



Making ‘Sense’ of the Pilgrimage Experience of the Medieval Church*

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Introduction

It cannot be doubted that medieval devotion towards the cults of saints was a physical affair, involving touching, kissing and even crawling as a way of coming into direct contact with the intercessory power of the divine. Expressions of the physicality of this type of worship can be seen in the design of the architectural and decorative schemes of medieval *foramina*-type saints’ shrines, and permeate the artistic elements of these sacred locales. Few survive, but in the stained glass and illuminated manuscripts of the twelfth through to the fifteenth century, pilgrims are depicted crawling into them, kissing the shrine through its apertures, and bestowing *ex voto* offerings in the shape of infected or broken limbs. Whilst highlighting the variety of monumental architecture deployed in the space of cult churches, they also demonstrate the importance of the *multi-sensory* involvement of such locations.

This paper will explore the importance of sensory experience throughout the late twelfth to the early fifteenth-century, with a particular focus on the act of bodily participation with the divine, and how this was reflected in the architectural and visual structure of a saintly site. To illustrate the importance of sensory means of veneration towards the cults of saints, several stained glass images from the decorative frameworks of two of the most popular English shrines of the medieval period will be analyzed; one of whom was a very locally venerated saint, and the other who was perhaps the most popular saint in the country for much of the Middle Ages.¹

The senses became evermore influential on the fabric of the church building itself, changing as a direct result of the pilgrimage experience. This complex notion will be explained in two parts: the first will focus on understanding, interpreting, and experiencing images of saintly devotion, and the second will detail the physical process of seeing and moving around the locations, creating the experience that this interaction and participation provided.

The medieval period was extremely sensory. Medieval religiosity dominated life and with it engagement with the senses was inherent, ranging from the burning incense, the chiming of bells, the kissing of relics to the aural sounds of the churches and monasteries;

* This paper was developed from a session entitled, ‘Saints’ Cults and their Evolution in Space and Time’, at the International Medieval Congress held at the University of Leeds, 12– 15 July 2010. A significant amount of the analysis also comes from my current Ph.D. thesis, ‘Kings, Commoners and Communities: ‘Sensing’ the Pilgrimage Experience of the English Medieval Church, c. 1170–1550’ (Durham University).

¹ York Minster and Canterbury Cathedral were chosen as case sites as they are two of the most complete schemes of medieval stained glass in England and include detailed hagiographical cycles of their patron saints. They also allowed for a comparison of the architectural and decorative devotional campaigns of one major Northern and one major Southern pilgrimage church and at different scales of analysis due to their varying religious functions; York being a secular minster and Canterbury, a Benedictine monastery.

stimulation of the senses was inescapable.² In light of the current interest on visuality and spatiality across various disciplines; most notably drama,³ it is therefore surprising that little consideration has been given to the interaction between saintly practice and sensory encounter analysis and its influence on the art and architecture of this period in relation to these sensory uses.⁴ This is even more significant given at that this time, hagiography was often represented by visual and architectural means, and thereby pilgrimage was described as “seeing with the senses.”⁵ Subsequently, in order to understand how and why pilgrims

² Although too complex to consider within the extent of this paper, it could be argued that the sensory experience, or focus on the corporeal interaction of the Church, determined its demise and ultimately led to the iconoclastic Protestant reforms of the sixteenth century. For in-depth analyses of this topic see for example, C. Pamela Graves, “From an Archaeology of Iconoclasm to an Anthropology of the Body: Images, Punishment, and Personhood in England, 1500-1660,” *Current Anthropology*, 48/ 1 (February, 2008), pp. 35-57; Margaret. Aston, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and literacy in late medieval religion* (London and Rio Grande: Hambledon Press, 1984); *idem.*, Public worship and iconoclasm. In *The archaeology of the Reformation 1480–1580*, (eds.), D. Gaimster and R. Gilchrist, (Society for Post-Medieval Archaeology Monograph 1, 2003), pp. 9–28; Joseph Leo Koerner, “The icon as iconoclasm,” in *Iconoclasm: Beyond the image wars in science, religion, and art*, (eds.), B. Latour and P. Weibel, (Cambridge, Mass., and London: MIT Press, 2002), pp. 164–213; *idem.*, *The reformation of the image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004); Sarah Tarlow, “Reformation and transformation: What happened to Catholic things in a Protestant world?” in *The archaeology of the Reformation 1480–1580*, (eds.), D. Gaimster and R. Gilchrist, (Society for Post-Medieval Archaeology Monograph 1. Leeds: Maney, 2003), pp. 108–21; John Phillips, *The reformation of images: Destruction of art in England, 1535–1660* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1973); Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, (eds.), *Iconoclasm: Beyond the image wars in science, religion, and art* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: MIT Press, 2002); Richard Marks, *Image and devotion in late medieval England* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing.; Eire, 2004); M. N. Carlos, *War against the idols: The reformation of worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Eamon Duffy, *The stripping of the altars: Traditional religion in England 1400–1580* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992); *idem.*, *The voices of Morebath: Reformation and rebellion in an English village* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001).

³ The most recent work on the relationship between devotional performance and sensory encounter is Jill Stevenson, *Performance, Cognitive Theory, and Devotional Culture: Sensual Piety in Late Medieval York* (New York, 2010), but see also Kathleen Ashley and Wim Hüskén, (eds.), *Moving Subjects: Processional Performance in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 2001); Clifford Davidson, *Festivals and Plays in Late Medieval Britain* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2007); Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Dawn Marie Hayes, *Body and Sacred Place in Medieval Europe, 1100-1389* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Beverly Mayne Kienzle, “Medieval Sermons and their Performance: Theory and Record” in (ed.), Carolyn Muessig, *Preacher, Sermon and Audience in the Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill Academic Press, 2002); Donald Perrest, “The Meaning of the Mystery: From Tableaux to Theatre in the French Royal Entry” in (eds.), Kathleen Ashley and Wim Hüskén, *Moving Subjects: Processional Performance in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 2001), pp. 187-211; Anne Bagnall Yardley, *Performing Piety: Musical Culture in Medieval English Nunneries* (New York: Palgrave, 2006); and Karl Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), 2 vols.

⁴ An earlier attempt to understand the development of architecture in relation to its use and function was Alain Erlande-Brandenburg, *The Cathedral: the Social and Architectural Dynamics of Construction*, trans. by Martin Thom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

⁵ See Georgia Frank, “The Pilgrim’s gaze in the age before icons,” in Robert S. Nelson and Norman Bryson (eds.), *Visuality before and beyond the Renaissance: Seeing as Others Saw* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 9. Pilgrimage was a personal act and so the intentions for such a journey were extensive, ranging from personal penance, group activity or even simply a quest for an adventure. Medieval concepts of visuality and sensuality have been applied to pilgrimage in the past by Edith and Victor Turner in *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978). Drawing on Van Gennep’s model of the rite of passage, the Turner’s work proposed the devotional journey as a stage of liminality which they suggest is an inherent aspect of any rite of passage. They argue that during pilgrimage people are free from social standing as they move from real into sacred time and space temporarily transcending mundane social

participated in such sensory actions, an examination of the development and construction of the sites in which they worshipped is crucial.

Evidence from contemporary documentary accounts and from the two- and three-dimensional imagery that adorned churches is particularly important given the crucial role art played in promoting the cults of saints. In essence, the visual imagery of the churches “defined and communicated the identity of a saint to the faithful,”⁶ immortalising the saint’s majesty, numinism, and power, whilst authenticating and projecting the sanctity of their relics.⁷ As such, the encasement of the shrine, that is the form and decoration of the reliquary and the imagery of the windows, walls and ceilings surrounding it, created and determined the experience of pilgrims.⁸

The Medieval Image-Experience

Interest in the individual’s reaction to devotional images was discussed throughout the Middle Ages becoming a more popular subject towards the end of the period as illustrated by texts ranging from St. Augustine’s *De Genesi as litteram* (401-415), St. Gregory’s eighth-century edict regarding the use of images, and St. Bernard’s *Cantica* (1088-1102); all of which psychologically typified human sight and perception.⁹ Medieval seeing was thought to provide the beholder with the sense of touching the object of their vision, creating an affective power. In simple terms, sensation was the means by which belief was to be experienced. This process of medieval sensory perception has been succinctly explored by Suzannah Biernoff¹⁰ and, more recently, by Chris Woolgar’s analysis of the medieval senses.¹¹ Biernoff explains: “The relationship between viewer and image was one of reciprocity, in which optical, carnal, and redemptive vision combined to allow for bodily participation in the divine. This she calls “ocular communion.”¹²

structures. Although the majority of the Turner’s argument is rather extreme, the concept of transcending the stages of reality, of time, place and space can be applied to the sensory experience of the cults of saints. As Stephen Gudeman noted, “saints are boundary figures, partaking of the spiritual and the divine and because they occupy this dual position, saints are called upon to act as mediators.” See Colin Morris, “Pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the Late Middle Ages” in C. Morris & P. Roberts (eds.), *Pilgrimage: The English Experience from Becket to Bunyan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 145. As a result, the stage of intercession by the saint; the time in which the salvific effect is received, would be felt to eclipse the reality of that specific point in the pilgrim’s life. The viewer’s were in effect lost to their experience through this bodily participation and present reaction that such images provided. Thus, the devotional experience of these sites provided temporary relief from mundane existence and everyday ritual forms, but did not remove social status or identity as through the development of pilgrimage art and architecture, identity and social status was certainly displayed, projected and understood by the medieval person.

