

SAINTS AND
SACRED MATTER

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SAINTS AND SACRED MATTER

The Cult of Relics in Byzantium and Beyond



Edited by

CYNTHIA HAHN AND HOLGER A. KLEIN

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RELICS

An Evolving Tradition in Latin Christianity

JULIA M. H. SMITH

GIUSEPPE TOMASI DI LAMPEDUSA'S ELEGY TO THE ARISTOCRATIC SICILY OF his ancestors, *Il Gattopardo* (*The Leopard*), ends long after the death of the Prince of Salina, its central character, in 1883. The final section depicts the extinction of private devotion in the Salina palace, now inhabited only by his three elderly, unmarried daughters, Carolina, Caterina, and Concetta. It narrates the Cardinal Archbishop of Palermo's visit to the family chapel in May 1910, and his secretary's destruction of its extravagant collection of relics. After long and laborious work, he declared that five of the seventy-four were legitimate but reduced all the remainder to a basketful of torn papers and bits of bone and gristle. The family dog, long since dead and doing duty as a floor rug, was then thrown away, leaving, in the novel's very final words, "un mucchietto di polvere livida": "a little heap of livid dust."¹ A whole way of life, of being, had perished.

The Cardinal's secretary was Don Pacchiotti, who, like the elderly prelate, hailed from Piedmont. He had been trained, we are told, in the Vatican School of Paleography (founded in 1884) and put his expertise to work to scrutinize the documentation accompanying the Salina relics in search of authentic items. Piedmont dominated the newly unified Kingdom of Italy, and while Lampedusa's parable epitomized the fate of Sicily itself at the hands of northerners, it also reflected on the transformation of traditional Catholicism during the author's own lifetime (1896–1957). Set in May 1910, the fiftieth anniversary of Garibaldi's conquest of Sicily, the episode encapsulated the crisis of Modernism in the Italian church. The Cardinal Archbishop and his secretary had imposed on the Salina relic collection the normative tests of the late nineteenth-century papacy, procedures ratified in the codification of canon law commissioned by Pius X in 1904. But that meant nothing to Carolina, who "was one of those Catholics who consider themselves to be in closer possession of religious truths than the Pope himself" and who thought that Pius X should mind his own business.² By confronting the eager collecting and dream-filled piety of the Salina sisters with the legal procedures of Don Pacchiotti, Lampedusa juxtaposed contrasting assumptions about what relics were: one subjective, intuitive, familial and deeply traditional, the other the product of the modern, professionally trained ecclesiastical establishment.

This chapter exploits this divergence to demonstrate that the assumptions that frame the place of "relics" in much late twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholarship on medieval Christianity derive

¹ First published in Milan in 1958; I have used Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, *Il Gattopardo*, ed. T. O'Neill and P. Glenan (Dublin, 2010), quotation at 311; trans. A. Colquhoun (London, 2005), quotation at 220. Unless otherwise credited all translations in this chapter are my own.

² *Ibid.*, 205.

from the scholarly niceties of Don Pacchiotti's late nineteenth-century *formation professionnelle* and its long prehistory, and that they bear little, if any, relationship to how relics were regarded during the middle ages themselves. I do this by working backward from the twenty-first century to the early middle ages in order to expose the slippage between modern and medieval understanding of the term and to outline how it came about. By distinguishing learned discourses from the practices of relic users, I demonstrate that they did not converge during the medieval and early modern eras. My approach thus complements the numerous accounts of saint-making that emphasize a fundamental tension between spontaneous and officialized veneration.³ By approaching sacred matter in a similar way, I separate lived experience from legalistic formulations, and draw attention to the ways in which these objects have been conceived, reconceived, and misconceived in the course of an evolving tradition.

It will be seen that the relics treasured by medieval men and women embraced many different small, easily portable material substances, some organic, others inorganic, which had been removed from their place of origin and carried elsewhere. As “the material articulation of the holy,”⁴ they all mediated between the created world and the divine: this chapter pursues changes in how that articulation was conceptualized, defined, and interpreted over the *longue durée* in the Latin West. Several crucial points emerge. First, the range of holy matter gradually narrowed to such an extent that, by the modern era, “relics” comprised a small subset of their late antique variety. Second, it follows that the term must be understood as a concept which encodes culturally specific meanings and institutional priorities. I use it in this sense throughout this chapter. Finally, its evolution was deeply implicated in discourses about ecclesiastical control of worship and religiosity, for differing understandings of

material holiness have been in tension with each other from the age of Augustine to that of Don Pacchiotti.⁵

I take my cue from John Arnold's observation that sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Christianity was characterized by “a tightening up of definition and control, and a closing down of a certain fuzziness and room for manoeuvre.”⁶ Having explored modern definitions and emphasized the centrality of control in early modern discourses, I then turn to the middle ages, from two angles. I outline the room for maneuver in medieval learned thinking about relics before drawing on neglected evidence in search of the things medieval men and women intuitively regarded as relics. In the final section, empirical observation reveals what medieval Christians gathered and treasured. The ways, if any, in which they conceptualized these objects as relics point to “a certain fuzziness” throughout the middle ages. In retrospect, three interventions stand out for their long-term significance: Aquinas's reasons for regarding body (or body-part) relics as of especial theological significance; the crucible of Counter-Reformation Catholicism and its program of liturgical reform that created a ranked classification of relics; and the incorporation of that schema into the programmatic canon law of twentieth-century Catholicism. Scholastic theology, the early modern papal drive for liturgical standardization, and modern legal precision have thus fused to define *relics* much more narrowly than in the middle ages.

This perspective is of fundamental significance for two reasons. In the first place, the history of relic cults has commonly been presented as one strand within the grand narrative of Catholic Christianity from archaic, even superstitious, behaviors and practices to enlightened, interiorized beliefs and ethical values.⁷ This story is reinforced by embedded definitions. A fully historicized perspective thus necessitates a determined

3 See importantly A. Vauchez, *La sainteté en Occident aux derniers siècles du moyen âge d'après les procès de canonisation et les documents hagiographiques*, Bibliothèque des Ecoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome (Rome, 1981), trans. Jean Birrell, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1997); K. L. Woodward, *Making Saints: How the Catholic Church Determines Who Becomes a Saint, Who Doesn't, and Why* (New York, 1990).

4 Cf. Jaś Elsner's chapter in this volume, whose subtitle I quote.

5 I shall deal elsewhere with the equally important question of “authenticity.”

6 J. H. Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief in Medieval Europe* (London, 2005), 231.

7 This is the narrative underpinning Arnold Angenendt's much-cited account *Heilige und Reliquien: Die Geschichte ihres Kultes vom frühen Christentum bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich, 1994).

effort to separate medieval understanding from its postmedieval teleological carapace, lest we inadvertently rely on modern assumptions to interpret medieval evidence. This anachronism permeates much nineteenth-century scholarship, and can still be found in some accounts of late medieval cults of saints. In the second place, the study of relic-like objects in other world religions has attracted considerable attention in recent years. Those traditions differ substantially from those of Christianity, and the unthinking export of terms of Christian discourse runs the risk of occluding cultural specificity or, alternatively, perpetuating inappropriate assumptions.⁸ This chapter explains why sensitivity to the cultural baggage of the term *relics* is an urgent priority for scholarship on materiality and religion.

Definition: Present-Day Ideas of Relics

It is helpful to begin with a clear sense of how the concept is used in current, twenty-first-century scholarship. A selection of readily available and authoritative reference works provides a convenient benchmark. For example, in the 2005 edition of the *Encyclopedia of Religion* relics are defined by the Buddhologist John Strong as “the venerated remains of venerable persons.”⁹ More playfully, in the words of another Buddhologist, Gregory Schopen, in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (1998), they are “bodies and bits of bone and otherwise seemingly dead matter [which] have played a lively role in the history of several major religions.”¹⁰ In other words, scholars frequently assign pride of place to body parts and other remains of persons among the material objects which are venerated in world religions.

For an explicitly Christian definition, we may turn to the *Encyclopedia of Christian Theology*

(2005). Here, the distinguished Dominican liturgist Pierre-Marie Gy (1922–2004) stated that the term *relics* “refers primarily to the bodily remains of saints and martyrs, and secondarily to objects that are directly associated with the life of Christ (the Cross, for instance) or of a saint, or again, objects which have touched the saint’s body.”¹¹ Divided into primary and secondary categories, relics are, once more, to do with bodies of the dead, including, this time, the crucified Jesus. Alternatively, and with exclusive focus upon the Christian middle ages, the *Encyclopedia of Medieval Pilgrimage* (2010) proposes that there are three classes of relics: first-, second-, and third-class, also termed primary, secondary, and tertiary relics. The primary category comprises the bodily remains of saints, relics of Jesus’s passion, and of Mary; the secondary ones are objects owned or used by a saint, however small they may be, while tertiary ones are items which have touched first- or second-class relics.¹² There is thus a contemporary scholarly consensus that relics are either corporeal remains of holy persons, notably the saints of Christian tradition, or objects very closely associated with them in their lifetime, or which have touched their corpse. That the Christian class of objects called relics can be subdivided into either two or three groups in descending order of importance is also widely accepted.

This system of classification is, however, a mid-twentieth-century variant on the categories prescribed in post-Tridentine canon law. It involves three separate decisions: selecting objects to include in discussion; classifying them into groups by type; and, finally, ranking the classes into a hierarchy of significance. Fused together, they form a powerful analytical tool for controlling the sacral use of certain material objects. In effect, this classificatory scheme downgrades some relics and excludes all those which do not conform to the normative definition it establishes. In short, the twentieth- and twenty-first-century definitions quoted above reflect the

8 See, for example, the explicit interpretation of Buddhist relics in terms of the Roman Catholic canon law category of *reliquiae insignes* (a category discussed in detail below): J. Strong, *Relics of the Buddha* (Princeton, NJ, 2004), 46. Cf. C. W. Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York, 2011), 273–79, for a sensitive example of a comparative treatment of material tokens of sacrality in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

9 J. Strong, “Relics,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. L. Jones (Detroit, 2005), 7686–92, quotation at 7686.

