# 'Multe etiam alie reliquie quorum scripta desunt': the migration of relics in Reformation England

Helen Parish

*University of Reading*

> Ye shall also receve a bage of reliquis, wherin ye shall se strangeis things, as shall appere by the scripture, as, Godes cote, Oure lades smoke, parte of Godes supper *in cena domini, pars petre super qua natus erat Jesus in Bethlehem* [part of the rock on which was born Jesus in Bethlehem] (...) I sende yowe also oure lades gyrdell of Bruton, rede silke, wiche is a solemne reliquie sent to women travelyng, wiche shall not miscarie *in partu.* I sende yowe also Mare magdalens girdell, and that it wrappyde and coveride with white, sent also with gret reverence to women traveling, wich girdell Matilda theempresse, fownder of Ferley, gave unto them, as saith the holy fahter of Ferley (...) To morowe erly in the mornyng I shall bring yow the reste.[1]

Thus Richard Layton described to Thomas Cromwell the relics of the saints that he had encountered at Maiden Bradley in Wiltshire. The direct language of Layton's letter was determinedly hostile to the cult of relics, unsurprisingly, given the critical gaze with which the Cromwellian visitors scrutinised the personnel and the piety of the monasteries that they were instructed to examine. But the account of the relics found within monastic communities also made clear that the suppression of relic cults in England in the 1530s was a multi-faceted process. Relics were first identified as 'strange', or feigned, false objects that were created by, and created, a false religion. They were removed from their material and emotional context, dispatched physically for inspection and public denunciation in London, in the most substantial movement of relics in England since the Norman

Conquest. The removal of relics from the centre of the cultus involved a moment of violence, shattering the physical and devotional distance between the relic in its reliquary and those who came to pay their devotions. The removal of relics from reliquaries highlighted the dichotomy between the material and monetary value of the reliquary and the spiritual value of the relics. But the gap left by the relic was evident in material and mental terms; the physical movement of relics was accompanied by a shift in the position of relics within the mind of the believer and the sceptic. Layton's work, and that of other Visitors, presents an opportunity to explore the materiality of relics in a period of religious turmoil, the nature of the language that was used to describe and disparage sacred objects, and the ways in which the iconoclasm of the reformation extended beyond the physical object and into the cultural and devotional matrix the defined it.

Layton's visitation of the monasteries in the south of England had been under way since late July 1535; his peregrinations had begun at Cirencester, from where he spent six weeks making his way through Gloucestershire, Worcestershire, Somerset, and Wiltshire before arriving in Oxford. Layton was inclined to treat gently those monastic communities that he encountered first, but by the Autumn his approach had become more forceful. By October he had convinced the prior and sub-prior of Lewes to admit both treason and moral corruption, and at Langdon in Kent, Layton described how he had used a polaxe to batter down the door to the abbot's lodging before setting off in pursuit of the abbot's mistress. After returning to London, Layton set out for Yorkshire with Dr Thomas Legh, visiting 121 religious houses in the north and providing a damning report on the conduct of the religious: the *Compendium Compertorum*, a document that helped to secure the passing of the act dissolving the lesser monasteries. Layton's treatment of monastic cults and relics was echoed in the letters sent to Cromwell by the other Visitors. At Bury St Edmunds there was little to report in terms of the conduct of the religious, but John ap Rice detailed 'moche vanitie and superstition', finding in the abbey the coals with which St Lawrence was roasted, paring of the nails of St Edmund, the penknife and boots of Thomas Can[terbury], 'divers skulles for the hedache' relics 'for rayne and certain other superstitiouse usages'.[2] In a similar tone, Bishop William

Barlow wrote disparagingly of Welsh relics and cults, particularly the miraculous taper of Cardigan which could not be extinguished, but which he had exposed as a 'devilish delusion'.[3] Barlow had taken his duties seriously: Thomas Hore, the prior, was questioned in details about the cult, and persuaded to concede that while he had in the past esteemed the taper to be a holy relic, now that he had seen it properly he recognised that it contained wood rather than wax, and that he had been deceived. The canons of St David's had received clear instruction from their bishop that they must no longer 'set forth fayned relics for to allure people to superticion'; Barlow had heard that such relics had been set forth on St David's day, but these he had taken away waiting for instruction. He now had in his possession parcels of relics – 'two heedes of silver plate enclosing two rotten skulles stuffed with putrified clowtes; item two arme bones and a worm eaten boke covered with sylver plate.' Barlow demanded that the suppression of such cults was to be accomplished by the removal of these objects of idolatry, although he followed this up with a more personal observation that he would be better placed to wage war on superstition if his See were removed from the western reaches of Wales to Carthmarthen.

