

Some reminders:

Books in seminar

Pace yourself throughout the week

Seminar passages

The locality of pilgrimage

The relic introduces all sorts of problems of value, but these problems are also quintessentially Christian: Christianity, as Peter Stallybrass argues, actually celebrates the remnant, the thing that would ordinarily be wasted. Not only that, but these inconsequential objects serve as the foundation for modern trade routes and some of the greatest medieval architecture:

“As a religion, and even more as a state religion, Christianity would transvalue those waste parts: the comb of Mary Magdalene, the fingernails of St. Sebastian, the girdle of the Virgin Mary, fragments of the cross, the bloody and lice-infested hair shirt of Thomas Beckett.

But as a state religion, Christianity developed its own powerful economics, not only through the modernizing work regimes of the monasteries but also through the cult of relics. That is, around a priceless/valueless fingernail a reliquary of gold and precious stones would be made; around the reliquary, a cathedral would be built; around the cathedral, an urban economy would develop; around that economy, new road systems would emerge that would pull large numbers of people and large amounts of money and goods along the pilgrimage routes of Europe. The priceless/valueless fingernail, provided it was not stolen or proved a forgery (and even if it was), produced economic value.

With this paradox—between the seemingly worthless and the enormous economic engine that was the medieval church—in mind, let’s talk about the specifics of a few pilgrimage sites.

Regensburg: the founding of a pilgrimage site

1519: synagogue destroyed; a workman is badly injured but survives. The miracle inspires the residents to set up a chapel dedicated to the image of the Virgin at the site. A statue of the Virgin is placed on a column outside the chapel. (Freedberg 100ff.) What Freedberg doesn’t tell you is that the workman later died in his bed and that his medical expenses were paid for from proceeds of the pilgrimage.

1519: 50,000 pilgrims arrive; the image works further miracles.

1519-22: Albrecht Altdorfer is commissioned to make additional copies of the image which were later sold to wealthier pilgrims, along with the cheaper pilgrim badges. He also makes commemorative etchings of the synagogue interior to sell to the Jews before the demolition.

What's unusual about this story?

- 1) The miracle is used as an excuse to celebrate the image, establishing Regensburg as a pilgrimage site (rather than the image specifically working miracles) – it provides a very specific answer to the question of how exactly miraculous images come to be miraculous images.
- 2) The act of copying the image is somehow central to the whole process of establishing the site (and, intriguingly, not copying of relics, but copying of images—note that the popularity of Regensburg is predicated in part on the widespread mass production of images like Ostendorfer's and Altdorfer's).
- 3) The forging of the pilgrimage site is premised on the expulsion of the Jews of Regensburg (which was itself inspired by economic pressures that exposed existing racial and religious tensions). The city's radical preacher had long been looking for an excuse to replace the synagogue with a chapel to the Virgin, and these socio-economic forces provided him with an excuse.

It's unclear to me from Freedberg or from the other sources I've read whether the image was in Regensburg before 1519 or not. The point seems to be that it gained part of its power, and all of its influence as a pilgrimage destination, from its association with the expulsion of the Jews. And, as Freedberg reminds us, it was not the original icon that generated the interest in the site, but the work of "art" the obvious reproduction by Altdorfer (141 - READ).

If it makes any of you feel any better, interest in the site eventually waned in the 1520s under the cloud of controversy over the over-exuberant behavior of the pilgrims.

Saint Foy: the theft of relics and the process of adaptation

[BIO MATERIAL: Saint Faith (Latin Sancta Fides, French Sainte Foy, Spanish Santa Fe) is a saint whose center of cult was transferred to the Abbey of Sainte-Foy, Conques, where her relics arrived in the ninth century, *stolen from Agen by a monk from the Abbey nearby at Conques*. Her fully developed historicised narrative placed the young girl in Agen in Aquitaine; her legend recounts how she was arrested during persecutions of Christians by the Roman Empire and refused to make pagan sacrifices even under torture. Saint Faith was tortured to death with a red-hot brazier. Her death is sometimes said to have occurred in the year 287 or 290, sometimes in the large-scale persecution under Diocletian beginning in 303.]