10 G. Schopen, “Relic,” in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. M. C. Taylor (Chicago, 1998), 256–68, quotation at 256.

11 P.-M. Gy, “Relics,” in *Encyclopedia of Christian Theology*, ed. J.-Y. Lacoste (New York, 2005), 3:1357. This is a translation of the *Dictionnaire critique de théologie*, ed. J.-Y. Lacoste (Paris, 1999).

12 M. Sauer, “Relics,” in *Encyclopedia of Medieval Pilgrimage*, ed. L. Taylor (Leiden, 2010), 597–99. See also the entries for “Bodily Relics,” “Contact Relics,” and “Belongings of Saints.”

Catholic Church's role as the guardian and arbiter of correct worship in the post-Reformation era, and embody its evolving theological claims, liturgical priorities, and institutional governance.

This is immediately apparent when we turn to Joseph Braun (1857–1947), a Jesuit schoolmaster and indefatigable researcher whose theological training took place in the late nineteenth century. His massive studies of medieval altars, reliquaries, liturgical vestments, and ecclesiastical textiles remain invaluable for their compendious learning laid out in efficient typologies. In 1940, he opened his account of reliquaries by noting that in his own day there were only two types of relics, “primary” and “secondary,” categories which he explicitly aligned with the terminology of the *Codex iuris canonici*.¹³ Inaugurated by Pius X but published in 1917 after his death, the *Codex* distinguished two classes of relic, *reliquiae insignes* and *reliquiae non insignes*, and subjected them to different provisions. All *reliquiae insignes*—I shall term them distinguished relics—had to be kept in churches where their liturgical veneration was under episcopal control; they could be transferred to a different permanent home only with papal permission, and a wide range of specific provisions regulated their public cult. They were defined as “the body, head, arm, forearm, heart, tongue, hand, leg, or that part of a martyr’s body which suffered [the death blow], provided that it is complete and not small.” By implication, all other relics were *non insignes*: undistinguished, unremarkable, or minor. Only these could be owned by laypersons and kept in their private chapels or homes and, for this reason, were not subjected to as many stipulations as those housed in churches under episcopal supervision.¹⁴

Braun defined primary relics by an almost verbatim translation of wording used in the 1917 *Codex iuris canonici* to specify what constituted *reliquiae insignes*. But he added a definition of “secondary” that the canon law lacked: “objects which stood in such a close and integral relation to Christ, Mary, the saints and the blessed

during their lifetime or after their death that they retained something of their venerable, sacred character, such as the Cross, the Crown of Thorns and the other instruments of the Lord’s passion, the crib at which he was laid at birth, clothing of the Lord and of Mary, the instruments of martyrdom by means of which martyrs suffered and were killed, the chains with which they were bound captive, the instruments of penance of holy confessors, objects of continual daily use of religious or non-religious nature, which they used during their lives, shrouds, etc.”¹⁵ In effect, then, Braun saw the middle ages through the lens of the canon law of his own day. Although he did acknowledge in passing that medieval usage had been more flexible, he injected early twentieth-century classification into scholarship on the middle ages.¹⁶ As a result, two ideas have become common currency: first, that there are two classes of relics, of which one comprises bodies or body parts and the other everything else, and, second, that the latter were of secondary importance. To him also we owe the dissemination of the concept of “speaking reliquaries”: but just as this severely distorted the nature and role of reliquaries shaped like body parts, so Braun’s distinction between primary and secondary is a grave misrepresentation of the world of medieval relics.¹⁷

Within twenty years, an alternative taxonomy was proposed by a much more sophisticated clerical scholar, Bernhard Kötting (1910–1966). In 1950, he published a major study of pilgrimage in antiquity and the early Church, research which won him an appointment the following year as Professor of Early Christian History, Christian Archaeology, and Patristics at the University of Münster.¹⁸ In it, he relied on a clear-cut categorical distinction between “relics” and “pilgrim mementos,” such as oil, dust, wax, or cloth from a shrine. The distinction nevertheless repeatedly failed to cope with the early Christian textual and archaeological evidence Kötting

13 J. Braun, *Die Reliquiare des christlichen Kultes und ihre Entwicklung* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1940), 1–3, with reference in footnote 2 to the relevant clause of the *Codex iuris canonici*.

14 P. Gasparri, *Codex iuris canonici Pii X pontificis maximi iussu digestus, Benedicti Papae XV auctoritate promulgatus* (Rome, 1917), can. 1281, §§1–2.

15 Braun, *Reliquiare*, 3.

16 J. Braun, *Der christliche Altar in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, 2 vols. (Munich, 1924), 1:621–22.

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

18 B. Kötting, *Peregrinatio religiosa: Wallfahrten in der Antike und das Pilgerwesen in der alten Kirche* (Regensburg, 1950).

knew so well.¹⁹ His unease seems to have spurred him to organize a typology, presented in two short but highly influential articles. In 1957, an encyclopedia entry on private devotional objects accepted that oil, dust, cloth, and the like were the same substances as secondary relics but that, in nonecclesiastical contexts, were to be classified under the modern concept of “devotionalia.”²⁰ The following year, an article on the origin and forms of relic veneration replaced Braun’s two classes of relics with a threefold schema by drawing on historical and patristic sources instead of canon law.²¹ Kötting argued that the continuously increasing pressure for yet more relics not only led to the fragmentation of martyrs’ bodies but the introduction of a new “category” of relics, those he termed “contact relics.” They took their efficacy and spiritual meaning from having touched the saint’s body, and he subdivided them into three types, of varying liturgical significance. “Naturally,” he asserted, the “primary objects of liturgical veneration” were objects which had come into contact with a saint during the person’s lifetime. Next came instruments of martyrdom, beginning with the Cross, but extending to include objects which featured in legendary hagiographical tales, such as Lawrence’s griddle. After these, he placed objects which saints had used during their lifetime, such as clothing. All these were partible, unlike his third group. These were substances sanctified by their contact with a saint’s tomb but not the body itself, notably oil, water, or cloth, and they came mainly from Rome and Thessalonike, cities which refused to allow the subdivision of their saints’ bodies, or so he believed. Kötting’s classification is a less systematically ranked hierarchy than Braun’s, but it encapsulated the same sharp distinction between body (or body-part) relics and all others, and it differentiated between objects in contact with a living saint or with a grave. Much more sensitive to changing historical circumstances than Braun, Kötting nevertheless felt impelled to rely

19 Ibid., 200 n. 644, 271–72, 282, 408, where his awareness that the terminology of his own day did not correspond to that of his sources is clear.

20 B. Kötting, “Devotionalien,” *RAC*, 3:862–71; A. Stuibler, “Eulogia,” *RAC*, 6:900–28, at 925–28.

21 B. Kötting, “Reliquienverehrung, ihre Entstehung und ihre Formen,” *ThZ* 67 (1958): 321–34.

on formal characteristics to create his typology and to eliminate from consideration anything for private devotional use.

In varying ways, twenty-first century definitions of *relics* thus draw heavily on Braun and Kötting, separately or together. Although these influential German scholars provide the proximate sources for current classifications, they did not invent them. As we shall see, neither schema had a single point of origin; instead, they are the cumulative sedimentation of centuries of thinking and arguing about relics in many different contexts, debates which the following two sections pare away.

Control: The Contribution of Early Modern Catholicism

When the 1917 *Codex iuris canonici* affirmed the veneration of relics and images, its compiler, Cardinal Pietro Gasparri (1852–1934), relied on the support of two early medieval councils and one early modern one. Alongside the condemnation of Iconoclasm issued at the Second Council of Nicaea in 787 and reiterated in 869–70 at the Council of Constantinople, he cited the Council of Trent.²² Its weary final session, on 3–4 December 1563, had confirmed that the invocation of saints and the veneration of their relics and images were integral to Catholicism, but did not go into any details about what this meant in practice. Indeed, apart from asserting that relics were an aspect of the cult of saints, the Council of Trent had offered no definition of them at all.²³

Nor, without extended debate, could it have done so. No medieval ecclesiastical legislation had ever defined relics, let alone classified or ranked them, and thus the Council of Trent lacked any precedents for thinking about relics in this way. Like so much else that caught the attention of local synods and bishops in council, or even the papacy, medieval canon law was as much

22 Gasparri, *Codex iuris canonici*, can. 1255, §2. The procedures and politics of its codification are summarized by C. Fantappiè, *Storia del diritto canonico e delle istituzioni della Chiesa* (Bologna, 2011), 262–70.

23 N. P. Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2 vols. (London, 1990), 2:774–76. For the hurried production of this decree, see J. W. O’Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council* (Cambridge, MA, 2013), 242–44.

a barometer of the interactions of clergy and people as it was of the changing ecclesiastical balance between diocesan self-regulation and increasing papal assertiveness. Meager in quantity until the twelfth century and far from copious thereafter, medieval rulings on relics had dealt only with those issues liable to trigger disagreement, such as authenticity, access, or the criteria for sainthood, topics that were symptomatic either of struggles about the location of authority in medieval society or of the ambiguous status of relics between sacred substance and mundane object.²⁴

Gasparri thus followed in the footsteps of the bishops assembled at Trent 350 years previously in placing relics and images alongside saints, but he departed from the precedent they provided by distinguishing between *reliquiae insignes* and *non insignes*. In so doing, he drew on decrees promulgated by the Congregation of Sacred Rites and Ceremonies, founded in 1588 as part of a post-Tridentine initiative to regularize the varied liturgical practices of the Catholic Church.²⁵ Among the many matters that had received its attention was the liturgical veneration of relics and, through the Congregation's pronouncements on specific local cases, rulings of general applicability gradually crystallized into a normative definition of relics. Early modern papal thinking on all aspects of saints and their cults was synthesized in the magisterial work on canonization procedures of the eighteenth-century jurist and papal administrator Prospero Lambertini (subsequently Pope Benedict XIV): his chapter on the forms of liturgical veneration for canonized saints is an authoritative guide to the relic legislation of the previous 150 years, but trimmed and adjusted for a Church in an age of change.²⁶

24 E. A. Dooley, *Church Law on Sacred Relics* (Washington, DC, 1931); N. Herrmann-Mascard, *Les reliques des saints: Formation coutumière d'un droit* (Paris, 1975).

