the medieval Church. He was also concerned at the



49 Walsingham, England. Pilgrims to the Anglican shrine at Walsingham in a procession which echoes the Via Crucis. The ritual, which involves carrying the Host out of the church and through the grounds of the shrine and back, is shown during a Sunday afternoon service in summer 1991.

possibility of increased non-Anglican influence at the site, as Catholic interest in recommencing pilgrimages to Walsingham had become all too evident.

Patten supervised the rebuilding of the original shrine, using ancient stones from abbeys and priories to make the altars. He even discovered a Saxon Well at the site, which he took to be an auspicious sign, not least because it echoed the experience of Richeldis herself. Regalia and mantles were created for the 'Guardians of the Shrine of Our Lady at Walsingham', and around a new garden he erected the Stations of the Cross. A statue of Our Lady and the Child was carved, modelled on a figure on an ancient abbey seal preserved in the British Museum. This became a focus of prayer and intercessions for increasing numbers of pilgrims.

The revival of Walsingham initially represented the apparently eccentric vision of a single man. However, it proved to have sufficient attraction for others, and has led to the creation of an Anglican tradition at the site from the 1920s up to the present. Today, the guide book once again refers to the site as 'England's Nazareth' and expresses many of the concerns of a contemporary Church keen to define its identity in the specific context of the late twentieth century:⁴⁰

In a world where there is so much insecurity and pain many find that Walsingham testifies to the unchanging reality of God's love. Although some of our visitors find parts of the Shrine decoration not to their taste, and others do not at first understand the significance of the externals with which they are presented, thousands of people witness to the very special atmosphere engendered by the Shrine. Walsingham is one of the few places in England where religious truth is not a matter of intellectual propositions but can be experienced in the heart. . . . We are told that we live in an increasingly secular age but Walsingham with its deep roots in our national heritage seems to be able to speak powerfully to men and women of our own generation.

V. Living Saints



a. Sadhus going to their ritual bath, Kumbh Mela at Ahmedabad, India.

In the crypt of the church of S. Maria della Grazie at San Giovanni Rotondo, a small town in southern Italy, lies the body of Padre Pio. This holy man (Fig. Vb), a Capuchin monk, is yet to be recognised by the Vatican as a saint but has become a focus of veneration for thousands of Catholic pilgrims, some of whom actually live beside his shrine. During his life, Pio experienced numerous mystical visions, culminating (like St Francis of Assisi) in his receiving the stigmata after having a vision of the crucified Christ in 1918. Pio's mission was realised in two ways: first, as a very practical programme of relieving the poverty of San Giovanni and, second, as a spiritual vocation of redemption through suffering.

This twin mission has continued since his death in 1968, and those pilgrims who come seeking spiritual solace from his remains make a vital contribution to the local economy. As early as 1923, official Church sources declared that the phenomena attributed to Pio had no miraculous origins. Pio thus represents a particular strand in popular religion (not only in Christianity, but also in other religious traditions such as the sufi strain of Islam or Hassidic Judaism) whereby a charismatic and miracle-working individual proves a focus for devotion which by-passes and may even conflict with the authority of the hierarchy.

In one sense, Pio was an exceptional figure on the periphery of the Catholic Church in Italy. Yet

his reputation derived from the fact that he was a near-perfect exemplar of the kinds of hagiographic traditions upheld most strongly by the Church. His saintly characteristics are strongly modelled on those of St Francis and include not only the meekness of his reported demeanour but also the very miracle of the stigmata for which he became most famous. In this sense Pio fits into a lineage of holy figures who, however controversial they may have been in their lives, tend later to be assimilated to the official history of Christianity. Although Pio has not yet been canonised, his material remains are venerated and preserved like those of many saints, and his cell has been kept as it was on the day of his death. Pilgrims to the shrine of Pio regard his stigmata as a manifestation both of the stigmata of St Francis and of Christ's sufferings in the Passion, so that the individual life story acquires a deeper significance by being assimilated to more established hagiographic narratives. Moreover, the site itself has resonances with older pilgrimage traditions, as it is located on the route to the shrine of St Michael in Monte Sant' Angelo.