At Reading, John London described how he had pulled down the image of the Blessed Virgin at Caversham, and placed it in a locked chest, which had been nailed up awaiting the next barge from Reading to London to convey it to Cromwell for his inspection. 'I have also pullyd down the place sche stode in' he wrote, 'with all other ceremomyes, as lightes, schrowdes, crowchys, and imagies of wex' and had defaced them in the hope of preventing further resort there.[4] London had encountered a pilgrimage centre that was very much 'alive' at the time of its suppression, with wax votive offerings, and indeed pilgrims, in evidence during his visit. At Grey Friars, London had fulfilled his duty in the removal of the 'principall relik of idolytrie within thys relame, an aungell with oon wing that brought to Caversham the spere hedde that percyd our Saviour is syde upon the crosse'.[5] At Reading Abbey, the relics had been 'lokkyd them... behynd ther high awlter', and London assured Cromwell that he had the 'key in my keping'. The list of relics in the abbey included two pieces of the holy cross, the hand of St James, the stole of Philip, a

bone of Mary Magdalen, a hand of St Athanasius, a piece of St Pancras arm, a bone of St David's arm, and 'a multitude of small bonys, laces, stonys and emrys, wiche wolde occupie iiij schetes of papyr to make particularly an inventary of every part therof. They be all at your lordeschips commaundement'.[6]

The *Injunctions* that provided the mandate for the Visitation of the monasteries were forceful in their denunciation of the kind of relics and cults that were reported: 'they shall not show no relics or fayned miracles for increase of lucre, but that they exhort pilgrims and strangers to give that to the poor that they thought to offer to their images or relics'.[7] Such rhetoric was explored widely beyond the confines of official papers in the 1530s, and owed much to the lexicon of Lollard justifications for pre-reformation iconoclasm and humanist criticisms of pilgrimage and the cult of the saints. John Heywood's pardoner entered the fray with a long list of relics and the cures that they could effect, including the arm of St Sunday, a mitten, a relic of the Trinity, a jawbone, the brain of St Michael, and 'a holy Jew's sheep.'[8] In Heywood's *A play called the Four PP*, the pardoner produced a slipper relic, 'the buttock bone of pentecost', the eye tooth of a Turk, a box of bees that had stung Eve after she had eaten of the forbidden fruit, and argued vigorously for the legitimacy of these relics against the protestations of the apothecary who argued that his ointments would accomplish a more tangible cure. Both representations of false relics were anchored in the language of Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale;* the 'holy Jew's sheep' was among the relics listed here, and the joke was not lost on Thomas More, whose Messenger in the *Dialogue Against Heresy* raised the possibility that the faithful might be venerating 'some olde rotten bone that was heppely some tyme as Chaucer sayth a bone of some holy Jew's sheep'.[9] However the iconoclasm of the 1530s was not simply another manifestation of Lollard antipathy to the cult of the relics and its material and spiritual form. Physical destruction went hand in hand with the articulation of a strident rhetoric which warned of the spiritual dangers of idolatry. Saints and their relics were the physical embodiment of a different and dangerous religious and political landscape. The shrine of Thomas Becket, in particular, became an immediate focus for the doctrinal and political iconoclasm of the

1530s; Becket's cult enshrined an assertion of the primary of the church over the crown, and its continued existence, and physical destruction, sent a powerful message.[10] But the legislation that required and accompanied the removal of relics also had the potential to turn the defence of such objects, in word or action, into a politically charged stance.[11]