In the same year the abbey was founded, the relics of St. James were discovered at Compostela in Spain. Streams of pilgrims soon began to make their way to the shrine. The pilgrimage routes passed through smaller shrines along the way, which soon became rich from pilgrim gifts and religious tourism. For the monks at Conques, the lure of fame and riches soon proved too much to bear, and they conspired to steal some relics to attract pilgrims.

In 866, a Conques monk was dispatched to join a monastery in Agen, which had the relics of St. Foy, a virgin martyred in 303 AD under Diocletian. The saint was known for her ability to cure blindness and free captives, and her statue-reliquary attracted many pilgrims. The

Conques brother acted as a faithful monk for 10 years at Agen until he was able to steal the relics, which he brought back to Conques. *Just as they had hoped, the pilgrim road shifted from Agen to Conques.*

The Conques monastery soon prospered. Pilgrims left jewels to be added to the saint's statue and the best goldsmiths competed to create ornaments and containers for the relics. Pepin and Charlemagne both sent golden treasures.

By the 11th century, it became necessary to build a larger church to accommodate the hundreds of pilgrims that flowed through the town. Construction of the new Church of St. Foy was directed by Abbot Odolric (1031-1065) and completed around the year 1120.

The pilgrimage route that passed through Conques began in Le Puy in eastern France and proceeded west through difficult, mountainous terrain before arriving in the hillside village. (The floor of the church slopes towards the door to make it easier to wash away the mud tracked in by tired pilgrim feet.)

Pilgrims coming from Le Puy and Estaing entered Conques on rue Haute. In the abbey church, *pilgrims circled the shrine of St. Foy three times then stopped in front of the golden reliquary-statue to ask the saint for a safe journey to Santiago, which could take them up to a year of dangerous travel.*

Santiago de Compostela: emergence of a modern pilgrimage

One etymology for the name "Compostela" is that it comes from the Latin phrase campus stellae, i.e. "field of the star", making Santiago de Compostela "St. James of the Field of the Star". This would reflect the belief that the bones of St. James were *taken from the Middle East, to Spain and then buried where a shepherd had spotted a star.* A church was eventually built over the bones, and later replaced with the Cathedral de Santiago de Compostela.

The legend that St James found his way to the Iberian peninsula, and had preached there is one of a number of early traditions concerning the missionary activities and final resting places of the apostles of Jesus. Although the 1884 Bull of Pope Leo XIII Omnipotens Deus accepted the authenticity of the relics at Compostela, the Vatican remains uncommitted as to whether the relics are those of Saint James the Great, while continuing to promote the more general benefits of pilgrimage to the site.

According to a tradition that cannot be traced before the 12th century, *the relics were said to have been discovered in 814 by Theodomir, bishop of Iria Flavia in the far northwest of the principality of Asturias.* Theodomir was guided to the spot by a star, the legend affirmed, drawing upon a familiar myth-element, hence "Compostela" was given an etymology as a corruption of Campus Stellae, "Plain of Stars."

Legend has it that after spending some years in Spain preaching the Gospel, James returned to Jerusalem and martyrdom. *His followers are believed to have carried his body down to the coast and put it into a stone boat, which was carried by angels and the wind to land in the North of Spain. The site of his tomb was lost for some 800 years when a hermit discovered the burial place.* The relics were authenticated by the Church and it became a place of pilgrimage and grew into the city of Santiago de Compostela.

In medieval times the pilgrimage grew in popularity. People set off from their homes and walked from all over Europe to Santiago. Religious Orders provided shelter along the way and there grew up a network of refuges in which pilgrims could sleep.

Over 100,000 pilgrims travel to the city each year from points all over Europe, and other parts of the world. In the Holy Year in 2004 250,000 pilgrims walked to Santiago.

<http://www.pilgrimage-to-santiago.com/>

ALSO NOTE: THE GROWTH OF THE RELIC TRADE WAS SPURRED ON BY THE SACK OF CONSTANTINOPLE AND THE 'TRANSLATION' OF MANY SACRED OBJECTS FROM JERUSALEM TO EUROPE.