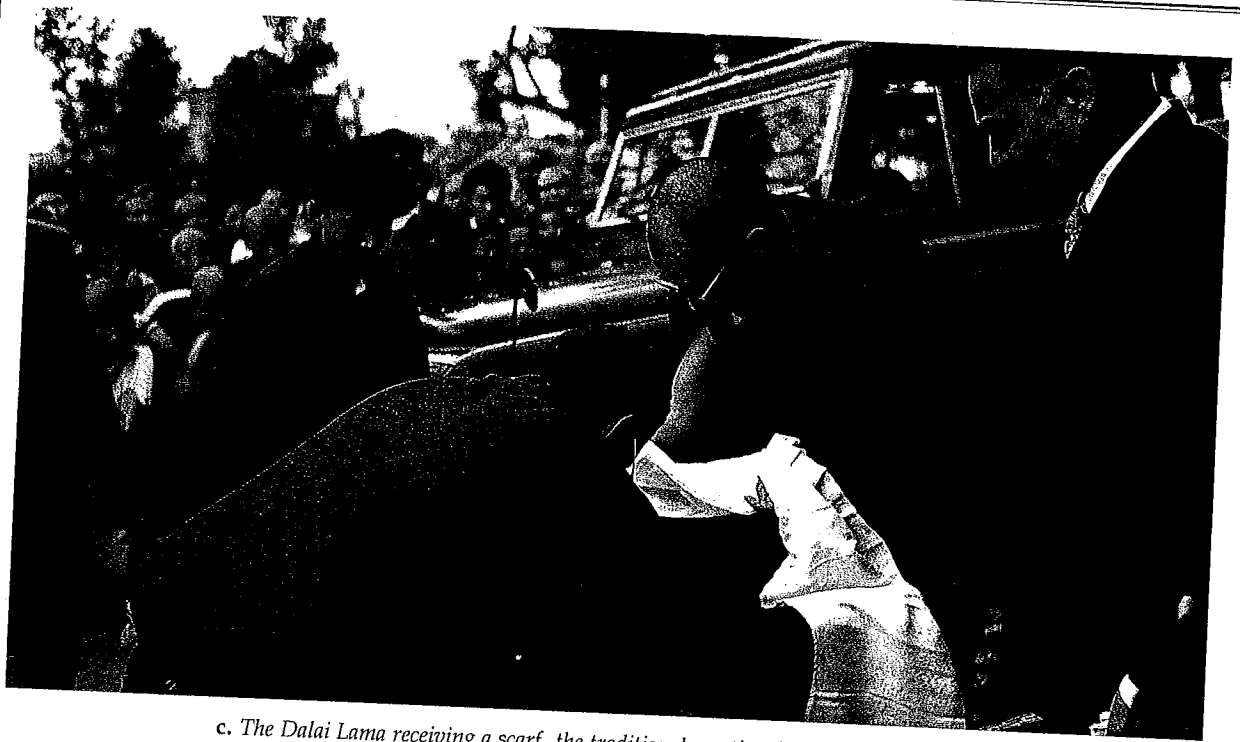
St Francis's reception of the stigmata at Assisi (Fig. Vd) became a central icon in the later Middle Ages, and in numerous altarpieces and frescoes the wounds are shown being placed on his body directly by Christ. Francis conceived of a vocation more exalted than Pio's: he gave up his wealth, founded a monastic order, went on Crusade, and even offered to undergo a trial by fire in front of the Sultan in Cairo in order to convert him from Islam. While Pio is still at the very beginning of his saintly career, St Francis is an example of how the charisma attached to a remarkable individual can be transformed through centuries into an iconographic and mythical narrative. In his lifetime, Francis was a radical reforming influence on the Church; after his death he became one of the upholders of orthodoxy. Assisi has become one of the most important pilgrimage sites of Italy, with spectacularly decorated medieval churches.

No religious system combines an official hierarchy with a charismatic pattern of 'saints' more successfully than Tibetan Buddhism. The recognition of young children as reincarnate lamas (a practice which has recently attracted the attention of Hollywood in the form of Bernardo Bertolucci's film *Little Buddha*) forms an important aspect of preserving the tradition. A child



b. Padre Pio.

recognised in this way as the reincarnation of a deceased holy person is then enthroned in the seat of that person, often as the Abbot of a monastery. Tibetan reincarnate lamas (*tulkus*) may be said to personify their monastery and its surroundings: they form a crucial link between charisma and place. The most famous of such reincarnations is His Holiness the Dalai Lama (Fig. Vc), the current incarnation being the fourteenth. He is regarded as the manifestation of Chenrezig, or the deity of infinite compassion, and Tibetans see him as the personification of the sacred land of Tibet. In the current political circumstances, where many Tibetans, including the Dalai Lama himself, are in exile following the Chinese invasion of the 1950s, the Dalai Lama embodies not only the continuation of a tradition removed from its sacred space but also the spirit of Tibet itself. Within Tibet, his person has come to embody the struggle for resistance against the