⁶ Richard Gameson, “The early imagery of Thomas Becket,” in Morris & Roberts, *Pilgrimage*, p. 46.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Sixten Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative; the Rise of the Dramatic Close-Up Fifteenth-Century Devotional Painting* (Abo: Abo Akademi, 1965), pp. 11-31. The most detailed discussion of medieval visuality and spirituality is Robert S. Nelson, ed., *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

¹⁰ Suzannah Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

¹¹ Christopher M. Woolgar, *The Senses in Late Medieval England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

¹² Woolgar p. 133ff.

The material qualities of an object signified its meaning within experience and in turn, devotional images evoked a deep emotional experience to the viewer which Ringbom called “the emphatic approach.”¹³ Sensory experience allowed the sacred to flow from these objects into the very being of believers. Images therefore initiated powerful connections between man and God which were interpreted and deciphered by the medieval viewer, subsequently becoming “a mediator between ‘earth’ and ‘world,’ between the mundane things of existence... and the sacred meaning of being articulated in ritual devotion.”¹⁴ As Milner explains, “Sense experience was the pathway for divine grace, corporeally integrating believers and the experiences of religious life in a beneficial sensuality.”¹⁵

It is this sensory experience that was evoked at pilgrimage sites. The architectural and material aspects of these sacred locations including their plan, altars, screens, glass, paintings, relics, and shrines created and expected multiple experiences designed to stimulate their audience’s mental visualizations through use of all of their senses.

The Pilgrimage Experience at Canterbury

When pilgrims arrived at Canterbury Cathedral, they were greeted by monks who escorted them to the chapter house in order to enamour them with the stories of the life and miracles of St. Thomas Becket.¹⁶ Then the pilgrims processed around the determined route,¹⁷

¹³ Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative*, p. 12.

¹⁴ Anne Harris, “Stained Glass Window as Thing: Heidegger, the Shoemaker Panels, and the Commercial and Spiritual Economies of Chartres Cathedral in the Thirteenth Century,” *Different Visions: A Journal of New Perspectives on Medieval Art* 1 (September 2008), p. 17.

¹⁵ Matthew Milner, “A Sensible Reformation: The Senses and Liturgical Life in Tudor England,” (Ph.D. diss. University of Warwick, 2006), p. 14.

¹⁶ Fitzstephen’s comments on this practice which can be found in *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket*, (ed.), by James Craigie Robertson and J. Brigstocke Sheppard, 7 vols, Rolls Series, 67 (London: Rolls Commission, 1875-1885), III, p. 151: *Sed de miraculis ejus in Anglia, sacerdotum et bonorum virorum testimonio declaratis, et in capitulo Cantuariensis ecclesiae publice recitatis, magnus codex conscriptus exstat.* “But about his miracles, declared by the testimony of priests and good men throughout England and recited to the public in the chapter house of the church of Canterbury, there exists a great, written book.”

Although this process of regaling the pilgrims with dissertations of Becket’s life and miracles in the chapter house is mentioned in this twelfth-century account, pilgrims in Chaucer’s *The Tale of Beryn with A Prologue of the Merry Adventure of the Pardoner with a Tapster at Canterbury* (eds.), F. F. Furnivall and W. G. Stone (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing Co, 2004) (although fictional) amuse themselves with attempts to decipher the meanings of the windows. See particularly p. 6 (lines 153-155):

“He bears a stout stick,” said the one, “or else a rake’s end.”

“Thou failest,” said the Miller, “thou hast not well thy mind/It is a spear, if thou can see, with a prick tofore/To push down his enemy, and through the shoulder bore.”

Subsequently, we must be cautious when referring to the speaking to pilgrims in the chapter house as a generalized practice occurring throughout the medieval period. This may not have been the case for the later fourteenth to early sixteenth-century as documents do not provide any clues as to whether this practice was continued. It must also be stressed that parishioners or pilgrims were not usually invited into chapter houses as they were reserved strictly for chapter or parliamentary business, as was the case at York Minster whose similar duality with Westminster meant that it served as a meeting place for Parliament, the Northern Convocation and even the City government. See Sarah Brown, *‘Our Magnificent Fabrick’: York Minster: An Architectural History c. 1200-1500* (Swindon: English Heritage, 2003), pp. 56-58.

¹⁷ There have been some discrepancies regarding where pilgrims entered the church. It would appear that even after the remodelling was completed in 1500, pilgrims would enter via the south-west porch, process up the north side of the south aisle and enter the south transept via an iron gate at the east end of the south aisle. It is

passing through stations within the cathedral, beginning at an altar in the north transept where Thomas Becket was martyred in 1170.¹⁸ They were then directed downstairs, plunging deep into the crypt in order to visit the original tomb-site of Becket. This part of the route is particularly significant. Even though here the pilgrims may not have yet viewed the miracle windows (placed upstairs), they were processing through the exact space where those miracles were experienced and initially recorded.¹⁹ In a sense, the pilgrims were physically experiencing the sanctity of the tomb due to the presence and authentication that had previously been attributed to the site. As such, they were experiencing the sanctity of Becket through the architectural surroundings which still remained venerated even after the translation of the body to the shrine above in 1220.

Finally, the pilgrims emerged from the darkness of the crypt and ascended into the light-filled Trinity Chapel which housed the shrine of Becket. Surrounding this section of the route were twelve windows of the ambulatory of Trinity Chapel, and nearby at its apex, was the light-filled Corona Chapel, which featured the head reliquary of Becket. Two of the windows in the ambulatory illustrated Becket's life, whilst ten depicted the posthumous miracles he performed in the immediate years following his martyrdom (between 1171 and 1173). The stories depicted in the stained glass were selected from accounts of Becket's life and miracles recorded by the monks, Benedict of Peterborough (c. 1135-93) and William of Canterbury (fl. 1162-74; d. c.1190).²⁰ Of the many types of miracles they recorded, perhaps unsurprisingly, healing miracles were chosen to be illuminated in the Trinity Chapel windows which enclosed the shrine area, authenticating the intercessory power of the cult.

Both the iconographic choice of the windows, in addition to the complex pilgrim route around the building, indicate the participation of the monastic community in arousing the hope of a miraculous cure by St. Thomas; the primary purpose of the pilgrimage to Canterbury.²¹ This was fulfilled by prioritising the physical experience of the pilgrim in establishing the memory of the saint.²² Although the historic-architectural element of the Trinity Chapel, created by the shrine and its proximity to the foundations of the cult in the

here, in the south transept, that the pilgrimage tour began. However, Tim Tatton-Brown suggested that the south transept could be entered directly from a door in the south wall which led out to the lay cemetery and from entering via this door, pilgrims could process down the crossing tunnel into the north transept. I do not believe this to be the case. The south transept door may have been used as an entrance during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (before the construction of the tunnel) as it would appear that once the crossing area was walled off, the south-west porch was made the official entrance to the cathedral. Therefore, I rather think that the south transept door was added during the later fourteenth/early fifteenth-century remodelling and then functioned as an *exit* route for pilgrims, so that they did not have to take the longer route back down the south side of the south nave aisle and out via the south-west porch. See: Tim Tatton-Brown, "Canterbury and the architecture of pilgrimage shrines in England," in Simon Coleman and John Elsner (eds.), *Pilgrimage: Past and Present in the World Religions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 90-107; M.F. Hearn, "Canterbury Cathedral and the Cult of Becket," *The Art Bulletin*, 76/1 (March 1994), pp. 19-52; Sarah Blick, "Comparing Pilgrim Souvenirs and Trinity Chapel Windows at Canterbury Cathedral: An Exploration of Context, Copying, and the Recovery of Lost Stained Glass," *Mirator* (September 2001), p. 5.

¹⁸ Blick, "Comparing," p. 5. See also, Anne F. Harris, "Pilgrimage, Performance and Stained Glass" in Sarah Blick and Rita Tekippe (eds.), *Art and Architecture of Late Medieval Pilgrimage In Northern Europe and the British Isles* (Leiden: Brill Academic Press, 2004), p. 272.

¹⁹ Harris, "Pilgrimage, Performance and Stained Glass," p. 250.

²⁰ Blick, "Comparing Pilgrim Souvenirs and Trinity Chapel Windows at Canterbury Cathedral," p. 5.

²¹ Blick, "Comparing," p. 6.

²² Harris, "Pilgrimage, Performance and Stained Glass," p. 272.

crypt directly below,²³ is indeed important in the overall shaping of the experience, the significance of the stained glass in projecting the power of Becket's cult is even more incredible.