25 S. Ditchfield, *Liturgy, Sanctity and History in Tridentine Italy: Pietro Maria Campi and the Preservation of the Particular* (Cambridge, 1995), 97–99.

26 P. Lambertini, *De servorum Dei beatificatione et beatorum canonizatione*, 4 vols. (Bologna, 1734–38), 4.2:37–49. For a twentieth-century account of the legislation, see R. Naz, “Reliques,” in *Dictionnaire de droit canonique*, ed. idem, vol. 7 (Paris, 1958), 569–74. O. Chadwick, *The Popes and European Revolution* (Oxford, 1981), 295–98, provides a succinct evaluation of Lambertini as an effective modernizer.

In brief, Lambertini indicated how in the decades after 1588 the Congregation had tried to eliminate the hundreds of festive celebrations of saints which cluttered the church calendar, in order to restore to its rightful prominence the annual sequence of services reflecting on the biblical narrative. To this end, it severely curtailed the celebrations of saints' days, and allowed saints to be given special liturgical commemoration only in such churches as possessed “distinguished relics.” In the face of considerable self-interested opposition, a series of rulings gradually established that if the entire body of a saint was lacking, “distinguished relics” comprised, at a minimum, the head, arm, leg shank, or other part of a martyr which had sustained the fatal blow, provided always that it was complete and not small. (Clarifications made explicit that complete meant, for example, the entire lower leg [*crus*], not just the tibia, and that body parts such as fingers, teeth, and hair were excluded because they were too small.) It was a further prerequisite that they were kept in churches and subject to firm control in conformity with the procedures laid down by the Congregation. These, and only these, were *reliquiae insignes*, distinguished relics, with the single subsequent addition of spines from the Crown of Thorns.²⁷ In effect, the Congregation of Rites defined by exclusion: no other relics were *insignes*, however venerable and important they might be to their owners, whether ecclesiastical institutions or private individuals. With some further refinements and restrictions added in the nineteenth century, this was the definition used by Gasparri for the *Codex iuris canonici* of 1917.

The Tridentine reforms of the liturgy had two significant effects on saints' cults: they promoted a much more critical reading of the historical sources and they profoundly altered the balance between local, diocesan control of the liturgical veneration of saints and papally approved rites and procedures to be used everywhere. As

27 In summarizing the rulings which resulted from many different cases, I have also used the index provided by G. M. Cavalieri, *Opera omnia liturgica seu Commentaria in authentica Sacre Rituum Congregationis decreta ad Romanum praesertim Breviarium, Missale, et Rituale quomodolibet attinentia*, 5 vols. (Augsburg, 1764), 1:xvi, decrees nos 45–57, with page references to the detailed discussion of each of them. On Cavalieri, see further below, 47–48.

universal norms were clarified, so there emerged a “carefully differentiated hierarchy of sanctity.”²⁸ Although not achieved without controversy and concessions, the standardization of what counted as “distinguished relics” was in effect part of the much larger enterprise of regulating Roman Catholic worship in an attempt to bring consistency and uniformity to it.²⁹ The term *reliquiae insignes* thus encapsulated the circumstances of its post-Tridentine origin: as a category, it was liturgical, normative, and curial.

This process of definition nevertheless took place against the backdrop of wider discussions among historians, liturgists, theologians, and polemicists about what relics were. They were responding to varying stimuli: the need to defend the cult of saints and their relics from Protestant onslaughts; rivalry between Catholic churches each with historical grounds for claiming exclusive possession of the relics of their own patronal saint; awareness of the inconsistencies among patristic and medieval commentators on saints’ cults. The emerging sciences of paleography, diplomatics, and Christian archaeology contributed too.³⁰ In this sense, relics were a small subset of much larger issues. On the one hand, they epitomized the weighty cultural meaning vested in saints and sanctity in early modern Catholicism as well as the deep anxieties surrounding them.³¹ On the other, they refracted long-term evolutions and tensions in western thought, as new forms of knowledge, changing modes of proof, and different methods of reasoning marked the transition from Scholasticism to Enlightenment.

The curial definition of “distinguished relics” that had emerged by the time of Lambertini can be placed in the broader context of its day

by turning to the commentary on the decrees of the Congregation of Sacred Rites dedicated to him shortly after his accession as Benedict XIV (1740–1758) by Giovanni Michele Cavalieri (d. 1757).³² Cavalieri used the Congregation’s legislation as the scaffolding for arguments derived from patristic authorities, and coupled them with awareness that the veneration of saints had a historical dimension. His fourth chapter addressed the relics of saints, and opened in an etymological vein by citing the classical meaning of the word *reliquiae* as exemplified by Cicero. Cavalieri continued: “Ecclesiastical writers, however, call ‘relics’ not only what remains from a saint, such as the corpse, bones, clothes, and other things, but also other things which do not reflect the word’s etymology but which are venerated by the faithful as relics of saints.” In his estimation, relics were “any monuments of the saints, that is, whatever to do with them is apt to arouse the memory of the saints in us, and so their veneration and cult.” He then offered a taxonomy divided into three *genera*, three categories: those “properly and rigorously” termed relics; those so termed “less properly”; and those “sanctified,” or “improperly” termed relics.³³

Despite his assertion that all relics fitted into this classification, he noted divergent opinions about the first category. This comprised bodies, body parts, and bodily effluents, but he acknowledged two controversies: whether the word *reliquiae* could be applied to a complete body or whether it described only what was left after the greater part had been removed, and whether to include here the healing *manna*, oil, or other liquid which seeped from the bodies of certain saints upon their feast days. His concern was that if the liquids which sometimes oozed from martyrs’ corpses were to be included, then so too could the tears and other exudations of statues and images of the saints. Cavalieri was not prepared to take that step.³⁴ In the second category, things “less properly termed relics,” he included the clothing and anything else saints had used during their

28 S. Ditchfield, “Tridentine Worship and the Cult of Saints,” in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 6, *Reform and Expansion 1500–1660*, ed. R. Po-Chia Hsia (Cambridge, 2007), 201–24, quotation at 217.

29 The controversies and concessions emerge clearly from Lambertini, *De servorum Dei beatificatione*, 4.2:39–44.

30 Ditchfield, *Liturgy, Sanctity and History*; D. Julia, “L’église post-tridentine et les reliques: Tradition, controverse et critique (XVI^e–XVIII^e siècle),” in *Reliques modernes: Cultes et usages chrétiens des corps saints des Réformes aux révolutions*, 2 vols., ed. P. Boutry, P. A. Fabre, and D. Julia (Paris, 2009), 1:69–120.

31 See the incisive overview of S. Ditchfield, “Thinking with Saints: Sanctity and Society in the Early Modern World,” *CI* 35, no. 3 (2009): 552–84.

32 First published in Brescia, 1743–45. I have used the edition in Cavalieri, *Opera omnia liturgica*.

33 *Ibid.*, 141: “Sunt autem Reliquiæ *proprie*, & *rigorose* dictæ, *minus proprie*, ac Reliquiæ *sanctificatæ*, seu *improprie* dictæ.” Punctuation and italics original.

34 *Ibid.*, cap. 4.5–9, pp. 141–42.

lifetime and that had been sanctified by contact with a living saint, and he observed that this had always been the custom of Christians. He also placed in this class of objects instruments of martyrdom, plus the keys of St. Peter and the filings from the apostle's chains which Gregory the Great had distributed. He then turned to buildings and places made so holy by a saint's dwelling or death that no relics needed to be added to sanctify them, and cited the example of the curative properties of soil from the spot where, in Bede's account, St. Oswald had been slain in battle.³⁵ The third category, sanctified things "improperly" called relics comprised shrouds, clothing, flowers, and anything else which had been in contact with a saint's corpse and had, through proximity or contact, acquired "some supernatural power and heavenly *virtus*" that brought benefits to the faithful. In this context, he drew attention to a "custom of ancient times" that was foreign to the behavior of his own day: regarding as sanctified the oil from the lamps at saints' shrines, oil whose miracle-working properties were documented by Gregory of Tours and Augustine. He also noted the oil brought to priests to be blessed, which then healed people (citing examples from Sulpicius Severus, the Apostolic Constitutions, and Jerome). Finally, he included the *brandea* distributed by Gregory the Great in this category. Cavalieri clearly found these "improper" relics distasteful, for he hastily concluded his discussion by referring the reader who wanted to know more to Augustine, John of Damascus, Gregory of Tours, and unspecified others.³⁶

Cavalieri is important for several reasons. His personal ambivalence about what might be deemed a relic and his recognition of deep-seated scholarly disagreements indicate that serious divergences of opinion persisted within the ecclesiastical circles of his day: classification simply papered over the cracks. His determination to distance his own times from the early church marks a dawning historical consciousness, an emerging awareness that the meaning of *relics* had changed over time, and that the concept was now, in the mid-eighteenth century, far more restricted than in the patristic era. In his awareness of

anachronism and alertness to historical evolution, Cavalieri was very much a man of the early Enlightenment, a period when others still clung to more traditional patterns of thought—hence the tensions and contradictions he had to negotiate. He also reveals that educated churchmen of his day did not accept all relics venerated by "the faithful" as legitimate. Most significant of all in this context, he ranked relics in a hierarchy of diminishing appropriateness, and simultaneously strove to constrain the concept even further by means of the comments he made in passing. Finally, the authorities he cited include many who are central to twenty-first-century scholarship on late antique and medieval saints' cults and miracles. However, his valiant effort to impose a firm classification belittled their diversity, nuance, and particularity because it shoehorned them into alien categories. In sum, Cavalieri reveals the challenges involved in pruning and redirecting early Christian and medieval understanding of relics so that it fitted the normative, standardizing needs of the eighteenth-century clerical establishment. The legislative impact of the Congregation of Rites had been supplemented by an effort to discipline the patristic inheritance.