Some philosophical-type thoughts

Let's set relics aside for the moment and think about the two categories of created objects discussed in the readings:

- 1) ex votos: made by ordinary believers; made to commemorate a miracle that has already occurred
- 2) reliquaries: made by craftsmen (contributed to by believers); focus was on supplication, the hope for more miracles

How, if at all, do the categories of representation and presentation help us here?

Another way to think about both images that gather ex votos and reliquaries (especially Saint Foy) is that they have life histories. The tiny statue [SLIDE] that becomes huge thanks to the objects donated to it accumulates value through those objects. The relic added to an existing image [SLIDE] gains value from the juxtaposition of these two objects, from their combined power. Saint Foy, however much we may laugh at her acquisitiveness, gains power through the addition of jewelry from the faithful.

[A little more on the image relic:

After the sack of Constantinople in 1204 by Western crusaders, the spread of increasingly large numbers of new relics into Latin hands. Some of these were important because they represented not the local relics of the venerated saints, but rather the universal relics of Christ and the Virgin Mary . . . The product of this was in effect a synthesis of the relic and the image into the image-relic. . . Late-medieval, Passion-derived images like the Arma Christi . . . [answer to] a kind of internalized pilgrimage of the mind. Where pilgrims had previously to travel to the relic, the image-relic now traveled to them.]

I think that some of the suspicion you all expressed toward reliquaries during Lisa's lecture was based on the idea that they are the exact opposite of the acheiropoietos—they have the hand of man all over them. But reliquaries actually combine the idea of a miraculous object independent of human ingenuity with the material, visual apparatus that tells the story of the object and mediates our experience of it.

The relic is fundamentally anonymous (this enables it to be translated from one community to another, sold as the bones of one saint in one town, and associated with another saint when stolen and relocated). We may be horrified by how cavalier this seems, but it actually makes the relic the ideal commodity, an object that is wholly responsive to the needs of individual believers.

BUT it is responsive only in so far as we successfully narrate its value through stories of miraculous transportation. Relics reveal how necessary narrative is to the power of the material object—this makes sense given that, like the Eucharist, the relic “the bare bone or bit of dust” in Geary’s words, is in some sense profoundly anti-visual. (for more interesting comparisons between the relic and the Eucharist, see Sumption pp. 41-2).

Relics in the modern era

We can think of plenty of modern pilgrimage sites: famous authors, Elvis, etc. Here, for the most part, the phenomenon is largely secularized. Relics may include clothing worn by the deceased, and we still buy tokens of our journey (shot glasses, t shirts, etc.). The distinction between a pilgrim badge and a foam hat is significant, but I don’t have time to go into it here.

There are also a number of ways in which the worship of more traditional relics persists. Here are just two examples.

1) Galileo's finger is on display at the Museo di Storia del Scienza in Italy. The finger was detached from Galileo's body by Anton Francesco Gori (Florence, 1691-1757, literate and antiquary) on 12 March 1737 when Galileo's remains were transferred from a small closet next to the chapel of Saints Cosmas and Damian to the main body of the church of Santa Croce where a mausoleum had been built by Vincenzo Viviani. Subsequently the finger was acquired by Angelo M. Bandini, the librarian of the Biblioteca Laurenziana and was exhibited for a long period in this library. Then, in 1841, it was brought to the Tribuna di Galileo, which had just been opened in the Museo di Fisica e Storia Naturale on the via Romana. Along with the instruments of the Medici and Lorraine dynasties, it eventually became the property of the Museo di Storia del la Scienza.

This example is extraordinary to me because it is a relic of someone who is associated with the scientific revolution, the age of reason, the triumph of science over superstition. But it is worth mentioning that I can't find any reference to the finger on the museum's website.

2) Relics on ebay
[go to ebay, search “religious relics”]

“Catholic Saint relic guide for buyers”

“Many churches no longer have relics on display for the faithful to venerate. But, unfortunately, many have derived profits by selling relics against the rules (cannon law) of the Church and eBay rules. EBay rules supposedly forbid the sale of human body parts, but that is exactly what many Saint relics are- pieces of bone, hair, or even skin.”