Figure 1 The cure of Petronella of Polesworth, from window n IV, Trinity Chapel, Canterbury Cathedral, Engalnd, (1213-1216). Photo: © Crown Copyright, NMR.

The Corporeal Aspect of Medieval Cults of Saints

Many of the Trinity Chapel windows promote the importance of a physical connection with the shrine, and hence, Becket himself. In the cure of Petronella of Polesworth, she is depicted suffering from epilepsy, coming to the tomb to be cured. (**fig.1**) Seated at the tomb, Petronella's feet are bathed in the holy water of St. Thomas (nIV, 50).²⁴

²³ *Ibid.* p. 265.

²⁴ Throughout the paper the CVMA (Corpus Vitrearum Medii Aevi) numbering method will be used in reference to the glass. Every part of the medieval stained glass at Canterbury has been recorded and examined in detail by Madeline H. Caviness in her influential volume *The Early Stained Glass of Canterbury Cathedral ca.1175-1220* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), which was then followed by *The Windows of Christ Church Cathedral, Canterbury* (CVMA, Great Britain, 2; London; New York: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 1981)

In another panel of the same window, Ethelreda of Canterbury who suffered from a malarial disease known as Quartan fever and is depicted as noticeably pale due to the loss of blood cells caused by her illness (**fig.2**) Yet as the panel inscription: *cessant quartane vis forma subit quasisane*²⁵ suggests, when she drinks the blood of St. Thomas mixed with water she is shown to fully recover as her face returns to the “healthy” color of the other protagonists in the scene (nIV 8).



Figure 2 The Cure of Ethelreda of Canterbury, from window n IV, Trinity Chapel, Canterbury Cathedral, England, (1213-1216). Photo: © Crown Copyright, NMR.

At Canterbury, the blood of Becket was mixed with holy water from the church as it was thought that even diluted, the blood held miraculous properties.

²⁵ “The fever receded to the power, and she took on a healthy form.”

The importance of having faith in Becket's cult is strongly emphasized throughout the stained glass. As such, the necessity of visiting his tomb over useless medical and, most importantly, non-spiritual treatments is promoted repeatedly throughout the scenes, particularly in the inscriptions. For example, the texts in the cure of the Petronella of Polesworth panels suggest that she came to the tomb "rather than to trust herself to 'hirelings and those who are not true physicians.'" ²⁶ Furthermore, in the first panel of the cure of Hugh of Jervaux (nIII), a lay physician diagnoses that Hugh is dying, yet in the following scene, the monks administer the blood and water of St. Thomas. The holy mixture is proven to be the effective remedy as in the final scene, Hugh is shown to be cured. Once again, the scene serves to highlight the ineffectiveness of surgeons and physicians. ²⁷ There are also several panels depicting ampullae which contained the blood/water mixture, again proclaiming the role of this spiritual water in the healing miracles. ²⁸ In the miracles of William Fitz-Eisulf (nII 11), (**fig.3**) the window shows the boy being revived by the water of Becket, ²⁹ with the several ampullae consciously emphasized throughout by their larger-than-life-size scale, bright color and obvious position around the necks and in the hands of the main figures in the scenes. In her study, Sarah Blick found that two ampullae designs attributed to the cult of Becket, actually imitated the iconographic compositions of the glass panels. ³⁰ Blick, perhaps unsurprisingly, discovered that these were most certainly objects of memory, not only instilling in the pilgrims the memory of a rite of passage or of the heightened experience to the shrine, but also that they possessed a container filled with the miraculous liquid from the sacred saint. ³¹

²⁶ M. A. Michael (ed.), *Stained Glass of Canterbury Cathedral* (London: Scala, 2004), p. 106.

²⁷ Michael, *Stained Glass*, p. 106; Blick, "Comparing," p. 6.

²⁸ At many of the most popular shrines of the later medieval period, lead ampullae could be obtained. These small objects were filled with holy water or oil associated with the saint. At York, sweet-smelling oil which seeped from William's tomb from 1223 onwards was sealed in ampullae and sold to pilgrims as thaumaturgical souvenirs. For a detailed discussion of the few surviving St. William of York ampullae see Katja Boertjes, "Pilgrim Ampullae of York Minster and the Healing Oil of the Shrine of St. William" in Sarah Blick, (ed.), *Beyond Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges: Essays in Honour of Brian Spencer* (Oxbow Press: Oxford, 2007.), pp. 48-63. In his influential volume on *Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges (Medieval Finds from Excavations in London)*, (Boydell & Brewer: London, 2004), Brian Spencer noted that in England ampullae were the chosen memento, often sold in town shops or stalls by the gates of the cathedral as in the example of Canterbury and York, until they were overtaken by pilgrim badges in the fourteenth-century. See Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs*, p. 141 for Canterbury, and Rawcliffe, p. 22; *Fabric Rolls of York Minster*, (ed.), James Raine (Durham: Surtees Society XXXV, 1858), pp. 225-226; *York City Chamberlains' Account Rolls 1396-1500*, (ed.) Richard Barrie Dobson (Gateshead: Surtees Society CXCII, 1978-1979), p. 145 for a tale of a group of chandlers fined for erecting illegal stalls along the major roads to York Minster in 1475-76). For a detailed discussion of pilgrim objects see: Brian Spencer, "Medieval Pilgrim Badges," *Rotterdam Papers*, vol. 1 (Rotterdam, 1968), pp. 137-147.

The association between these ampullae and the glass can be explained by their intended function. Both were created to promote the power of Becket's cult to miraculously heal the sick which was to be achieved via contact with the blood-mixed water contained in the pilgrim ampullae sold at the cathedral. Sarah Blick correctly observed that "the stained glass windows helped form the pilgrim's experience at Canterbury and the ampullae enabled them to partake in and remember the experience." "Comparing," p. 4.

²⁹ Blick, "Comparing," p. 8.

³⁰ Blick, "Comparing," p. 1.

³¹ Blick, "Comparing," p. 17.

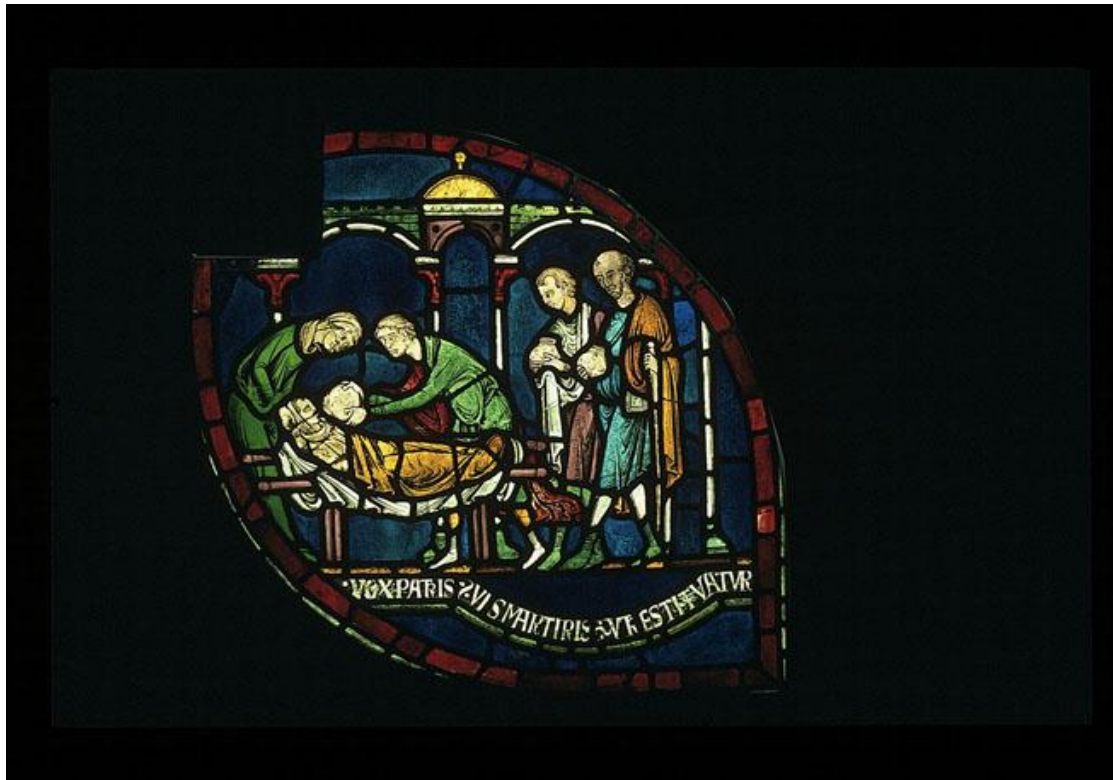


Figure 3 The Miracle of William Fitz-Eisulf, from window n II, Trinity Chapel, Canterbury Cathedral, England, (1213-1216). Photo: © Crown Copyright, NMR.