Cavalieri's approach thus mirrored the selection, classification, and ranking which lay at the heart of the efforts of the Congregation of Rites to exert control over the cult of relics. It had little in common with the way churchmen had worried about relics before the Congregation began its legislative endeavors: sixteenth-century pastors, theologians, and polemicists, for the most part, still relied on the methods and insights of late medieval scholastic theology, but redirected them to the fight against the iconoclasm of the Protestant reformation. Nevertheless, it took until 1600 for the Catholic arguments in defense of relics to cohere: that they did so was thanks to Giovanni Battista Segni (1550–1610), prior of S. Salvatore di Bologna. Segni had been to Rome in 1599 to fetch martyr remains for his community, and the experience made him realize that, although much had been written in defense of relics in many different contexts, no one had previously gathered it all together in one place.³⁷

35 Ibid., cap. 4.10–12, p. 142.

36 Ibid., cap. 4.13–16, pp. 142–43.

37 G. B. Segni, *Reliquarium, sive de reliquiis, et veneratione sanctorum in quo multa de necessitate, prestantia, usu, ac*

The resulting treatise opened by proposing that *reliquiae* include “all those things which were left to us and remained after the death of saints, from body, property, place, and anything of theirs.” In support of this, Segni cited the leading authorities of his own day, all of whom were in the vanguard of the Catholic attack on Luther, Calvin, and their disciples but who had published their views on relics before the Congregation of Sacred Rites began its work.³⁸ From the *Summa summarum* of Silvestro Mazzolini (ca. 1456–1527; also known as Silvestro Prierias), he took the elegant formulation that they are “the remnants of saints’ human existence,” either the entire body or particles of it.³⁹ He then turned to the polemicist Roberto Bellarmino (1542–1621) for the view that they included not only bones and clothes but also places in which saints were martyred, where they lived or achieved anything outstanding.⁴⁰ Finally, he quoted from the commentary on Aquinas’s *Summa theologiae* by the leading theologian and philosopher of the late sixteenth century, Francisco Suárez (1548–1617), to the effect that relics are not only the bodies of saints, or parts thereof, but also their clothes and other similar things of which the saints had made special use.⁴¹ Then, noting that other words such as *fragmenta* and *micae* were also used, Segni turned to the Gospels for some examples. To these, he added the corporeal remains left

fructibus reliquiarum pertractantur (Bologna, 1600), preface and 154.

38 *Ibid.*, 1.

39 S. M. Da Picrio, *Summa summarum que Sylvestrina dicitur*, 2nd impression (Strassburg, 1518), 396r.: “Reliquiae in proposito dicuntur ea quae nobis de sanctorum humanitate remanserunt, ut totum corpus, et propriae particulae eius.” This was first published in 1514.

40 R. Bellarmino, *Quartus controversia generalis, De ecclesia triumphante* (first published in 1589), in *Disputationum Roberti Bellarmini Politiani . . . de controversiis Christianae fidei, adversus huius temporis haereticos opus*, 4 vols. in 6, Editio ultima ab ipso auctore aucta & recognita (Ingolstadt, 1605), 2:1395.

41 F. Suárez, *Opera omnia*, 26 vols., ed. C. Berton (Paris, 1856–78), 18:653b (first published in 1590). For Suárez’s theology of relics, see P. Séjourné, “Reliques,” *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, 13.2 (Paris, 1937), 2312–76, at 2366–67. In the second, enhanced, edition of 1610, Segni elaborated his citation of Suárez. He added a list of body parts, specifically hair, bones, flesh, teeth, ash, and dust; he extended clothing to include veils and cloths; and he glossed the third type of relic to include anything which had been in contact with the saint’s bones or body, or which the saint had touched or owned.

by Christ—foreskin, tears, blood—and noted churches where they could be found. He then extended the list with Christ’s clothing, the cross and other instruments of the Passion, the table at which he ate the Last Supper, the towel on which he wiped his hands, and the shroud in which he was wrapped. The chapter ended, by noting very briefly that he held the same view with respect to Mary, the apostles, and all the saints.⁴² Thus, when Segni culled the preeminent theologians of sixteenth-century Catholicism, he found no clear consensus about what constituted relics beyond bodies and body parts, but felt able to offer his own view, a notably broad one.

Room for Maneuver: The Ambiguities of Medieval Views of Relics

From the very beginning of the Protestant Reformation in 1517, there was an acknowledged, urgent need for Catholics to defend the cults of saints, of which relics formed but one part. Reflecting on this imperative in 1589, Bellarmine had gone straight to the heart of the controversy when he opened his tract on the Church Triumphant by an attack on “the arguments of heretics by which they strive to prove that saints are not yet blessed, etc.” This is what he wrote:

This is therefore the first question: Whether or not the souls of pious persons, which have been released from their body and have no need of purgation, have already been admitted to enjoying the blessedness which is located in clear sight of God? Indeed, it was the opinion of ancient [i.e., early Christian] and recent heretics that all souls, even of sainted persons, do not see God until the day of the last judgment but lurk in some hidden places, and cannot be said to be “blessed,” unless in hope.⁴³

42 Segni, *Reliquarium*, 2–3.

43 Bellarmino, *Quartus controversia generalis*, 1107: “Argumenta hereticorum, quibus illi probare nituntur, sanctos nondum esse beatos, etc. Est igitur quaestio Prima: Sintne piorum hominum spiritus, qui & corpore soluti sunt, & nulla purgatione egent, iam ad fruendam beatitudinem, qua in clara Dei visione sita est, admisi? Et quidem antiquorum, et recentium haereticorum opinio fuit, animas omnes, quantumvis sanctorum hominum, usque ad ultimi iudicii diem servari in quibusdam abditis receptaculis, ubi nec Deum

As Bellarmine realized, relics were meaningless unless saints' souls were in paradise. Although the Reformation had placed the cult of saints on the front line of confessional polemics, the doubts and anxieties about what happened to souls after death were nothing new, as Bellarmine made clear. It would thus be a fundamental mistake to regard the centuries before the Reformation as an age of consensus about relics. As Caroline Bynum has pointed out, ambivalence, confusion, and difficulty characterized medieval attitudes toward many sorts of "holy matter."⁴⁴ Rather, the change came with the decision at the Council of Trent to require bishops to "instruct the faithful carefully about the intercession of the saints, invocation of them, reverence for their relics and the legitimate use of images of them."⁴⁵ Prior to that time, the place of saints and relics in medieval Christianity had been among those things which, as the early twelfth-century monk Guibert of Nogent put it, were "practiced but not taught."⁴⁶ In other words, they were not core aspects of dogma to be interpreted by theologians and passed on by instruction to the faithful, but were rooted in the quotidian behavior of most Christians. Until Trent, relics were *habitus*, not creed.⁴⁷

In this context, it is little surprise that it took exceptional intellectual rigor even to attempt to order the many and varied patristic and medieval discussions of what constituted relics. The most effective way to approach them is through the comments of one of the most powerful, disciplined, and comprehensive of medieval

videant, nec beatæ dici possint, nisi in spe." Punctuation and italics original.

44 Bynum, *Christian Materiality*, esp. 154–76. See also eadem, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (New York, 1995), 92–94, 104–14, 200–225; Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief* (n. 6 above), 221–30; M. Dal Santo, *Debating the Saints' Cult in the Age of Gregory the Great* (Oxford, 2012).

45 Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (n. 23 above), 2:774.

46 Guibert of Nogent, *De sanctis et eorum pignibus*, ed. R. B. C. Huygens, CCCM 127 (Turnhout, 1993), 85–87. English translation by Thomas Head, *Medieval Hagiography: An Anthology* (New York, 2001), 405. Guibert's unease about relics is discussed by J. Rubenstein, *Guibert of Nogent: Portrait of a Medieval Mind* (New York, 2002), 124–30.

47 A point I have made more fully in "Portable Christianity: Relics in the Medieval West (c. 700–1200)," *ProcBrAc* 181 (2012): 143–67.

theologians, Thomas Aquinas (1224/25–74). He derived his conclusions from a blend of rigorous reasoning and authoritative patristic *obiter dicta*; in turn, his formulation had a decisive influence on subsequent scholastic discussions of relics, including, notably, that of Suárez. At the end of the section of his *Summa* which dealt with the Incarnation, Aquinas placed questions about saints' relics, after his treatment of Christ's divine and human nature, the cross, his mother, and the saints.⁴⁸ With a Latin translation of John of Damascus available, his discussion relied throughout on the crisp language that distinguished worship (*latria; adoratio*) from veneration (*doulia; honor*) that had been formulated as part of John's counterattack against Iconoclasm.⁴⁹

When he reached the issue of whether any form of honor should be paid to the relics of the saints, Aquinas grounded his argument in the succinct formulation provided ca. 500 by Gennadius of Marseille in his version of the *Liber ecclesiasticorum dogmatum*. This compendium of Nicene dogma and its concomitant teachings was a conveniently short and simplified summary of patristic theology which circulated widely in various versions throughout the middle ages; we shall return to it very shortly.⁵⁰ In further support of his position, Aquinas cited Augustine and Jerome. From *The City of God* 1.13 he took the comment that if children who love their parents have great affection for their father's clothing and other paraphernalia, they should honor his corpse with even greater respect as part of his very being (a remark whose original purpose was to link the human body, via the resurrection of the flesh, with the heavenly city).⁵¹ From Jerome, he excerpted the incisive rebuttal of the Gallic priest Vigilantius (ca. 400), whose claim that

48 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae: Latin Text and English Translation, Introductions, Notes, Appendices, and Glossaries*, 61 vols., gen. ed. T. Gilby (London, 1964–81), IIIa.25.6 (vol. 50, ed. and trans. C. E. O'Neill, 202–5).

49 For Aquinas's theology of relics in general, see Bynum, *Resurrection of the Body*, 263–66; Séjourné, "Reliques" (n. 41 above), at 2360–65.

50 C. H. Turner, "The *Liber ecclesiasticorum dogmatorum* attributed to Gennadius," *JTS* 7 (1905–6): 78–99; idem, "The *Liber ecclesiasticorum dogmatum*: supplenda," *JTS* 8 (1907–8): 103–14.