In this sense, the destruction of relics in sixteenth century England was a destruction of meaning and mental understanding, as well as a destruction of the material object. Sacred objects were re-read as indicators of doctrinal error and corruption, as 'true' relics were replaced, rhetorically, by a language of false and feigned deceptions.[12] Thus William Tyndale in the 1520s argued that appropriate honour accorded to the saints lay in the imitation of their faith rather than the veneration of their bodies. The purpose of images and relics in the early church had been to remember the saint and their faith; it was only in later centuries that relics had been abused by the church and turned into occasions for idolatry.[13] Hugh Latimer inveighed against the cult of relics from the pulpit, denouncing the delusions that they embodied; 'St Blaise's heart which is at Malverne and of St Algar's bones, how long they deluded the people: I am afraid, to the loss of many souls (...) all about in this realm, there is plenty of juggling deceits' . Such sacred objects were, he speculated, likely to be pigs' bones rather than saint's relics.[14] It was the church  of Antichrist, Thomas Becon argued, which  'diggeth out of the ground the old rotten bones or reliques of the saints, translateth then, incloseth them in gold, keepeth them in precious shrines and costly clausures, and setteth them forth to the people to be kissed and worshipped.[15] This emphasis on the material rather than the spiritual lay at the heart of what was wrong with the medieval church; for John Bale, such pieties were the 'whoredom of the spirit' that encompassed the external worshippings of the false church, including relics, dry wafer cakes, old rags, shoes, spurs, skulls, bones, breeches, nightcaps etc. [16] A satirical piece by Desiderius Erasmus, printed in English in the 1530s to coincide with suppressions of shrines and monasteries, was comically critical of the veneration of 'stocks and stones'. Erasmus was not, in a physical sense, an iconoclast, but his assault on the 'material manifestations' of worship paved the way for the doctrinal

iconoclasm of English evangelicals in the decades that followed.[17] The notion that the sacred could be confined or localised in place or object was roundly rejected; the physical confining of the holy in the remains of the dead and the physical migration of the living in search of its rewards was a form of idolatry. In the *Enchiridion*, Erasmus amplified the message. 'Perfect piety', he wrote, 'is the attempt to progress always from visible things which are usually imperfect or indifferent, to invisible'. [18] There could be no truly 'invisible' aspect to the veneration of relics precisely because the physicality or materiality of the relic was essential to its function. The materiality of the relic, James Kearney has argued, provided its meaning, but we might also conclude that this materiality was central to its downfall.[19]

The movement of relics in the mental world of the percipient was a significant development in sixteenth-century religious culture, and one that emerged from the turmoil of the reformation that had made relics physically mobile. This mobility is evident in a variety of forms; the movement of relics from reliquaries into the cold light of day, the spatial movement of relics from one location to another, and the movement of relics from the relatively controlled environment of shrines, churches, and religious houses into private hands, or protective concealment. The impact of lifting the material occlusion of relics should not be under-estimated. Despite the centrality of the relic to the motivations for, and experience of, pilgrimage, it was not always easy for even the pious to position themselves in physical proximity to the remains of the saint. Access was controlled, and controlled in various ways. Shrines were often located behind the high altar, or in reredos that could be thirty feet or more distant from the pilgrim. St Swithun, and the remains of St William of York, were both housed in the quire until the late fifteenth century, hardly the most accessible part of the building. Other relics were housed in cathedral feretory chapels, and, although visible, were still concealed within reliquaries and behind screens.[20] Erasmus, visiting the shrine of Becket at Canterbury, had not been permitted to view the bones of the saints, although he had glimpsed relics that were heavily decorated, gilded, or opaque. In the *Pilgrimage for Religion's Sake,* Menedemus explained that it was neither permitted, nor physically possible, to see the body of the saint; to do so would require ladders, and even then the