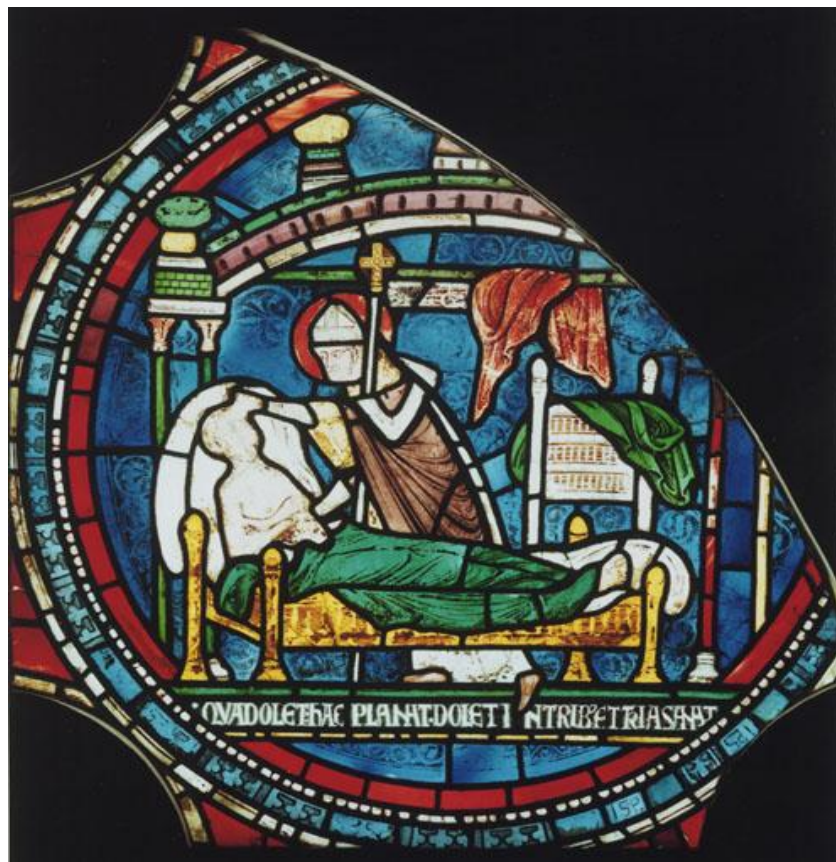


Figure 4 Becket touches head of an ailing figure, from window n IV, Trinity Chapel, Canterbury Cathedral, England, (1213-1216). Photo: © Crown Copyright, NMR.

How the holy water was accessed emphasized the role of the senses in the experience of the pilgrim. As seen in the tale of Petronella of Polesworth, this mixture was used to cure, promoting the idea once again that the salvific essence of Becket's cult lay in his body. This process was the means by which the votives offered at devotional locations or the souvenirs that many pilgrims left with were instilled with the sanctity of the saint. Devotees placed both of these types of objects near the shrine, physically proclaiming the saint's powers, and as such, they were thought to cure illness, ensure salvation, and repel evil, as the miraculous legends and stories surrounding the cult transformed these mere mementoes into relics.³²

They were regarded as endowed with the force of a relic, either because they contained a fragment of holy material or because pilgrims touched their tokens to the reliquaries or shrines, thereby absorbing their curative powers. They were the physical embodiment of devotional promises.³³

The production of these objects therefore proclaimed and multiplied the miraculous power of Becket's body,³⁴ exerting the desirability of offering thanks, gifts, and *ex votos* at the tomb of the saint. The previous panels illustrate the requirement of a physical element for the cure through recurrent depictions of the use of Becket's blood through the process of swallowing, the cure by holy water (and ampullae), and the need for a sense of closeness to the relics of the saint. Thus, evoking the authenticity of the stories contained in these windows required an action related to the body to be performed through use of at least one sense. For the pilgrims visiting the shrine, they were reassured of Becket's power by observing its effects on the body via the senses. This focus on the body, not only Becket's but also St. William of York's, is reflective of the core of the pilgrimage cult: the Translation of the saintly relics "because...the removal of [the] bones from a humble place to a glorious space [meant] that... [they] had the power to remit the sins of the assembled."³⁵

³² Sarah Blick, "Votives, Images, Interaction and Pilgrimage to the Tomb and Shrine of St. Thomas Becket, Canterbury Cathedral" in Sarah Blick and Laura Gelfand (eds.), *Push Me, Pull You: Art and Devotional Interaction in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art* (Leiden: Brill Academic Press, forthcoming 2011).

The distinction between votives and souvenirs must be noted. Votive objects (or *ex votos*) were offerings of largely any medium (e.g. jewellery; wax, wood, stone or metal objects or small images) which were brought to the relics or sacred image to seek blessings or to give thanks for vows made when purchasing, making or donating the item (see Blick, "Votives," p. 1-2.) The presence of discarded *ex votos* around a cult site proved its efficacy and so pilgrims were encouraged to present such gifts so that once left, their presence would continue the credulity of the cult.

Pilgrim souvenirs were more simply mementoes which, similarly for today's tourists, commemorated one's visit to the site. The most common form of souvenir was the pilgrim badge or brooch; made of lead or pewter they depicted either a miniature of the shrine itself or they carried depictions of the saint or instruments of martyrdom, many of which had pins or clips in order for the pilgrim to display evidence of their peregrinations on their hat or cloak. For an overview of these objects see Ben Nilson, *Cathedral Shrines of Medieval England* (The Boydell Press: Woodbridge, 1998), pp. 111-112 and Spencer, "Pilgrim Badges." For a detailed discussion of Canterbury's votives and souvenirs see Blick, "Votives," and Blick, *Beyond*.

³³ Blick, "Votives."

³⁴ Harris, "Pilgrimage, Performance and Stained Glass," p. 279.

³⁵ *Patrologia Latina*, (ed.), J P Migne, vol. 190 (Paris, 1850), p. 422 para 35. Translated as "...And let us therefore hope for the present remission of sins for us, because of our translation of the martyr," by Harris in "Pilgrimage, Performance and Stained Glass," p. 278.



Figure 5 William heals a blind woman, from window n VII, St. William Window, York Minster, England, 15th century. Photo: © Dean and Chapter of York.

In fact, emphasis on the corporeality of the cults of both Becket at Canterbury and St William of York is reaffirmed in the few glass panels that the saints appear in. In the majority of the scenes, Becket and William directly touch recipients, displaying their presence both visually and physically.³⁶ An example of this can be seen in the panel in which Becket touches that of an ailing figure (nIV 57), (**fig.4**) and in a panel from the St. William window at York Minster (c.1414/15) where William heals a blind woman (15b), (**fig.5**) he intentionally stretches out his fingers to receive the woman's forehead which she offers to him with her hands. As Anne Harris correctly identified, Becket and William are presented as hands-on saints.³⁷ This was not only the case in their lives but perhaps more so after the deaths of these saints, as the multiplicity of the corporeal elements were the focus of much imagery associated with their cults. This can be seen in the depictions of *ex voto* offerings which were made at their shrines, where physical offerings were expected to result in physical healing. At Canterbury, the panels depicting the cure of Robert of Cricklade (n IV) who became lame when in Sicily show his crutch, cloak and shoes as *ex votos*. (**fig.6**) The inscription which stretches over the architectural canopy within which the scene takes place

³⁶ Harris, "Pilgrimage, Performance, and Stained Glass," p. 262.

³⁷ *Ibid.*



Figure 6 The cure of Robert of Cricklade, from window nIV, Trinity Chapel, Canterbury Cathedral, England, (1213-1216). Photo: © Crown Copyright, NMR.

reads, “his stick, his garment, his shoes, are all witnesses to his cure.”³⁸ As the inscriptions of such panels were difficult to read, the detailed depictions of the *ex votos* serve to explain the storylines themselves.³⁹ Madeline Caviness has suggested that the verses on ampullae could be recited like a spell over the sick person who was to receive the holy mixture of St. Thomas as “even if he/she could not understand the Latin, the inscribed letters carried the mystique of literacy that was associated with the church.”⁴⁰ Equally, the inscriptions in the windows could be read aloud (by a “guide” or literate pilgrim) and then recited by the remaining pilgrims,

³⁸ *est baculus uestis pero cure sibi testis.*

³⁹ Although many *tituli* (verses) and inscriptions were notably difficult to read, there is evidence (especially at Canterbury) that many monks functioned as “tour guides” whose task it was to explain the images and inscriptions to the masses of pilgrims. Alyce A. Jordan, “The St. Thomas Becket Window of Sens Cathedral,” in Evelyn Staudiger Lane, Elizabeth Carson Pastan and Ellen M. Shortell (eds.), *The Four Modes of Seeing: Approaches to Medieval Imagery in Honor of Madeline Harrison Caviness* (Burlington; Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), p. 563, Blick, “Comparing.”

⁴⁰ For a detailed discussion see Madeline Caviness, “Beyond the Corpus Vitrearum: Stained Glass at the Crossroads,” *Compte Rendu: Union académique internationale*, 72^{ème} session (Brussels, 1998), pp. 20-21, and Blick, “Comparing.”