51 Cf. Bynum, *Resurrection of the Body*, 94–108.

relics were almost accorded pagan ritual Jerome had refuted by relying on the distinction between worship and honor. Aquinas followed Augustine and Jerome in placing relics in the context of a justification of the general principle of the cult of saints. Augustine well knew that dust, soil, oil, water, flowers, and the like were channels of saintly *virtus* as potent as human remains, for his account of the miracles wrought by St. Stephen's relics in North Africa did not differentiate in any way between them.⁵² Nor had Jerome's invective against Vigilantius addressed the material specificity of relics—that they might be “a bit of powder wrapped up in a costly cloth in a tiny vessel” was not the point.⁵³ At issue, as Bellarmine had spotted, was Vigilantius's refusal to accept that deceased saints had any ability to intercede with God for humankind. In this respect, Aquinas was true to his sources.⁵⁴

Thanks to his reworking of Gennadius, however, Aquinas produced a significantly different account of relics. Gennadius had stated, “We believe that the bodies of saints and especially (*praecipue*) the relics of blessed martyrs should be honored very sincerely as the limbs of Christ, and that basilicas dedicated in their name, as holy places given over to worship, should be visited with very reverent love and most faithful devotion. If anyone denies this, they are to be regarded not as a Christian but as a follower of Eunomius and Vigilantius [i.e., as a heretic].”⁵⁵ Aquinas changed this by omitting the clause

about basilicas and transferring Gennadius's emphasis from the relics of the blessed martyrs to saints' bodies. “We are bound . . . in memory of them [the saints as *membra Christi*],” he wrote, “to accord due honor to any of their relics; and this is primarily (*praecipue*) true of their bodies, which were the temples and instruments of the Holy Spirit . . . and which are to be made like the body of Christ by glorious resurrection.”⁵⁶ Aquinas thus ignored reverence for places associated with saints and instead turned the special role which Gennadius had reserved for the bodies of martyrs into emphasis on the bodies of saints (all saints) at the expense of other relics. Asserting that the Holy Spirit dwelled in and worked through saints' bodies, and that their bodies would be Christ-like at the resurrection, Aquinas thereby linked saints to the Incarnation and Resurrection to provide theological grounds for his significant shift of emphasis. This move also aligned his interpretation of patristic authorities with the recently established papal procedures for canonizing saints. In redirecting and narrowing the concept of relics, Aquinas provided the germ from which Mazzolini, Bellarmine, and Suárez subsequently developed their own views.

Prior to Aquinas's formulation of theological grounds for putting primary attention on bodily remains, Gennadius's succinct formulation had been the only widely available statement of the place of relics in Latin Christianity. For example, it made its way into a Roman florilegium compiled in defense of images and relics during the iconoclast era. As a result, it features among the texts cited in their support by the Roman synods of 731 and 769; then, in 793/94, when Hadrian I rebutted the Franks' refusal to support the way in which saints, images, and relics had been reinstated at the Second Council of Nicaea in 787, he relied on it as a statement of the papal position.⁵⁷

52 Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, CCSL 47–48 (Turnhout, 1955), 22.8 (815–27).

53 *S. Hieronymi presbyteri opera III.5: Adversus Vigilantium*, ed. J.-L. Feiertag, CCSL 79C (Turnhout, 2005), ch. 5 (12); I cite the translation of W. H. Fremantle, G. Lewis, and W. G. Martle, *St. Jerome: Letters and Select Works*, Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church 2nd ser., v. 6. (Oxford, 1893), 419.

54 J. Raaijmakers, “The Souls of the Saints—Debates about Relic Veneration in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages” (forthcoming). I am very grateful to Dr. Raaijmakers for allowing me access to her unpublished work.

55 PL 58:997: “Sanctorum corpora et praecipue beatorum martyrum reliquias, ac si Christi membra sincerissime honoranda, et basilicas eorum nominibus appellatas, velut loca sancta divino cultui mancipata, affectu piissimo et devotione fidelissima adeundas credimus. Si quis contra hanc sententiam venerit, non Christianus, sed Eunomianus et Vigilantianus creditur.” I cite the version used by Aquinas; for variant recensions see articles cited n. 50 above.

56 Trans. O'Neill. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, IIIa.25.6 (202): “Et ideo eorum reliquias qualescumque honore congruo in eorum memoriam venerari debemus; et praecipue eorum corpora, quae fuerunt templa et organa Spiritus Sancti in eis habitantis et operantis et sunt corpori Christi configuranda per gloriosam resurrectionem.”

57 *Concilium Romanum* a. 769, MGH Conc 2.1:87; *Epistolae selectae pontificum Romanorum* 2, cap. 49 [Hadrian I's Responsum to the Franks], MGH Ep 5:41. For the 731 florilegium, see the evidence adduced by T. F. X. Noble, *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians* (Philadelphia, 2009), 118–23.

That position was an inclusive one, for the council convened in Rome in 769 declared that “if we wish to reach the company of the saints, assuredly we should venerate with the most outstanding honor all things in the saints’ honor, whether relics not only of their bodies and clothing or basilicas dedicated in their name and even images and portraits of them wherever they are painted.”⁵⁸ In mid-eighth-century Rome, then, “relics of saints” was an open, fluid category, for bits of their bodies and clothing were easily assimilated to their likenesses and churches.⁵⁹

One other Roman author must be briefly discussed: Gregory the Great. An enthusiast for sending gifts of relics, he never attempted to define, categorize, or rank them. Nevertheless, he did describe them in his accompanying letters. On one occasion, in the course of justifying his refusal to send body parts of Rome’s apostles to Constantina, wife of the Emperor Maurice, he distinguished body parts from the relics he was willing to dispatch: filings from the chains of St. Paul (objects associated with the apostle during his lifetime) and small pieces of cloth placed on the saint’s tomb and sanctified by proximity.⁶⁰ These were a textile equivalent to the oil or water poured over a holy tomb in several eastern Mediterranean shrines for distribution in little phials and flasks but, to avoid any confusion, he invented a Latin form of a Greek word to describe them: *brandea*.⁶¹ Gregory clearly assimilated these little cloths to the martyr’s lifetime clothing and associated

objects. It was irrelevant whether not-body relics derived from the martyrs’ earthly or heavenly life, and indeed, with fears that the end times were at hand and resurrection in the flesh imminent, this would have been a meaningless distinction.⁶² Whenever politically expedient, however, he was firm about the difference between corporeal and noncorporeal relics, and his decisions reflected the specifics of the situation, the city, and the saint in question. He did not decide on the basis of either principle or category.⁶³

In this context, it must also be emphasized that Gregory’s descriptions of different relics only hardened into firm categories endowed with normative authority from the late ninth century onward. When his letter became incorporated into canon law collections in the tenth and eleventh century, it acquired a definitive status which it had hitherto lacked and became the progenitor of a categorization into corporeal and contact relics. In this way, an anachronistic reading was retrospectively foisted onto Gregory.⁶⁴ That a formal distinction between corporeal and “contact” or “representative” relics was frequently reiterated in later centuries tells us nothing about relics at the end of the sixth century.

Thiofrid of Echternach was an early twelfth-century monastic writer who knew Gregory’s letter to Constantina well but used it as the springboard into a distinctive—indeed unique—medieval attempt to organize a comprehensive classificatory scheme for relics. In reality, though, his treatise on the *Flowers of the Epitaph of the Saints* provides a fascinating illustration of how intellectual agility trumped definition when religious truths were the goal. Thiofrid found it convenient to divide his allegorical and typological interpretation of saints’ cults into four parts. First, he treated the bodies of saints. Then came the places in which they rested, their graves and reliquaries, but also the bellies of wild beasts, the ocean floor and the pits of sewers. There followed two books on the saints’ external accoutrements,

58 *Concilium Romanum* a. 769, actio IV, MGH Conc 2.1:87: “Si ad sanctorum consortium venire optamus, profecto hic omnia in honore sanctorum sive reliquias non solum corporum, set et vestimentorum sive basilicas nominibus eorum memoratas seu etiam imagines et vultus eorum in quolibet loco depictos caeleberrimo honore venerari debemus.”

59 In his *Opus Caroli regis contra synodum*, Theodulf of Orléans disagreed. For him, the relics to be venerated “in accordance with the tradition of the early Fathers” comprised saints’ bodies, or parts thereof (he mentions dust, bones, and ashes elsewhere), their clothing and other similar things which they had used or had about their person during their lifetime: *Opus Caroli* 3.16, 24, MGH Conc 2, Supplementum, 409, 411, 448, 449, 451, quotation from 411. See also Noble, *Images*, 200, 214.

60 Gregory the Great, *Registrum epistularum*, ed. D. Norberg, CCSL 140–140A (Turnhout, 1982), Ep. 4.30 (1:248–50).

61 I have discussed this at length in J. M. H. Smith, “The Care of Relics in Early Medieval Rome,” in *Rome and Religion in the Early Middle Ages: Studies in Honor of Thomas F. X. Noble*, ed. V. Garver and O. Phelan (Aldershot, 2014), 179–205.

62 R. A. Markus, *Gregory the Great and His World* (Cambridge, 1997), 50–67.

63 I diverge from the influential argument of J. McCulloh, “The Cult of Relics in the Letters and ‘Dialogues’ of Pope Gregory the Great: A Lexicographical Study,” *Traditio* 32 (1976): 145–84 for the reasons I detail in “Care of Relics.”

64 Smith, “Care of Relics.”

their *appendicia exteriora*: anything associated with them in their lifetime, including their names and shadows as well as clothes, staff, utensils, and so forth; and, finally, the instruments of torture that led to their martyrdom.⁶⁵ Thiofrid does not reveal whether he knew Gennadius, but that is hardly relevant, for his categorization is simply an enabling device for a profound meditation on relics in relation to incarnation, resurrection, and incorruptibility. He had no interest in historical or liturgical, let alone legal, ideas about relics, and his uniquely imaginative conceptual framework remained entirely without influence.