wooden chest contained a golden chest, concealed inside. At Walsingham, Ogygius asked the guide at the shrine what proof he had that the relic presented as the milk of the Virgin Mary was indeed what it said on the tin, putatively so as to be able to answer its critics. The guide was shocked by the question – why was there a need to ask, when there was an authenticated record that proved the point, but Ogygius could see only a document hung so far up that it could not be 'read by just any eyes'.[21] These same questions were asked, more directly, in the 1535 Visitation of Walsingham Priory that demanded 'what probacion and argument have they to shewe that the same are trewe relics'; had witnesses been examined, was the milk relic in solid or liquid form, had the former sexton ever renewed the relic, or 'invented any relique for thaugmentation of his prouffet'. Elaborate reliquaries and locations, such as those at Walsingham, were not mere smoke and mirrors; putting it bluntly, the relics of the saints, for the most part, looked no more striking than the remains of the dead, with the result that it was in the elaborate ritual and material culture that accompanied the relic that its true meaning was made real, and authentic.[22] Cynthia Hahn has gone further than this, arguing that in many respects the container superseded the contained, and the reliquary enabled or perhaps even constituted the power of the relic.[23] In this respect, the breaking apart of shrines and of reliquaries, whether for their material value or as an act of purging the church from idolatry, turned the relic into a contested object – both in terms of what was physically contained within the reliquary (pigs bones?), and how this sacred object might be accessed. Relics, removed from their containers, were desacralised, and once migrated into public sight, they started to lose their meaning. As Matthew Milner has observed, the senses were potentially transformative, bringing experience into the being of the beholder. The removal of relics from reliquaries was part of a polemical and pastoral reformation that sought to limit the sensory impact and – by implication – the spiritual dangers of theological and devotional error in the cult.[24] Relics and reliquaries were a fundamental part of piety, but they were also malleable and material manifestations of faith.[25]

    The polemical potential inherent in this movement of relics out of their material occlusions was not lost on the evangelical reformers

who rejoiced in such destruction. Iconoclasm and iconophobia, as Adam Morton reminds us, were not one and the same. But we should not underestimate the spiritual impact of material destruction.[26] The revelation that relics such as the Blood of Hailes, revered as the blood of Christ spilt at the crucifixion, were a fraud turned such objects into a showcase for reform, and an embodiment of all that was wrong with traditional religion. In October 1538, Latimer wrote to Cromwell

> sir, we have been bolting and shifting the blood of Hailes all this forenoon. It was wonderfully closely and craftily enclosed and stopped-up for taking of care, and it cleaves fast to [the] bottom of the little glass. And verily it seemeth to be an unctuous gum and compound of many things. It hath a certain unctuous moistness and though it seem somewhat like blood while it is in the lass yet when any parcel of the same is taken out it turneth to a yellowness and is cleaving like glue.[27]

Here, as at Walsingham, once the relic was removed from its material covering, as the commissioners observed, it appeared rather unimpressive. The denuding of the relic was a public ceremony – or almost anti-ceremony; it was opened up 'in the presence of a great multitude of people'. Thus exposed, materially and doctrinally, the Blood was taken to London where John Hilsey preached a condemnatory sermon, and the relic was, in a parody of the rituals that might traditionally have accompanied the translation of a relic, or its rare public display, paraded it through the city. Every man, the chronicler noted, could behold it there at Paul's Cross.'[28]

The Blood of Hailes was not the only sacred relic that was transported to London; the outcome of the commissioners' visits was a migration of material remains around the country. John London and Richard Layton, as we have seen, sent not only inventories of relics, but the relics themselves to London, where they were mocked and publicly destroyed in a 'jolly muster' of the saints.[29] In July 1538, the statue of the Virgin at Ipswich made the journey to London, to be stored in Cromwell's wardrobe of the beds, and by the end of the year had been joined by an image of the Virgin from Caversham, and of

Modwenna, from Burton on Trent.[30] Nicholas Shaxton's injunctions for the diocese of Salisbury, were scathing about the relics of the saints 'and such pelfry beyond estimation', and ordered that all such items be sent to the bishop's house in Ramsbury for further inspection. Upon scrutiny, those that were found to be authentic would be returned with clear instructions as to how they might be used; it is hard to imagine the bishop providing a positive endorsement in many cases. In October 1535, a relic of the milk of the Virgin was removed from St Paul's in London, and denounced by Thomas Legh as an item of 'covetousness in deceiving the people', and relics that were claimed to be the girdles of the Virgin and of St Elizabeth were removed from the religious houses .[31]