Figure 7 The cure of Mad Henry of Fordwich from window n IV, Trinity Chapel, Canterbury Cathedral, England, (1213-1216). Photo: © Crown Copyright, NMR.

proffering a similar type of spell either over themselves or the person for whom they were visiting the cathedral for. The glass therefore also attained the guise of "mystery" as the pilgrims copied the strange yet hopefully powerful language of the church and its saints.

Still, in these miracle scenes it is the *physicality* of the attributes that is being stressed as integral to fulfilling the cure at the shrines. In the cure of Mad Henry of Fordwich (n IV), (**fig.7**) the later scenes portray Henry in a more dignified manner with sticks and rope presented as *ex votos* (instead of in the previous scene where they are used to bind and beat him) as they are placed around the shrine alongside the many offerings that adorned the structure in the previous panel.⁴¹ In the York St. William window there are a large quantity of candlesticks depicted around the tomb/shrine and many pilgrims are presented with the particular attributes associated with their cure needs i.e. crutches and shackles. However, unlike the Canterbury panels where *ex votos* and ampullae recurrently feature to authenticate the miracle accounts, images of votive offerings in the York window rarely occur and it is rather the contact that pilgrims make with the shrine structure itself that is continually stressed. This is surprising given the amount of human attributes left around the portable shrine of St. William listed in the surviving inventories. Such items included a golden nose, many pairs of gilded shoes, several hands, and even a silver breast!⁴²

⁴¹ Michael, p. 73.

⁴² Robert Norman Swanson (trans.), *Catholic England: Faith, Religion and Observance Before the Reformation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), pp. 179-180.



Figure 8 Cripples collect healing oil at the tomb of St. William, from window nVII, St William Window, York Minster, England, 15th century. Photo: © Crown Copyright, NMR.

The extraordinary access to the tomb is clear. Throughout the glass pilgrims are seen kneeling within the shrine niches, touching and kissing the reliquary caskets, and even licking the shrine as in the case of the cripples seeking the salvific effect of the sweet oil which exuded from William's shrine from 1223 onwards (15c). (**fig.8**) What is also notable are the poses of the pilgrims; nearly all are kneeling, once again, cementing the idea of immediacy and intimacy with the relics of the saint. At Canterbury, in the cure of Richard of Sunieve (nII 57), (**fig.9**) a similar image of bodily involvement is portrayed as Richard is seen stooping at the tomb, his hands outstretched and touching the side and top of the structure. He is again in the closest possible proximity to the saint. Accordingly, at both locations there is a repetitive theme of contact in order for a cure to be achieved. Further confirmation exists in that *only* the main protagonists (the receivers of the cure) make physical contact with the tomb/shrine and therefore it is clear that interaction with the relics is a vital component in fulfilling the cure. It would appear that "physical proximity to the tomb became physical proximity to the saint, thus the rapidity and power of the cures."⁴³

⁴³ Harris, "Pilgrimage, Performance, and Stained Glass," p. 273.

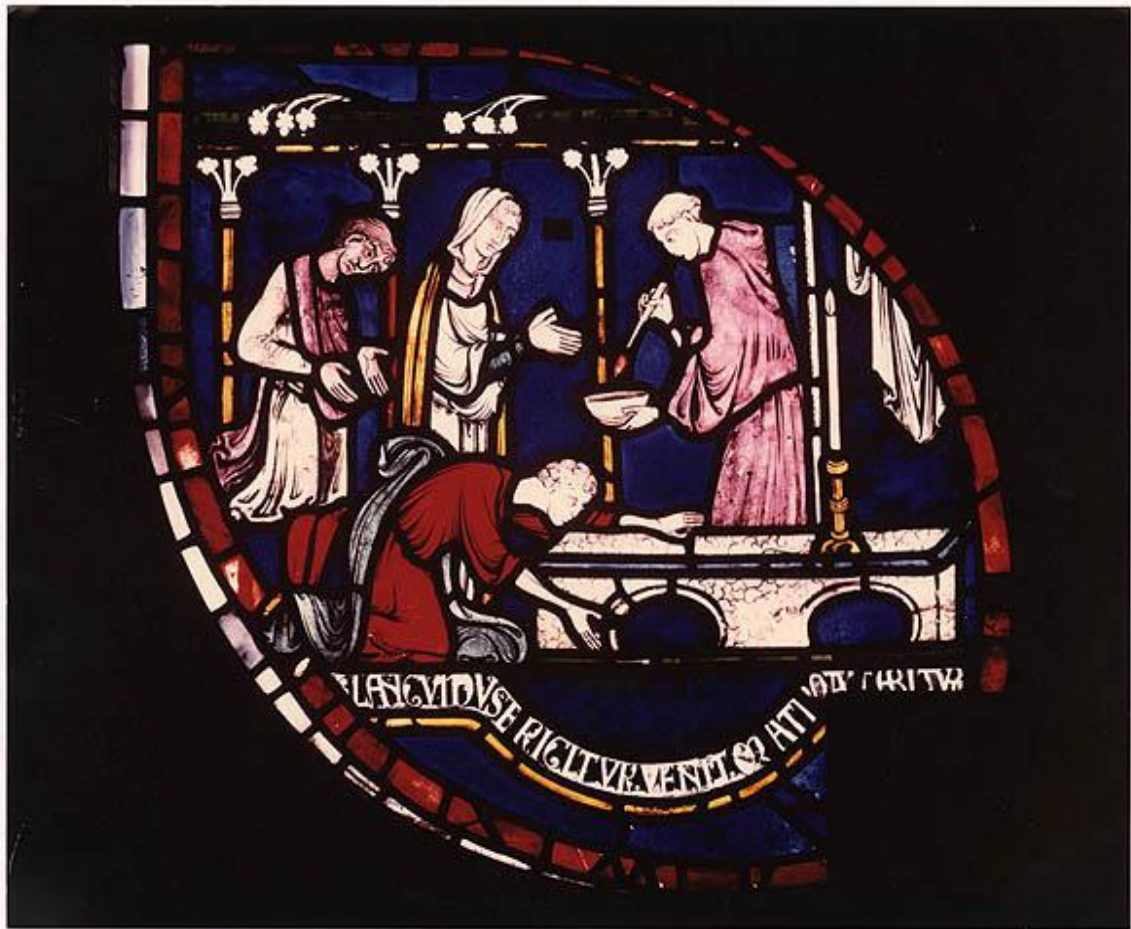


Figure 9 The cure of Richard of Sunieve, from window n II, Trinity Chapel, Canterbury Cathedral, England, (1213-11216). Photo: © Crown Copyright, NMR.

In the St. William window at York perhaps one of the most literal examples of corporeal interaction for saintly intervention can be seen. In the scene where a man offers a wax leg at the tomb (24e), (**fig.10**) replications of bodily parts are brought to the structure for healing.⁴⁴ That the replicated parts are so detailed suggests the importance of their function. In the background a female head, a leg, a hand, and a heart in wax form are hung on the tomb; a typical act performed by pilgrims who wished for certain body parts to be cured by intercessory power. Therefore the actual visual display and constant repetitive depictions of such cures (or more specifically objects for cures) inspired faith and hope in the pilgrims waiting to visit the shrines for their own needs, and thus through identification with the divine prototypes they valued the power of these images to stimulate their perception of and experience to them. Interestingly, the cults did not just promise that the pilgrims might be healed through contemplation of images and stories, they made available to pilgrims the physical agents (the repetitive images of the *ex votos*) through which this healing was made manifest in visual form.

⁴⁴ The use of replicated bodily parts in devotional worship is a long-standing tradition in religious practice. In ancient Greece, Rome, and other ancient religions this was characteristic. See Ralph Merrifield, *The Archaeology of Magic* (London: Batsford, 1987) and Hugo van der Velden, *The donor's image: Gerard Loyet and the votive portraits of Charles the Bold* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000).



Figure 10 Man offers wax leg at tomb of St. William, from window n VII, St William Window, York Minster, England, 15th century. Photo: © Crown Copyright, NMR.

The scale and position of the miracle windows at Canterbury meant that their images (at least at their base) were large enough for pilgrims to see.⁴⁵ This works to position the pilgrim in the closest distance possible to the saint in order to receive his intercessory power. Although the enormous St. William window at York is set high up in the wall, the consistent repetitive image of the tomb/shrine in the small panels (a frequent feature in both churches' glass) makes the images identifiable from afar. Adding to the visual clarity of the message, at Canterbury, the compositions were quite consistent: with the miracle recipient placed to the left and the tomb and the saint or his attendants to the right,⁴⁶ making the composition understandable with an ability to be easily memorized by the viewer. This is also interesting as the pilgrims themselves could identify with the left hand protagonist, and their own proximity to Becket's shrine in the Trinity Chapel.

⁴⁵ Anne Harris noted the unusual proximity of viewer to image at Canterbury due to the unusually low locations of the windows, p. 253.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p. 273.