Medieval and early modern learned discourses had one key feature in common: they all dealt with relics in the context of the cult of saints. In late antiquity and the middle ages, relics' primary meaning was as signs of the truths of incarnation and resurrection—and, more generally, that the saints were already with God. As a result, relics remained embedded in theological discourses of embodiment, signification, and intercession, with all their attendant difficulties and anxieties. In the sixteenth century, the need to counter Protestant polemic reinforced this. From the seventeenth century, however, as papal centralization tightened up regulation of the cults of saints, a standardized liturgical template made relics into the subject of prescriptive stipulations for the first time. Although the germ of the notion that one sort of relics was superior to others can be traced back to Aquinas, ranked classifications as such were a product of the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries and had no medieval precedent. As a canon law hierarchy of classes emerged, so many of the objects which the middle ages had regarded as relics of saints were eliminated. Flowers, stones, oil, names, shadows: none had any place among saints' relics by the age of Benedict XIV.

Fuzziness: Relics as Practice in Medieval Christianity

Medieval discourses about relics were the product of the educated, clerical, and monastic elite. Participation in the cult of relics was far more

widespread, however, and we can establish what a large circle of people regarded as relics by interrogating the evidence of what they collected and treasured. Dozens of inventories of medieval relic collections survive, and they contain enough detail to allow conclusions to be drawn about what sorts of things were meaningful to those lay and clerical devotees who collected, inherited, or bequeathed relics to churches. These inventories were compiled from the identificatory tags attached to relics themselves. In addition, several hundred of these labels survive, and yield direct information on what was safeguarded inside reliquaries and how it was described.⁶⁶ This evidence demonstrates that the range of objects deemed to be relics was more varied than medieval and early modern learned treatises acknowledge. It also indicates the practical methods of sorting and classifying in common medieval use and introduces us to the conceptual vocabulary with which those who cared directly for relics were familiar. By these means, we can bypass normative pronouncements and focus instead on the substance of medieval relics themselves.

As an example of a monastic collection, we can turn to the careful inventory of the relics of Abingdon made by Abbot Faritius in 1116, which was copied into the house chronicle later in the century.⁶⁷ One of the most important and wealthy Anglo-Saxon monasteries, Abingdon had amassed a large collection of relics by the time of the Italian Faritius, its first post-Conquest abbot. It had certainly possessed some of them for centuries, but others had been acquired by Faritius himself, clearly a great lover of relics.⁶⁸ He arranged the inventory in the order used in litanies of the saints by commencing with Christ, and proceeding via Mary (to whom his monastery was dedicated), then apostles, to martyrs,

66 For a general discussion of relic inventories and their structure, see P. Cordez, "Gestion et médiation des collections de reliques au moyen âge: Le témoignage des authentiques et des inventaires," in *Reliques et sainteté dans l'espace médiéval*, ed. J.-L. Deuffic (Saint-Denis, 2006), 33–63.

67 J. Hudson, *Historia ecclesie Abendonensis: The History of the Church of Abingdon*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 2002–7), chs. 223–28 (2:220–25). Hudson's translation is followed in this chapter.

68 The development of the relic collection can be traced from the early tenth century: see Hudson's Introduction, *ibid.*, 1:clxxiii–clxxv, 2:civ–cvi. On Faritius's abbacy and his love of relics, *ibid.*, chs. 55–56 (2:264–73).

65 Thiofrid of Echternach, *Flores epytaphii sanctorum*, ed. M. C. Ferrari, CCCM 133 (Turnhout, 1996). For *appendicia exteriora* see 3.1 (57).

confessors, and finally virgins. A common, but by no means universal rank order for relic lists, this heavenly hierarchy made clear that relics bridged the distance between earth and heaven. Relics thus linked Abingdon to the celestial Jerusalem without regard for whether they were body parts or not.

It must have been a considerable administrative undertaking to collate details from many different altars and reliquaries and, unsurprisingly, some relics were overlooked in the process.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, Faritius's inventory is sufficiently full to give a clear indication of how they were catalogued and what was especially treasured. The list commenced with passion relics: fragments of Christ's *sudarium*, the cross, a nail from the crucifixion, Christ's table (i.e., from the Last Supper), and his tomb. Next came Mary, represented by her clothing. Twelve relics denoted six of the apostles: Abingdon possessed bones or teeth of John the Baptist, Andrew, James, and Bartholomew; part of the beard of Peter; particles of the crosses of Peter, Paul, and Andrew; and the clothing of James. Twenty-eight martyr cults featured, headed by several remains of St. Stephen (bone, stole, dalmatic, hair, stones from his lapidation). Abingdon had recognizable body parts of some others, such as St. Victor: "his arm and a whole rib and part of another rib and very many other bones."⁷⁰ There were also bones of the Holy Innocents. Among its possessions were relics of two martyred Anglo-Saxon kings: "Of the blood-stained shirt of St. Edmund, king and martyr [king of East Anglia, d. 869], which he was wearing at the hour of his passion, and of his wooden coffin, and of the reliquary of his pillow and of the shavings of box-wood of which it was full. The greatest part of St. Edward [d. 978]."⁷¹ Finally a further fourteen martyrs were mentioned by name, without indication of what material was preserved. Most were martyrs of the city of Rome, alongside whom feature two murdered early medieval bishops, Boniface (d. 754) and Leodegarius (d. 679). The list of thirty-nine confessors was headed by body parts

69 Ibid. for references to relics of John the Evangelist, Margaret, and Faith, which the inventory missed.

70 Ibid., chap. 226 (2:220–21).

71 Ibid., chap. 226 (2:222–23).

of three notable Anglo-Saxon bishops, Chad, Aldhelm, and Æthelwold, and it implies, though is not explicit, that all the other confessors were also represented by bodily relics. Finally, the seventeen virgins were headed by "hairs of St. Mary Magdalene." Some of the virgins who followed were Roman martyrs, such as Caecilia and Agnes, but they were interspersed with early medieval abbesses, including Balthild, Eadburh, and Genovefa. Abingdon had corporeal remains of most but not all of them, and the list closed with "from the clothes of St. Brigid, Radegund, Juliana, Victoria."⁷²

As a result, Abingdon's most prestigious relics are scattered across its different sections, with Faritius's gifts to his monastery dispersed among the martyrs, confessors, and virgins. For our purposes, it is notable that not all the most treasured relics were body parts, nor even large objects, for the "small piece" of the nail of the crucifixion and the "precious finger" of St. Denis were both remembered as gifts of King Æthelstan.⁷³ Furthermore, in common medieval fashion, Abingdon extended relic veneration to various biblical characters (the Holy Innocents, Mary Magdalene) and took a broad view of what might be hailed as a relic, including the stole and dalmatic of the New Testament martyr, Stephen, and the sawdust stuffing from Edmund of East Anglia's pillow. This itemization of the Abingdon collection at one moment in its long history gives us a helpful snapshot of what a major monastery regarded as relics in the age of Guibert of Nogent.

From Abingdon, we move to the Saxon town of Brunswick, where the collegiate church of St. Blaise was, by the fifteenth century, the home of a stunning hoard of sacred art assembled by the Guelph ducal family from the eleventh century onward, the so-called "Welfenschatz."⁷⁴ In 1482, all the St. Blaise reliquaries were inventoried and

72 Ibid., chap. 228 (2:222–25).

73 Ibid., chap. B62 (1:282–83) for the gifts of Æthelstan in their silver reliquary. I have commented on these in my "Rulers and Relics, c. 750–950: 'Treasure on Earth, Treasure in Heaven,'" in *Relics and Remains*, ed. A. Walsham, Past & Present Supplement 5 (Oxford, 2010), 73–96, at 95.

74 P. M. de Winter, "The Sacral Treasure of the Guelphs," *Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 72, no. 1 (1985): 2–160, with an account of its twentieth-century fate at 132–37.

their contents itemized: approximately 1,220 relics inside 138 reliquaries.⁷⁵ Some relics had demonstrably been in the family's possession since the eleventh century; some others had been acquired by more recent members of the Guelph dynasty, and the inventory betrays the fact that many of the relics had moved around between reliquaries on various occasions.⁷⁶

Countess Gertrude (d. 1077) had cofounded St. Blaise with her husband, Liudolf, in 1030, and her generous benefactions include the portable altar bearing her name, now in the Cleveland Museum of Art (fig. 2.1). In 1482, it contained thirty-one named items, plus an uncounted number without any labels attached.⁷⁷ They are not listed in any structured sequence, but were itemized in whatever order they were extracted, as was the case throughout the inventorying process.⁷⁸ Several of the relics refer directly to the iconography of the embossed gold figures which adorn the four sides of the altar, notably two relics of the crucifixion (from the column of the flagellation and from the rock where the cross stood), of seven of the apostles, and of Adelheid of Selz (d. 999), widow of Emperor Otto I, whose presence on the reliquary marks the claims to royal blood and throne-worthiness of Count Liudolf's line.⁷⁹ Most of the saintly relics are identified by name but not substance, although the tooth of St. Christopher and tibia of St. George are mentioned, as is also the tunic of the apostle Philip. Given the modest dimensions of the portable

altar, even the relics described as "large" can, in fact, have only been of tiny size.⁸⁰

The contents of Gertrude's altar are representative of the Guelph relic collection as a whole, as revealed by the 1482 inventory.⁸¹ The majority of its 286 named saints are early Christian martyrs, with an admixture of church fathers, Merovingian and Carolingian saints, and local German saints, of whom Adelheid is just one. Relics of Jesus and his passion were not limited to the two in the altar, but included a wide range of others. His grave, crown of thorns, *sudarium*, a nail, reed, lance, and many pieces of the cross marked the crucifixion, as presumably also a piece of the veil of the temple. The events of his lifetime were made real by relics of the crib, soil from the place where he had stood in the river Jordan, a piece from the five loaves he distributed at the feeding of the five thousand, from the gate through which he entered Jerusalem, and bread he had blessed at the Last Supper. There were also his hair, robe (*de peplo*), white garment (*de veste alba*), and tunic (*de tunica*), and so forth. A penny with a nail through it was a typically north German domestic relic of the wounds of Christ.⁸² There is a similarly wide range of relics of Mary: from her hair and milk, her robe, cloak and gloves, stones from her tomb, from the place where the angel carried her up into heaven. An ampulla of oil from Mary's miracle-working icon at Saidnaya near Damascus was among the many phials of oils from various shrines. Important Old Testament prophets featured: several pieces of the rods of Aaron and of Moses, plus a relic from the burial place of the prophet Samuel. The stony landscape of the Holy Land was present too: the rock on which Moses stood when he received the law, the boulder on which Christ had sat, a stone from the place where he was taken captive, the rock which the angel rolled away from his tomb, a stone from the place where St. Helena found the cross, one from Mount Tabor, and the rock on which Christ stood when he ascended to heaven. Many of these

75 A. Boockmann, *Die verlorenen Teile des 'Welfenschatzes': Eine Übersicht anhand des Reliquienverzeichnisses von 1482 der Stiftskirche St. Blasius in Braunschweig*, Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, Phil.-hist. Klasse, 3^e Folge 226 (Göttingen, 1997), with comments on the circumstances which led to the inventorying at 18–19 and statistical summary at 65–66.