Author explains that there are three types of relics – the very nature of this categorization speaks to the demand for relics that has created a need for duplication

- 1) first-class relics are parts of a Saint's body
- 2) second class relics are things they possessed, such as books or clothing,
- 3) third class relics are things touched to first-class relics or shrines of Saints.

“Third class relics are often given out free by religious orders, or may be bought as part of a holy card, medal, badge, or rosary center. The cost for them is not much more than a regular medal, card, badge, or rosary center. The medals are easily obtainable for less than \$3 each. All these and third class relic cards are found easily on the Internet and anyone is allowed to sell them.

First-class relics are never to be sold. Religious orders may distribute them in exchange for donations. If they are to be used for public veneration, the document from the order issuing the relic must be included. This is essential in determining real relics from fake ones, the Saint should match the Order issuing the relic, for the most part.”

What to do with Sumption, Geary and Freedberg

The contrast between the two of them reveals what Freedberg is about. Both provide important information about the historical trajectory (say more about why Sumption is useful, then compare and contrast quotations – 1975, 1991).

Sumption:

“The cult of saints was the counterpoint of the fear of evil.” (21)

“The belief in dreams as a revelation of the supernatural world is one of the commonest features of primitive religions.” (28)

“The practice of fasting and praying before removing a relic was a survival of these ancient prejudices.” (31)

“As soon as they began to insist on bodily relics the demand rapidly outstripped the supply and a nefarious trade in relics sprung up . . .” (35)

“In the eleventh and twelfth centuries the sale of relics was practiced on an alarming scale.” (35)

“The trade in relics reached epidemic proportions after the sack of Constantinople in 1204. . . .” (36)

“Orthodox theology was purveyed to ordinary people by a lengthy and indirect route and was considerably distorted in the process. . . [lives of saints and other exempla] encouraged the uneducated to look on the mysteries of the faith in a somewhat literal and pictorial fashion. Religious thought, in Johann Huizinga’s brilliant phrase, ‘crystallized into images.’” (55)

Geary:

“As long as the scholar concentrates on the things rather than on the persons, he can do little more than add to the already considerable number of treatises . . . which condemn the cult of relics to a greater or lesser extent as barbarous superstition.” (3)

“In order for an object to be venerated as a relic, a new symbolic function had to be assigned—a function that had its origin in the fabric of the society in which it was to be venerated.” (6)

“Thus there is little that is entirely new in the roles of relics in the Middle Ages; almost every custom, even the most bizarre, can be traced to early Christian or pre-Christian precedents.” (17) [in the context of a kind of continuity—with important variations—from then to now. Sumption, by contrast, wants to separate out the early Christian’s use of “mementos” from the superstitious and materialistic practices of medieval Christians, which looked more like barbarism.]

“A world that looked to saints for identity, protection, and economic sustenance was far different from one that depended on national identity, central government, and fiscal planning. . .” (19).

“Now, saints might be honored as much as ever, or even more, but they could be honored anywhere and not only at their tombs.” (24)

Now, where does Freedberg fall? How can he be seen to be responding to Sumption? [p. 55 quotation]

Structuring questions:

What kinds of examples can we find to talk about these questions (not answers, just examples you might use in an essay):

- 1) How is the religious impulse tied to the visual impulse? What happens to that impulse after the Protestant reformation?
 - we haven’t gotten to the reformation yet, so don’t worry about it. But what would Freedberg say about the first part? John of Damascus?
- 2) What is the relationship between art and ideology in the modern, secularized western world?
 - We haven’t gotten here yet either, but you all have been applying your modern perspective to the medieval period, inevitably
- 3) What has been the role of the artist in relation to religion?
 - icon writers, reliquary makers, Altdorfer
- 4) What is the relationship between religious institutions and personal faith?
 - pilgrimage, mass, iconoclastic controversy
- 5) What role can religion play in the lives of believers?
 - icons, relics (miracles, generally); also economic and political structures

- 6) How does religion function as an ideology that supports intolerance and oppression?
- Regensburg, militaristic use of icons