The Memory Aspect

The multitude of images within the space where pilgrims waited to view the shrine of St Thomas Becket and St William of York, it would appear, denotes their intention. As Sarah Blick noted,

These windows showed events within memory of some early pilgrims, and, more importantly, pictured objects from the Cathedrals itself [such as Becket's and William's tomb] reminding the pilgrims that the events shown had actually occurred in the very place they were now standing.⁴⁷

This has been explained by studies of medieval relics and reliquaries which explored their power to provoke imaginative memory.⁴⁸ Through the documents and stories which are created to produce and to transform the meanings of the shrine “relics [were thought to] bring to life...an origin or a founding event, and...[so] for the believer they made the present the full, holy effect of the past.”⁴⁹ It could be said then that the glass images also re-evoked the past within the present therefore cementing the authenticity of the miracle cures through their physical presence in the glass. This was an important tool used by medieval artists as by depicting real events, places and objects as visual mnemonics, the observer could understand and experience these images through recognition and remembrance. Subsequently, the shrine structures became icons as the repeated depictions were recognised and symbolically interpreted by the viewer. In both cases, the glass then assumed the function of a giant advertisement for the merits of the local saint, visually attracting the stream of passing pilgrims.

Public, yet Private Space?

Like devotional images, relics and other parts of the sensory experience of pilgrimage sites fuelled and inspired devotion. First printed in 1526, Desiderius Erasmus wrote a satire that reflected his 1512-1514 visits to the shrines of Our Lady of Walsingham and St. Thomas Becket of Canterbury. In *A pilgrimage for Religion's sake*,⁵⁰ Erasmus observes the contradiction at Canterbury between the desire for a site that welcomes all pilgrims to worship and offer at the shrine stations, yet restricts access to the most sacred of objects and areas of the cult.⁵¹ For example, he notes the intense adoration that took place at the

⁴⁷ Blick, “Comparing,” p. 7.

⁴⁸ Simon Coleman and John Elsner (eds.), *Pilgrimage: Past and Present in the World Religions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 193.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Desiderius Erasmus, *Pilgrimages to Saint Mary of Walsingham and Saint Thomas of Canterbury*, trans. by John Gough Nichols (John Bowyer Nichols and Son: Westminster, 1849).

⁵¹ Erasmus. p. 46. He explains, “The iron screens stop further progress, but yet admit a view of the whole space from the choir to the end of the church.” In fact, if a medieval pilgrim looked towards the east end from the nave they would first have to look through the Great Rood, then through the iron gates in the pulpitum screen (made c.1404 and reset c.1450), and then in the far distance they may be able to glimpse the top of the elevated shrine visible through and above the iron screen called ‘le Hake’ situated above the High Altar and which survived until the late sixteenth-century. Tatton-Brown, “Canterbury and the architecture of pilgrimage shrines in England,” p. 102.

numerous pilgrim stations, as well as the ability to kiss the relics in the north side of the choir, and the kissing allowed to the top of Becket's cranium, teeth, jaw-bone, hands, fingers and arms;⁵² many of which appear to have been openly available to all society.⁵³ However, he observes the restriction of access given to the bones of Becket that reside in a gold chest that are to be touched only by the monk (here the Prior) with a white rod.⁵⁴

This access and restriction is evident when he repeatedly mentions open ironwork screens and gates located before each successive stop on the route, which permitted viewing, but closed off access to certain spaces.⁵⁵ According to Erasmus, gates were placed before the entrance to the Chapel of Our Lady in the Undercroft, in the south choir aisle, and leading up to the Trinity Chapel.⁵⁶ Such restrictions or "control systems," had various purposes. Although they certainly increased security, they also enhanced the pilgrim's sense of wonder and perception of visual grandeur as they created vistas of the most holy areas. This culminated in excitement as the various relics and shrines of Becket were viewed. Tim Tatton-Brown's analysis of Canterbury conveyed the same conclusion by suggesting that these gates were essentially used to *heighten* the pilgrim's experience by providing a "glimpse" of the great elevated shrine throughout their journey.⁵⁷ Obstructing view seems to have been a requisite of many screens designed to exclude the gazes and bodies of the laity from the sacred precinct of the shrine, except when permitted to do so by the clergy.⁵⁸ Subsequently, focus on the vista appears central to the entire purpose of the barrier arrangement. That screens could be looked over, through and beyond "reinforced their roles as reminders of the [sacred] zone that [lay] behind."⁵⁹ No doubt the design accentuated the *sanctum sanctorum* aspect and the process of entry; entering one door and leaving via another added a degree of solemnity.⁶⁰

Various scholars have concluded that the boundaries created by such screens were used to structure rites of passage.⁶¹ Using psychology, the screens did not block movement,

⁵² Erasmus, pp. 47-48.

⁵³ I believe this to be the case as Erasmus goes on to say:
 "A pall was shown, which, though wholly of silk, was of a coarse texture, and unadorned with gold or jewels. There was also a sudary, dirty from wear, and retaining manifest stains of blood. These monuments of the simplicity of ancient times we willingly kissed.
Me. Are they not shown to anyone?
Og (Erasmus). By no means, my good friend." p. 50.

⁵⁴ Erasmus, pp. 55-56.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p. 81.

⁵⁶ Tatton-Brown, "Canterbury and the architecture of pilgrimage shrines in England," p. 102. See also Jane Geddes, *Medieval Decorative Ironwork in England* (London: Society of Antiquaries Monograph, 1999).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Jacqueline E. Jung, "Beyond the Barrier: The Unifying Role of the Choir Screen in Gothic Churches," *Art Bulletin*, 82 (December, 2000), pp. 622-57, p. 626.

⁵⁹ Jung, p. 631.

⁶⁰ Jennie Stopford, (ed.), *Pilgrimage Explored* (York: York Medieval Press, 1999), p. 103.

⁶¹ The theory was developed by Arnold Van Gennep in *The Rites of Passage* (1909. Reprint, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960). It was then used by Victor Turner in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New Jersey: Aldine Transactions, 1969), followed by Jung who used the principles of the theory in her analysis of choir screens in "Beyond the Barrier," pp. 630-633.

but rather signified a passage through to a new territory that lies beyond them, and where a new special status will be assumed by the individual who enters it.⁶² Because the doors were always visible, they continually enticed people with the potential of passing through them; an aspect shared by choir screens.⁶³ Jacqueline Jung suggests that these screens had an incorporative function, uniting the space of the choir and nave, using a distinctive visual vocabulary aimed at the socially differentiated viewers who inhabited the respective spaces.⁶⁴

Visibility and visibility of cathedral shrines from outside the feretory or shrine locale can tell us a great deal about both the theological and practical aspects of sanctity, as well as the architectural and social history of the church itself. The general consensus was that shrines needed to be visible from afar;⁶⁵ however, the interior of Canterbury as discussed above appears to have given the opposite impression, with the vista from the nave being largely that of screens with a small view of the top of the shrine. Nilson argues that the vista was in fact exceptionally significant in the planning of the great church with the necessity of a “long-range view of the feretrum”⁶⁶ being at the top of the agenda, providing a visually impressive sacred sight culminating in a small preview of the magnificent shrine spectacle to come.

The pilgrimage route at Canterbury restricted (and incorporated) access to various places; this was also the case at York Minster. There, access was controlled at the east end, which was a sacred area that contained Archbishop Richard Scrope’s and St. William’s shrine. The arrangement of the liturgical space was as follows:

...The choir aisles were accessed through gates from the east side of the main transepts... There were also, it appears, screens across the choir aisles on the west side of the eastern transepts, through which gates gave access to the eastern bays of the aisles and the Lady Chapel.⁶⁷

St. William was translated to his shrine behind the high altar in 1284, and again in 1472 to a more elaborate shrine to celebrate the re-consecration of the Minster. But the view of both shrines was obstructed by a tall, stone screen located between the high altar and shrine. Such a restricted approach was very unusual for English churches with residing shrines,⁶⁸ yet it appears to have been used as a tool for controlling the flow of pilgrims. The gates could be opened at certain times only, to specific volumes of pilgrims and even to certain social

⁶² Jung, “Beyond the Barrier,” p. 631.

⁶³ Jung, “Beyond the Barrier,” p. 631.

⁶⁴ Jung, p. 264. Choir screens, in parish churches, also marked out areas of responsibility. That is, the clergy were responsible for the upkeep of the space beyond the screen (the choir) and the laity, for the space in front of the screen (the nave).

⁶⁵ Nilson, *Cathedral Shrines*, p. 81.

⁶⁶ Nilson, p. 81.

⁶⁷ Christopher Norton “Sacred Space and Sacred History: The Glazing of the Eastern Arm of York Minster,” in Rüdiger Beckmann (ed.), *Glasmalerei im Kontext Bildprogramme und Raumfunktionen* (Nürnberg: Internationalen Colloquiums des Corpus Vitrearum, 2005), pp. 167-182, p. 169. In two early printed plans of the Minster dating to around 1726, the screens across the choir aisle on the east side of the eastern transepts are shown. See Brown, “*Our Magnificent Fabrick*,” plan 2, p. 271 for plan of c.1726 drawn by E Barker and engraved by J Nutting, and Ivan Hall (ed.), *Samuel Beck’s Yorkshire Sketchbook* (Wakefield: 1979), pp. 260-261.