76 *Ibid.*, 59–60, 72–79.

77 *Ibid.*, 130–31, no. 8 for the list of its contents.

78 *Ibid.*, 58–59.

79 P. Corbet, "L'autel portative de la comtesse Gertrude de Brunswick (vers 1040): Tradition royale de Bourgogne et conscience aristocratique dans l'Empire des Saliens," *CabCM* 34 (1991): 97–120; H. Westermann-Angerhausen, "Die Stiftungen der Gräfin Gertrud—Anspruch und Rang," in *Der Welfenschatz und sein Umkreis*, ed. J. Ehlers and D. Kötzsche (Mainz, 1998), 51–76; L. Lambacher, "Reliquien im Welfenschatz als Zeugnisse von Pilgerschaft und Politik," in *Heiliges Grab—Heiliger Gräber: Aktualität und Nachleben von Pilgerorten*, ed. U. Röper and M. Treml (Berlin, 2014), 49–68.

80 Boockmann, *Die verlorenen Teile*, 130: "... sancti Bartolomei apostoli magna portio; ... item in una ligatura unum magnum os et alie partes sine scripturis; item reliquie sancti Marciani martiris magna particula. ..."

81 All details in this paragraph from *ibid.*, 69–80, 162–65.

82 R. Kroos, "Vom Umgang mit Reliquien," in *Ornamenta Ecclesiae*, 3 vols., ed. A. Legner (Cologne, 1985), 3:25–49, at 33–34.



FIG. 2.1 Portable Altar of Countess Gertrude, ca. 1045. Gold, cloisonné enamel, porphyry, gems, pearls, niello, wood core; 10.5 × 27.5 × 21.0 cm. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift of the John Huntington Art and Polytechnic Trust 1931.462 (photo courtesy The Cleveland Museum of Art)

doubtless originated during the pilgrimages to the Holy Land which successive dukes of Saxony are known to have undertaken in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.⁸³ As late as 1482, all these, and more, were subsumed under the generic term *reliquie* without any further classification.⁸⁴

The Guelph relic collection had accumulated gradually, the result of gifts, pilgrimages, crusades, bequests, and exchanges. The particles treasured in this dynastic church were in no way unusual, exceptional, or implausible, and provide a sober index of what men and women in late medieval Europe revered as relics. When these objects also served as mementos of illustrious ancestors, patrons, and benefactors, their prestige was all the greater, as at Abingdon and elsewhere. They derived extra significance from political circumstances and associations that were as readily applicable to relics of the places, persons, and events of the Bible as to relics of saints and martyrs.⁸⁵ That biblical relics were characteristic of medieval piety emerges clearly from the next and final example.

The altar in the Sancta Sanctorum, the private papal chapel in Rome's Lateran palace, was opened in 1905. Built into the later marble surround was a reliquary chest made by Leo III (795–816), and many of the reliquaries and early patterned silks discovered inside it are now justly famous.⁸⁶ Scholars are much less familiar, however, with the large collection of unspectacular relics which accompanied them. These were stored in assorted small bags, boxes, and wrappers, and, together with the associated identification tags, are a valuable insight into relic collecting in medieval Rome. They reveal an acceptance of holy stuff which was far more heterogeneous—far fuzzier—than the formulations of theologians, canonists, or liturgists would recognize.

83 Boockmann, *Die verlorenen Teile*, 77–78.

84 The inventory begins: “Registrum in quo conscripte sunt Reliquie que habentur. . . .” *ibid.* 127.

85 On this, see further Smith, “Rulers and Relics.”

86 An overview (with bibliography) of works of art found in the altar is available in G. Cornini, “Non est in toto sanctior orbe locus”: Collecting Relics in Early Medieval Rome,” in *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics and Devotion in Medieval Europe*, ed. M. Bagnoli, H. A. Klein, C. G. Mann, and J. Robinson (New Haven, 2010), 69–78. For a detailed discussion of one significant reliquary found in Leo III's chest, a painted box dated ca. 600, see below, fig. 6.1 and pp. 112–14.

In brief, the collection mostly comprised early medieval objects, for seventy-five percent of the 119 legible labels date from the ninth century or earlier; the remaining relics were labeled between the eleventh and mid-thirteenth centuries. Tags from this later period are confined to the remains of saints, whereas the early medieval stratum of the collection contains a very large number of relics of Christ, Mary, and biblical sites in the Holy Land, in addition to early martyrs and a handful of post-persecution saints. By contrast, tags explicitly mentioning saints' body parts are notably few, and all date from the twelfth- to thirteenth-century part of the collection.⁸⁷

A wide range of substances had reached Rome from the Holy Land in the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries. Frequent reference is made to soil, pebbles, and stones, from the crib (i.e., Bethlehem), the river Jordan, Calvary, Christ's tomb, and the garden around it.⁸⁸ Wax and oil both came from the tomb, in the latter case in a pottery oil lamp.⁸⁹ A phial of Christ's blood had been labeled in the eighth century.⁹⁰ Manna came from the shrine of the head of John the Baptist at Emesa.⁹¹ Some indicate the care with which some early medieval visitors sought out Old Testament sites, not only Mount Sinai but also the tombs of prophets such as Amos and Isaac.⁹² They also visited places associated with Jesus and his family: the tomb of Zachariah; the cave where Elizabeth fled with the infant John the Baptist to escape the massacre of the innocents; the tree which Jesus

87 For a detailed analysis of these trends, see Smith, “Care of Relics” (n. 61 above).

88 B. Galland, *Les authentiques de reliques du Sancta Sanctorum*, *Stude Testi* 421 (Vatican City, 2004). Soil, pebbles, and stones in nos. 10, 48, 63, 70, 99–103, 106, 118, 120–24 (pp. 96, 110, 116, 119, 131–35, 138, 146, 148–51).

89 *Ibid.*, nos. 109, 111, 119 (pp. 140, 142, 146). Label 111 (*oleo de sepulchro Domini*) was found wrapped around an oil lamp: see P. Lauer, *Le trésor du Sancta Sanctorum* (Paris, 1906), fig. 15, p. 91.

90 Galland, *Les authentiques*, no. 14, p. 98. Lauer, *Trésor du Sancta Sanctorum*, figs. 10, 15, pp. 53, 91.

91 Galland, *Les authentiques*, no. 6, p. 95. There may be confusion here: tradition did locate the shrine of the head of John the Baptist at Emesa, but manna recurs in association with the tomb of John the Evangelist at Ephesos from the time of the apocryphal Acts of John onward. For a twelfth-century explanation of this sweet, sticky effluent from saints' bodies and tombs, see Thiofrid, *Flores epytaphii sanctorum* (n. 65 above), 3.6 (75–76).

92 Galland, *Les authentiques*, nos. 2, 9, 29, 41, 78 (pp. 93, 96, 103, 107, 122).

had planted as a child; Cana, “where the Lord made wine out of water”; the sycamore tree which Zacchaeus climbed to get a better look at Jesus; the rock on which Mary’s body had been washed and anointed.⁹³ The numerous biblical relics have analogues in two other large collections of seventh- to eighth-century relic labels, those of Sens and Chelles; most also correlate with sites mentioned in late antique and early medieval pilgrim itineraries.⁹⁴ All told, they are a powerful reminder of how late antique and early medieval Christians elaborated the biblical narrative—canonical and apocryphal—by adding meaningful places, details, and objects to “update” the Judean landscape to match their own pragmatic understanding of events, as well as drawing on their experience of the liturgy.⁹⁵

More than one third of the Sancta Sanctorum labels explicitly use the term *reliquiae*.⁹⁶ Although the majority of instances refer to patriarchs, prophets, and saints, the word also denotes objects associated with Jesus’s death: his cup (from the Last Supper), the column of the flagellation, his cross, and his tomb.⁹⁷ One of its more intriguing occurrences is for “relics of the twelve thrones,” the thrones on which Christ prophesied that his disciples would sit alongside him in glory to judge the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28, Luke 22:30).⁹⁸ In all likelihood, this was oil, wax, or a stone from the much-frequented church “of the Twelve Thrones” on the shore of Lake Tiberias, in other words an object whose material nature efficiently conflated the created world with the world to come, a relic of the eschatological future.⁹⁹

93 Ibid., 10, 21 (quoted), 24, 43, 65, 99, 124 (pp. 96, 100, 101, 108, 117, 131, 150).

94 A. Bruckner and R. Marichal, *Chartae Latinae Antiquiores: Facsimile-Edition of the Latin Charters Prior to the Ninth Century*, 49 vols. (Olten, 1954–98), vol. 18, no. 669, pp. 84–108 (Chelles) and vol. 19, no. 682, pp. 40–59 (Sens). See also the comments of M. McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy: Communications and Commerce, AD 300–900* (Cambridge, 2001), 283–318.