Not all relics fell victim to the theatre and spectacle in the capital; the migration of relics into private hands precipitated a loss of control over their material and spiritual value. [32] By John Jewel's account, the 1559 commissioners had uncovered a 'wilderness of superstition' that had grown up in the short reign of Mary, and a devotional landscape that was still punctuated by relics and sacred objects. Jewel complained that there were still people who believed that they had in their possession the nails with which Christ had been hung on the cross, and fragments of the cross itself.[33] In the second half of the sixteenth century, new miracles were associated with the arm of St Thomas Cantilupe, Bishop of Hereford. Anne Vaux and her sister had in their possession part of the jawbone of Stephen, and the shirt of Becket, in the early seventeenth century, and the remains of St Chad had been safely concealed in the bedhead of a Staffordshire yeoman.[34] The Elizabethan Jesuit John Gerard explained how the relics of St Vita came into his possession after the parson of the place 'where the whole body (or at least a great part of it) was preserved and venerated in the old days found that he was always restive at night (...) When one day it struck him that this trouble came from not paying proper and due respect to the bones that he had in his keeping'. When the parson delivered the relics into the hands of 'the Catholics who were their rightful owners' he was able to sleep soundly once more.[35] In August 1582, 'superstitious stuff, abominable relics and vile books' were removed from those detained in the Marshalsea; 'popish relics' were found in a house in Stoke in 1584, 'many popish relics

and books' were confiscated from the house of Francis Yeates in Lifford in February 1587. What is striking here, as Alexandra Walsham has demonstrated, is the extent to which relics had migrated from their regulated surroundings into private houses and personal possession, and the challenges that this presented to Jesuit missionaries seeking to re-establish a more controlled cultus.[36]

If the material ownership of relics had become hard to control in the aftermath of the religious turmoil of the sixteenth century, the meaning of relics was even less constant. As Patrick Geary has argued, relics may have been a central source of personal supernatural power, and a primary focus for religious devotion, but this did not prevent their division, sale, or theft. Relics, at face value, have no value; they have no practical function, no decorative advantage, no economic value, and no meaning outside the reliquary. Their position was contingent upon the sense that the remains were those of an individual who had been a friend of God in life, and after death; upon an understanding of the relics of the saints as something that was to be prized and revered, and upon an agreement that the relics were indeed the remains of the saint. The bodies of the saints passed from being normal human remains to being relics by a public ritual, and by miracles; a relic was created in a specific cultural context, and if the relic were to migrate, then its significance and meaning would need to be reconstructed through a process of social negotiation in a new environment.[37] Without such a cultural matrix, the relic remained inert.[38] In some senses, the English reformations effected just this kind of material and cultural migration, in an act of iconoclasm which shattered not just the shrine, but also the cultural context that created and sustained the relic. The process of social and religious negotiation that followed had a number of consequences. In some cases, the empty space left by the shrine became itself an object of devotion, and the memory of the cult itself became the focus for veneration. At Hailes, for example, after the dispatching of the blood relic the remains of the shrine were also removed in order that it might not become a focus of veneration. Walsham has described how after John Jewel removed a relic from Glastonbury from its owner, the empty reliquary became itself an object of devotion.[39] In other cases, the memory of the cult outlived the presence of the relic. John Leland's

*Itineraries,* the records of his journeys through England and Wales between 1538 and 1543, depicts a mental landscape upon which relics and shrines had left their mark, even if the material remains were no longer visible. At Hoveden, 'in the quire lieth one John of Hovedene, whom they caul a saincte'; at Sonning 'there is an old Chappelle at the est end of the church of st Sarik whither of late tyme resorted in pilgrimage many folks for the disease of madness' at Bodmin the shrine of St Petroc still stood, and memories of Marian devotion were still in evidence in Liskard, Netley, and Southwick.[40]

The meaning of the relic had also migrated; the word acquired a literary meaning that divorced it from an association with the cult of the saints, a metaphor that still carried a historical memory but had been de-sanctified by change, a sense of the relic not of the body, but of the mind, as Erasmus wrote of the *animorum reliquiis.* Relics, preserved and re-defined in their textual and linguistic remains, remained a potent part of post-reformation religious culture, in which devotional activities were intermingled with a culture of collecting and antiquarianism which both prized the material object and undermined its sacred worth.  In some respects, the relic as physical object came to be viewed as something of an antiquarian or natural curiosity; the antiquarian artefact filled the temporal , if not spiritual space left by the relic. But the lexicon of relic as sacred object and repository of miraculous power was not entirely divorced from this more pragmatic interpretation. The relics of a medieval saint might have ended up in the hands of Elias Ashmole, or displayed between two dried out fish in a Reading museum, but they still occupied a central place in the formation of confessional identity in post-reformation England, and in the starkness of sacred histories that were structured around a permanent conflict between true and false religion in past and present.[41]