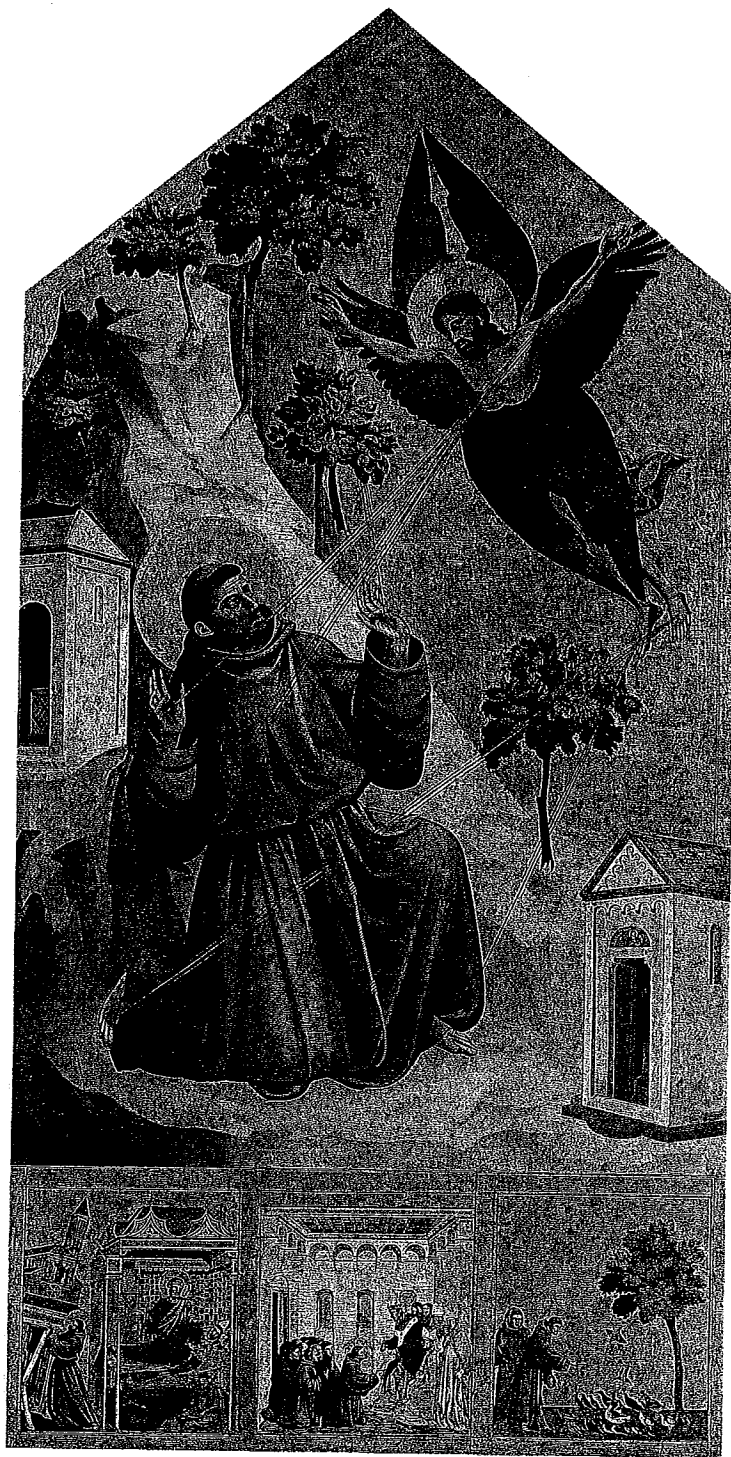
c. The Dalai Lama receiving a scarf, the traditional greeting for high lamas in Tibet.

Chinese. While the Catholic Church locates orthodoxy in a series of traditions and institutions to which individual charisma may even seem a threat, the Dalai Lama (and to a lesser extent other reincarnate lamas) embodies orthodoxy. As an individual he is accorded immense respect and veneration by Tibetans, who bow also to his photograph.

While a sacred site is fixed in space, a holy person (or his relics) may move. The process of establishing a pilgrimage site often involves the fixing of the charismatic influence of a holy event or person within a given space. Pio, who spent most of his life in San Giovanni Rotondo itself, provides a good example. By contrast, a site may become important by association with events in a holy person's life – for instance the eight canonical holy places of Buddhism, which reflect important places associated with the Buddha's life, or the principal pilgrimage sites of Islam, which are associated with the life of the Prophet. Just as the sacred persona of a holy figure may evolve after his or her death, so their body in the form of relics can be used to establish new sacred sites which were not necessarily associated with them in their lives. Examples include the tomb of St

Mark in Venice (whose body was stolen from Alexandria), that of St Catherine at Mount Sinai (her body was miraculously translated to Sinai by angels) and the shrine of Santiago (St James) at Compostela.

Several religious traditions maintain the notion of permanent movement to sacred places as a sanctifying activity in itself. This represents an institutionalising of pilgrimage as an endless activity. The etymology of the very word *pilgrimage* lies in the Latin *peregrinatio*, which means 'wandering about' without a goal as such, 'being a foreigner'. In Christianity, Celtic monks – 'exiles for Christ' – were particularly noted for their form of permanent travel. Likewise, Jain ascetics called *munis* travel naked or in white robes between Jain shrines in India. Hindu ascetics are not necessarily required to engage in constant movement, but are one of the main religious attractions at the great twelve-yearly festivals of India such as the Kumbh Mela (see Fig. Va). Although Celtic monks, Jain *munis* and Hindu *sadhus* emerge from divergent religious contexts and traditions, they nonetheless exemplify the notion of divorce from mundane society.



d. Giotto, St Francis receiving the Stigmata, c. 1300, Louvre. Originally painted for the church of St Francis at Pisa, this large altarpiece represents the central icon of medieval Franciscan spirituality. Beneath the main scene are three smaller images portraying the dream of Pope Innocent III, the confirmation of the Franciscan Order, and the sermon to the birds.