⁶⁸ Christopher Wilson, *The Shrines of St. William of York* (York: Yorkshire Museum, 1977), p. 20.

classes, whilst the screen protected the visibility of the shrine to the chosen few that were allowed access to the shrine. Although it seems strange that a relic as important to York as St. William's shrine was blocked off from a large portion of visitors, the presence of such significant stained glass in this area may explain this oddity. The huge walls of glass in this most sacred of areas may have functioned as signifiers for the holy space: the Great East window indicating the high altar and St. William's window, his magnificent shrine. At the same time, the specific nature of the windows' locations, height, and grandeur suggest that they also acted as visual sacred relics for the devotional areas unable to be freely entered by the majority of the medieval population. As such, the painted glass images became substitutes for the saintly visions that could no longer be experienced in the sacred areas, and so, simply by looking on these ocular intercessory narratives "the vision [produced by the image] filled that gap that existed in the imagination of the common beholder and gave a sense of nearness [to the saint]."⁶⁹ In comparison, due to the restrictions on sight of the shrine at Canterbury, a similar function was adopted by the glass. As the windows framed the shrine locale, the huge scale and intense jewel-like tones of the Trinity Chapel glazing created an illuminated frame around the space of the shrine making the sacred area visible from almost all areas of the pilgrimage route. Furthermore, as the windows resided in the eastern end of the church they also, like at York, acted as signifiers of these most holy of areas; the high altar, the shrine behind and the tomb directly below.

*non solum ad edificacionem sed ad recreationem*⁷⁰

Erasmus' account also reflects another important feature of pilgrimage sites: the presence of various shrines and altars within one larger location. This is important to the concept of sensory perception and interaction as the numerous types of saintly engagement provided by these various attractions heightened the overall experience of the cult, giving greater prestige to the church, and subsequently enticing more pilgrims to visit. The competition between saintly sites is apparent throughout the entire medieval period,⁷¹ and as a result, the churches wished to both stimulate and appease an appetite, both for contact with the holy and for various shrines to visit. Multiple cult stations provided an overall pilgrimage attraction heightened by the visual decorative schemes of the glass and wall paintings (which also functioned as official sanctions of Becket's and William's intercessory power). Numerous sacred areas created an embodied type of experience as different emotions were provided by different parts of the building's fabric.⁷² Expectation was created on immediate

⁶⁹ Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 412.

⁷⁰ "not only for the edification but also for the entertainment" in Jung, p. 636.

⁷¹ Competition was particularly fierce during the late thirteenth to fifteenth century when the popularity of many established cults was starting to wane. The churches had to counteract this problem first with the creation of miracle accounts further to the original sets, such as with St. Cuthbert's cult after Becket was martyred. This was followed by vast amounts of money invested in developing shrine structures and elaborating church interiors in order to draw pilgrims to their saints. See Emma J. Wells "'...he went round the holy places praying and offering': An examination of the evidence for Cuthbertine pilgrimage to Lindisfarne and Farne," *Newcastle and Northumberland*, (eds.) Jeremy Ashbee and Julian. M. Luxford, British Archaeological Association Conference Transactions, XXXVI (forthcoming, 2012).

⁷² At Canterbury the shrine locations in the 1170s consisted of: the place of martyrdom in the north transept, the tomb in the crypt of the Romanesque Trinity Chapel and the altar in the Trinity Chapel. As Becket's body remained in the original burial place until 1220, the new Trinity Chapel did not become another sacred site for several decades, yet the Corona took the place of the old Trinity altar sometime after construction ceased in

entry to the church by the shrine vistas, anticipation was stimulated on the journey route to the main shrine, visits to the lesser known sites and also during the wait to enter the Corona and Trinity Chapel (at Canterbury) and to the choir (at York), culminating in heightened excitement as the various relics and shrines of both Becket and William were subsequently viewed.

Entry into many areas of the medieval church was forbidden to pilgrims or greatly controlled, as previously explained, but once they gained entry to the shrine precinct, what becomes fascinating is the access to the actual shrine structure itself. Many shrines contained apertures (later niches) designed for pilgrims to kiss or touch the shrine base implying that contact with the sacred was an important aspect of the construction.⁷³ Shrines dating from the early twelfth-century, as seen in early images and descriptions of Cuthbert's shrine at Durham and suggested reconstructions of St Æthelthryth's shrine at Ely, show a thin stone slab atop a row of columns.⁷⁴ Whilst restricting admission and acting as spatial dividers, the apertures also created a harmonious integration with their architectural surroundings offered by the aesthetic unity of the structures which compliment the decorative schemes around them. An example of this can be seen at Durham Priory. It cannot be doubted that the origin

1184. Therefore between c.1185 and 1120: three sacred sites, and after 1220: the new shrine made a fourth. See Hearn, "Canterbury Cathedral and the Cult of Becket," p. 44.

At York, there were two sacred sites associated with St. William. He was originally commemorated by a small altar and tomb in the Minster since 1154 (this was located in the centre of the east end of the nave), but in around 1284 the bones were moved to a new larger shrine behind the High Altar, although the original tomb site in the nave was still sanctified and a monument erected over it by Archbishop Melton (1317-40). Christopher Wilson, *The Shrines of St. William of York*. York: Rusholmes Printers, 1977; Eric Gee, "The Topography of Altars, Chantries and Shrines in York Minster," *The Antiquaries Journal*, 4 (1984), pp. 337-350, p. 12. A new, more elaborate shrine was then constructed in the 1470s to entice pilgrims to return and offer at the main shrine in time for the consecration. See Brown, 'Our Magnificent Fabrick,' pp. 236-237.

⁷³ *Foramina*-type shrine structures consisted of a stone chest pierced with large holes known as "apertures," Although St. Oswald's and St. Candida's are the only English example to survive, early images of Becket's tomb (made 1171) as illustrated in the glass, are of this type with two holes per side. Most interestingly, it has been suggested, that this design was not used for Becket's shrine once the relics had been Translated in 1220 due to the recurrence of many pilgrims who had become stuck in the holes in their search for a cure. The new shrine rather had six columns and wide, round-headed arches supporting a flat table, as is depicted in the Trinity Chapel glass and the fifteenth-century images of Becket's shrine in Nettlestead parish church, Kent.

The *foramina*- type design then developed into one with shallower niches with the introduction of the highly decorated solid base-plinth in the mid-thirteenth century, pierced with tall niches in which praying pilgrims could kneel as St. William of York's is depicted in the glass; "the supplicants' heads pressed against the stonework of the base and their elbows resting on a sort of table which often filled the niche to a height of two or three feet." See Nilson, *Cathedral Shrines*, p. 43-49 for a detailed discussion of the development of bases.

⁷⁴ The shrines of Cuthbert and Æthelthryth, along with the most notable shrines of the medieval period, are analyzed in detail by Nicola Coldstream in "English Decorated Shrine Bases," *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, XXXIX (1976), pp. 15-34. See also: Nilson, *Cathedral Shrines*; John Crook, *The Architectural Setting of the Cults of Saints in the Early Christian West c.300-c.1200* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000); Virginia Blanton, "Building a Presbytery for St. Æthelthryth: Bishop Hugh de Northwold and the Politics of Cult Production in Thirteenth-Century England," in Sarah Blick and Rita Tekippe (eds.), *Art and Architecture of Late Medieval Pilgrimage In Northern Europe and the British Isles* (Leiden: Brill Academic Press, 2004), pp. 539-565. The significance and focus on the corporeality in the construction of Æthelthryth's shrine, which like St. Cuthbert's, has been attested to the incorruptibility of her physical body as the shrine was seen as an extension of that body. This concept has been widely studied by Virginia Blanton-Whetsell in her article: "Tota integra, tota incorrupta: The Shrine of St. Æthelthryth as Symbol of Monastic Autonomy," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 32/2 (Spring, 2002), pp. 227-267, and most recently in her book *Signs of Devotion: The Cult of St. Æthelthryth in Medieval England, 695-1615* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007).

of the building's design derives from the need to house the bones of St. Cuthbert. As such, the design of the entire east end plan appears to have reflected this purpose, focusing the space around the symbol of the monastic community's identity. Not only his first shrine, but also St. Cuthbert's second, more elaborate, shrine-structure commissioned in 1372⁷⁵ featured four elliptical arched recessed openings cut into the marble of the base. Moreover, in its later development, Cuthbert's shrine contained several other sensory stimulants which invaded its spatial surroundings. On Cuthbert's feast day the carved and painted wooden canopy above the shrine was raised by a pulley system and six silver bells which were attached to it would ring out permeating the considerable barriers of the choir and subsequently the Neville choir and rood screens into the body of the church so that anyone not in the immediate vicinity would be stirred by the sounds.⁷⁶ If we examine this evidence in light of my earlier argument regarding the corporeality of such shrine designs, there is no doubt that the sensory elements combined to enforce a symbolic experience like never before. Although Blesser and Salter's work on aural architecture proposed that the "earconic" aspects of the niche embellishment were incidental,⁷⁷ this analysis surely proves that definite planning was undertaken with respect to enhancing the entire sensory environment.