95 Cf. Derek Krueger, chapter 6 in this volume.

96 With the exception of label 6, manna from the head of John the Baptist, no other descriptors are used.

97 Galland, *Les authentiques* nos. 26, 27, 74, 86, 87, 91 (pp. 102, 121, 125–26, 127).

98 Ibid., no. 42 (p. 108).

99 M. McCormick, *Charlemagne’s Survey of the Holy Land* (Washington, DC, 2011), 212–13, 232. See also J. Wilkinson,

In early medieval Rome, *reliquiae* was thus a capacious word whose usage extended far beyond the remains of Christian saints to embrace churches and other holy sites as well as holy persons. Reflecting a pre-Iconoclast notion of the holiness of places and persons as well as buildings, it assimilated high points of the Old Testament into the Christian experience.¹⁰⁰ Durable organic or inorganic substances from holy places and persons which could be transported in tiny portions might turn into *reliquiae*. Moreover, prior to ca. 800, it was only one of several Latin synonyms for these holy substances: *benedictio, beneficia, nomen, patrocinia, pignus, sanctuaria* could all mean the same.¹⁰¹ This rich vocabulary was apposite for the many and varied forms of holy matter gathered up in the sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries as well as for the wide range of biblical and saintly sites from which it derived.

Although relic labels cannot be precisely dated, the considerable number of late seventh- and eighth-century ones for Holy Land objects may suggest that they filled the place left when the production of mass-produced metal ampullae collapsed in the seventh century (figs. 5.1–5.5, 6.3, and 6.5–8 for examples). Lacking

Jerusalem Pilgrims Before the Crusades (Warminster, 2002), 345–346, s.v. “Seven Springs.”

100 See A. Louth, “Holiness and Sanctity in the Early Church,” in *Saints and Sanctity*, ed. P. Clarke and T. Claydon, *Studies in Church History* 47 (Woodbridge, 2011), 1–18.

101 The vocabulary of pre-Carolingian relic labels overlaps with hagiographical, epistolary, and epigraphic usage. For *patria*, see Bruckner and Marichal, *Chartae Latinae Antiquiores*, vol. 1, no. 25, pp. 34–35 (Saint-Maurice d’Agaune); vol. 12, no. 548, p. 84 (Säckingen: relics from Rome); vol. 28, no. 665, pp. 75–75 (Baume-les-Messieurs); no. 669, pp. 84–108, labels 16, 55, 66, 69, 127 (Chelles); vol. 19, no. 691, p. 77, label 7 (Vergy: relics from Rome); no. 682, pp. 40–59, label 87 (Sens). *Pignora*: *ibid.*, vol. 28, no. 665, pp. 75–75 (Baume-les-Messieurs); no. 668, p. 83 (Chartres); vol. 19, no. 691, p. 77, label 6 (Vergy). *Nomina*: *ibid.*, vol. 43, no. 1240, p. 3 (Röns).

For the terminology in epigraphic, epistolary, and other genres, see G. Gagov, “Il termine ‘nomina’ sinonimo di ‘reliquiae’ nell’antica epigrafia cristiana,” *MiscFr* 55 (1955): 3–13; *idem*, “Il culto delle reliquie nell’antichità: Riflesso nei due termini ‘patrocinii’ e ‘pignora,’” *MiscFr* 58 (1958): 484–512; C. Mohrmann, “A propos de deux mots controversés de la latinité chrétienne: Tropaeum-nomen,” *VChr* 8 (1954): 154–73; McCulloh, “Cult of Relics” (n. 63 above); M. Weidemann, “Reliquie und Eulogie: Zur Begriffsbestimmung geweihter Gegenstände in der fränkischen Kirchenlehre des 6. Jahrhunderts,” in *Die Ausgrabungen in St. Ulrich und Afra in Augsburg 1961–1968*, 2 vols., ed. J. Werner (Munich, 1977), 1:353–73. After ca. 800 the range of words used in all contexts narrows to *reliquiae* and *pignus/ora*.

iconographic detail, *reliquiae* represented many of the same holy places depicted on them and were their functional equivalent in transmitting the “blessing of the holy places of Christ the Lord” (ΕΒΛΟΓΙΑ ΚΥΡΙΟΥ ΤΩΝ ΑΓΙΩΝ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ ΤΟΠΩΝ).¹⁰² In view of the facts that *benedictio* (the Latin translation of *eulogia*) was a common synonym for *reliquiae* in early medieval Rome,¹⁰³ and that tiny glass phials of holy oil from Mediterranean shrines continued to make their way into medieval relic deposits, as the Brunswick inventory confirms, their equivalence is clear. Commonly classified separately as devotionalia, ampullae emerged as a separate category of religious object only when *relics* acquired their narrow twentieth-century definition.¹⁰⁴ In a late antique and early medieval perspective, however, oil in a decorated flask meant the same as a handful of dirt, a twig, or a sliver of bone wrapped in silk.

In Rome and elsewhere in the early medieval West, the material articulation of the holy thus took a notably wide variety of forms. A considerable range of interchangeable Latin descriptors referenced many biblical events and stories in the distant past, and even the eschatological future, as well as the saints of Christian history. When the scribes who penned papyrus or parchment labels for this holy stuff bothered to give it any descriptive noun, it was, to be sure, most commonly *reliquiae*. This was, after all, a word which Augustine, Jerome, Gennadius, and Gregory the Great all used. But their advocacy was driven by pastoral, polemical, and theological concerns, and was never about selecting, classifying, and ranking objects into a hierarchy of significance. Patristic vocabulary had no prescriptive connotations, liturgical or legal. Although the vocabulary thinned around 800, the contents of later

medieval relic collections testify that, right until the end of the middle ages, *reliquiae* and *pignora* retained their original generic meaning for any particle of sacred matter, whether biblical or saintly, body part, vegetable or mineral matter, or fabric. Only in the centuries after Trent did this broad-spectrum usage shrink to an exclusive focus on saints, and its final metamorphosis into the relics of contemporary encyclopedia definitions is scarcely a century old.

This chapter has juxtaposed two approaches to the place of relics in Latin Christianity: practices of accumulation and evolving ways of thinking about them. I have contended that learned discourses are not reliable guides to what medieval Christians selected and treasured as relics or how they made sense of them. Inspection of selected medieval monastic, aristocratic, and papal collections has revealed that they were more heterogeneous than could be predicted on the basis of either medieval or postmedieval conceptualizations of relics. In addition, the range and variety of words employed to describe this holy stuff has confirmed that, especially in the early middle ages, it was not constrained by either a standardized conceptual vocabulary or clear criteria for inclusion. I have also demonstrated that the kinds of relics gathered and safeguarded in the early medieval era continued to remain important until the end of the middle ages.

No unified, consistent, or coherent relic-related discourse developed during or after the middle ages. Instead, relics of saints were conceptualized in different ways for different purposes. Pluralism and inconsistency were the hallmarks of discussion. I have drawn attention to theological, spiritual, liturgical, legislative, and political strands of thought, some in the writings of individual scholars, others in the pronouncements of those in positions of ecclesiastical authority. Some were monastic or academic disquisitions of a reflective or scholastic kind, while others were stimulated by pressing pastoral or polemical priorities. Some took greater account of earlier discussions than others; some were much more sensitive to historical change than others. All pondered what relics might be; none reached the same conclusion as another. None offered a view

102 I quote the inscription from Monza 5: A. Grabar, *Ampoules de Terre Sainte (Monza-Bobbio)* (Paris, 1958), 22–23.

103 For *benedictio* as “relic” for the consecration of a new church see T. E. Von Sicking, *Liber Diurnus Romanorum pontificum*, 2nd ed. (Aalen, 1966), 1:xxii, xxiii, 16–17. References in the correspondence of Gregory the Great are collected by A. T. Hack, *Codex Carolinus: Päpstliche Epistolographie im 8. Jahrhundert*, Päpste und Papsttum 35 (Stuttgart, 2007), 782–91.

104 For bibliography on ampullae as devotionalia, see Krueger, chapter 6, and for iconography, Cox Miller, chapter 5 in this volume.

which fully describes the actual contents of medieval reliquaries.

The disjuncture between the ideas about and the practice of relics in Christian tradition has two principal explanations. One concerns the complexities of historical change: prescriptive institutional directives, modes of thought, and everyday practice almost never evolve in tandem. The other relates to the religious attributes of these material substances: theological problems surrounded only a portion of relics. Saints' remains raised pressing questions about the relation of soul to body after death, and about the ability of saints to intercede on behalf of the living, whereas relics of holy places were unencumbered by such fraught problems, and hence triggered no theological speculation. They simply faded from attention in postmedieval centuries: wherever they survived in situ in reliquaries, they remained inert but were not discarded.

These dissonances continued into the age of Enlightenment. Although selection, classification, and hierarchy came into prominence as intellectual tools during the early modern era, the fusing of theology, liturgy, and law into a monolithic definition took much longer. When it finally happened, it did so from a basis in codified canon law, not history. As a result, a proportion of medieval relics were relegated to the status of "devotionalia" or "pilgrim souvenirs" because

they failed to conform to the normative, regulated needs of a modernizing Church.

Nevertheless, the hard work of control by ranking and exclusion could touch relics only as they existed in handbooks and encyclopedias but not as they persisted as objects inside surviving reliquaries. Abingdon's relics perished at the Reformation, but many of the Brunswick reliquaries retained a portion of their medieval contents into the late nineteenth century: those that survive are now museum exhibits. But when the ancient silks, ivories, and gemmed reliquaries extracted from the *Sancta Sanctorum* became art historical treasures for public display, the relics discovered inside them were placed back in the altar, where they remain. Today's encyclopedias (in libraries and online) reproduce ideas about relics grounded in the 1917 *Codex iuris canonici*: but were they to take their cue from the material objects that remain inside medieval reliquaries, they would tell a very different story about what relics are. If Don Pacchiotti's destruction of the Salina relic collection symbolized Sicily's religious future as part of a modernizing and systematizing Church, the Salina sisters epitomized a past where *relics* derived their meaning from the subjective understanding of those who gathered and cherished them, not from clerical regulation, theological insight, or legalistic interpretation.

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"Matter for Debate: Relics and Related Devotional Objects," which she graciously invited me to cohost with her in 2010, and they germinated during subsequent conversations. In addition, Tom Noble gave valuable comments on an early draft, Simon Ditchfield guided me through Counter-Reformation treatises, and Charlotte Methuen provided invaluable help with points of detail ranging from the fourth to the twenty-first century.