Moreover, it has been suggested that the resonances and amplification of the recesses in shrine-bases also created an intimate encounter with the saint, while the visual isolation contributed to the feeling of private worship, making the saints' spirits a visual and aural accessible experience.⁷⁸ One example can be seen in the panel from the St. William window at York which depicts cripples collecting healing oil at William's tomb (15c). (**fig.8**) On the left stands a man supporting himself on two crutches; next to him a blind man leans into the arcading of the tomb, whilst another man's head can be seen within the niches of the structure. Although the exact purpose of this disembodied head is unclear, its presence illustrates the significance of the bodily involvement in worship at the shrine. Is it demonstrating the importance of the head in devotion or is it a wax offering, a vision or perhaps something else?

It can be assumed that as many shrines contained these similar apertures designed for pilgrims to kiss or touch the sarcophagus, the functions were numerous. Not only did they provide acoustical properties appropriated for experience as the echoes of pilgrims' prayers reverberated around the enclosed space, but the power of touch combined with vision also appears to have been a significant quality. Such an intimate and small spatial area for a large

⁷⁵ Coldstream, "English Decorated Shrine Bases," p. 25.

⁷⁶ James T. Fowler (ed.), *Rites of Durham: being a description or brief declaration of all the ancient monuments, rites and customs belonging or being within the monastic church of Durham before the suppression* (Durham: Surtees Society, 1903), p. 111; C. Pamela Graves, "Sensing and believing: exploring worlds of difference in pre-modern England: a contribution to the debate opened by Kate Giles," *World Archaeology*, 39/4 (2007), pp. 515-531, p. 525.

⁷⁷ Barry Blesser and Linda-Ruth Salter, *Spaces Speak, are You Listening? Experiencing Aural Architecture* (MIT Press, 2007), p. 88.

⁷⁸ The most innovative study on the aural properties of architecture is Blesser and Salter, *Spaces Speak*, p. 88. Church architects were always aware of aural issues in conceiving the design of religious interiors. For example, the Shrine of St. Werburgh at Chester Cathedral contains six recesses where kneeling pilgrims inserted their heads while pleading their petition. "The cavity serves both as amplifier and filter, thus giving the petitioner's voice dramatic and emotional emphasis: only modest vocal effort is required to produce a strong voice. The shrine's cavity becomes a unique private arena that also excludes external sounds—privacy without walls...Because the experience of being in such a space takes place in a religious ritual, the aural architecture of the cavity gradually acquires symbolic meaning." A very competent summary of Blesser and Salter's contribution to the understanding of aural space can be found at: <http://www.blesser.net/spacesSpeak.html>.

body of people would enhance any type of smell (whether human or religious), heightening the experience and creating a more intimate encounter between the pilgrim and the saint. The popularity of these shrine bases clearly illustrates that the accessibility of the relics was more desirable for the fulfilment of the devotional experience.⁷⁹ Many accounts describe pilgrims touching the niches with their foreheads and eyes, and then kissing them,⁸⁰ with similar actions being depicted in the stained glass as already seen. At York particularly, throughout various scenes of the St. William window, as well as the St. Cuthbert window located directly opposite, pilgrims are portrayed partaking in the physical elements of the shrine constructions. This shows that the tangibility and tactility of the sacred was becoming a predominant factor in the designs of shrines as the closer pilgrims were to the relic, the more genuine and more immediate access was offered to sanctity.⁸¹

Furthermore, the emphasis of the design is on the head and hands for partaking in the saintly veneration. As Pam Graves' article on the anthropology of the body elucidated, the head and the hands were thought to embody more of the symbolic life force than any other parts,⁸² and many early Christians spoke of their desire of a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in order "to see and touch the places where Christ was physically present."⁸³ As many scholars of medieval vision have shown, "seeing something was in effect touching it,"⁸⁴ but it is my opinion that pilgrims wished to receive the intercessory power of the saints as intimately and as quickly as possible. The evidence for pilgrims touching and even sleeping underneath shrines suggests that direct engagement with the holy was extremely important. It is therefore not surprising that focus was often put on these two attributes for saintly veneration or for any type of devotional activity for that matter.⁸⁵

Still, we cannot rule out the importance of vision within these experiences. The combination of sight and touch is resonant within tactile worship, but this concentration on immediacy with contact explains why these two senses were the most predominant. Furthermore, the ultimate importance of the medieval experience was the memory it created within the mind of the pilgrim. As such, the process by which this devotion was undertaken

⁷⁹ Morris & Roberts, *Pilgrimage*, p. 5.

⁸⁰ Frank, "The Pilgrim's gaze in the age before icons," p. 105.

⁸¹ Frank, p. 106

⁸² In early medieval art, the head and hands are always emphasized over other body parts, as they are the most expressive as Christ was seen as the 'head' of the mystical body, and inside this head, all of the senses were to be found, while the saints only possessed the sense of touch. Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations, Volume XVI, Experience of the Spirit: Source of Theology*, trans. By David Morland (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979), pp. 104-134. See also C. Pamela Graves, "From an Archaeology of Iconoclasm to an Anthropology of the Body: Images, Punishment, and Personhood in England, 1500-1660," *Current Anthropology*, 48/ 1 (February, 2008), 35-57, p. 41.

⁸³ Frank, p. 104.

⁸⁴ Graves, p. 42.

⁸⁵ In fact, these attributes were not only significant in the religious environment, but throughout the social and political structures of the entire medieval world the hierarchy of the human limb was adhered to. For a further discussion see Jacques Le Goff, "Head or heart? The political use of body metaphors in the Middle Ages. In *Fragments for a history of the human body*," pt. 3, (ed.), M. Feher (New York: Urzone, 1989), pp. 13-27. For a detailed discussion of the historiography of the significance of the head and hands in body-part reliquaries see Barbara Drake Boehm, "Body-Part Reliquaries: The State of Research," *Gesta*, 36/1 (1997), pp. 8-19.

was important as “memory consisted of a tidy assemblage of sense perceptions.”⁸⁶ Frank explains that perceptions enter the mind in visual form and therefore smells, sounds, and tastes are all translated into a mental picture and stored away.⁸⁷ Whichever sense had the most substance, therefore imprinted the experience in the mind and so further explains why a stimulation of each individual sense was created by the church to create such a magnificent memory; “resonances contribute to the sense of being in another world; amplification contributes to intimacy; visual isolation contributes to privacy.”⁸⁸

Conclusion

*“tasting, smelling, hearing, seeing, touching.
Taste and smell, hearing, sight, touch;
By all these five senses everything is known to man.”*⁸⁹

As the Middle Ages progressed, there was a greater emphasis on the emotional and physical aspects of worship as promoted by many clerics. John Drury’s *c.1434 Lenten Instruction* exclaimed that the five senses were like five gates; “just as nothing can enter a city except through the gates, just so may nothing enter your soul, good or bad, except through one of them.”⁹⁰ It is clear that as the medieval period drew on the senses became an evermore inherent part of daily devotion. In fact, Drury suggests that sins were committed due to “badly” use of the senses and therefore one must keep the sensory gates closed in order for sins to be kept at bay.

This increased sensory focus certainly penetrated into all devotional practices of the period as illustrated by the development in designs of the architectural and decorative schemes of the pilgrimage church. Stained glass and shrine architecture are both great examples of the substantial amount of bodily participation that, it appears, encompassed almost every aspect of a devotional visit and was considered key in order to fully interact with the divine, with physical involvement being at the heart of any pilgrimage.

As such, the detailed contemporary texts, as well as the images incorporated into the Canterbury and York pilgrimage schemes, raise important questions about the involvement and significance of the body and its senses in medieval devotional experience. Were these decorative and architectural schemes designed to appear to the increasingly large numbers of pilgrims, many of whom travelled long distances desperate to seek salvation or cures and who therefore needed, as much as they *required*, corporeal involvement in their cult experience? Or did the pilgrimage practices, such as the oral recitation of the inscriptions in the glass panels, imprint the hopeful stories into the memories of the faithful pilgrims?

This study of York and Canterbury has attempted to explore how the creation and subsequent development of the pilgrimage art and architecture of the churches was influenced by the sensory experience of the pilgrim. The evidence shows that the idea of seeing and reading, in conjunction with touching as a unified form of sensory practice, was certainly designed to elucidate meaning and understanding of devotional images. However, it suggests that although there was certainly a linear progression in the amount of sensory engagement

⁸⁶ Frank, p, 107.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ <http://www.blessers.net/spacesSpeak.html>.

⁸⁹ Swanson, *Catholic England*, p. 54.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

required by the pilgrim with the cult images and the shrine structures, throughout the period there existed complex and conflicting ways of seeing and understanding of these devotional schemes and their associated locales.

Such an approach may be fruitful when applied to other shrine sites in England and even Europe, although it must be stressed that more research is needed to understand the exact process of this practice! 🍷