One of the compelling stories of the mental and material migration of relics emerges from the dissolution of Reading Abbey and the dispersal of its relics. The medieval abbey at Reading was not a foundation like, for example, St Albans, which had been built around the relics of a saint. But it did have a large and impressive collection of relics, judging by the two surviving inventories, one from the late twelfth century and one from the eve of its dissolution. The

former (London, British Library, Egerton MS 3031) arranged the abbey's  relics in categories – those of the Cross and Our Lord (28), those of the Virgin Mary (6), Patriarchs and prophets (18), Apostles (120), Martyrs (73), Confessors (51) and Virgins (49). Listed among the relics of the apostles is 'the hand of St James with flesh and bones; the cloth in which the hand was wrapped; item of the cloth in which the hand of St James was wrapped'. But the list also described the many other relics in the abbye, whose labels are missing, and whose identity was therefore unknown ('multe etiam alie reliquie quarum scripta desunt'). In the early thirteenth century additions were made to the list – among the relics of the apostles, an insertion reads 'John King of England, gave us the head of Philip the apostle to venerate, and he allowed us to have a fair on that day'. The inventory made by John London was shorter, listing 23-4 relics, but Brian Kemp has demonstrated that this did not mean that the others were missing by the mid 1530s; London concluded his list with the comment that there were 'many othere (...) small bonys, laces, stonys, and ermys'. Perhaps London and his team were daunted or shocked by the number of relics that they found in the abbey and detailed only those that they deemed to be the most important. The list began with the relics of the true cross, but next came the hand of St James, preserved in a reliquary. In fact three successive containers were used, and a miracle accompanied the translation of the relic by the bishop of London, Gilbert Foliot. It is worth noting here that the relic was, like many others, remote from the people; most of the miracles recorded related to St James' water, or the cures before the picture of St James painted at the altar dedicated to the saint, rather than touching the hand itself. The account of the translation described how the bishop 'went up onto the screen and transferred the hand'.[42] When London removed the relic from this elevated location he probably presented its materiality publicly for the first time. Further miracles followed, and for four centuries there were privileges and pilgrims at the abbey as a result of the cult. But first the cult, and then the abbey were suppressed in the 1530s, and there is no clear record of what happened next. We know from the correspondence sent to Cromwell by the visitors that silver, gold, and precious items were often stripped from the shrines and reliquaries, and that the bones were removed. In

some cases, like that of St Cuthbert at Durham, the bones were reinterred; in other cases, for example that of Frideswide in Oxford, they were thrown out, and mingled with other remains or waste to prevent the restoration of the cult.

The next that we hear of the Reading relic is in an account of the discovery of a human hand hidden in the wall of the abbey ruins in 1786. The hand, like the relic of James that had been preserved in the medieval abbey, was a left hand. But the discovery was treated not as an 'invention' of a relic, in the medieval sense, but as an object of curiosity. It was passed to one Dr Blenkinsopp, then to Dr Hooper, who presented it to the museum of the Reading Philosophical Institute. Here, the hand was put on display, with its identifying text from the chronicle of Hoveden, between two dried fish. Here we can see the multiple levels at which the iconoclasm of the reformation operated; whether as an assault on the authority and veracity of the relic, the lifting of its material occlusion, the movement of relics at the behest of the king and his servants, or at the hands of the pious, and this shifting meaning of 'relic' in spiritual, material, and linguistic form. The reformation of the saints was materially and culturally iconoclastic, but as Walsham charts in the English context, there is still evidence of the survival of traditional sacred sites and the construction of new material and topographical features that commemorated both object and belief. Even energetic polemic against a religious culture that was too focused upon the spiritual significance of material objects and physical landmarks might come to serve as a catalogue of those very places that it sought to condemn, preserving the memory albeit through mockery of its meaning.[43] Some thirty years after the Cromwellian visitors did their work, Bishop John Jewel lamented the 'wilderness of superstition' that had been allowed to spring up as a result of the survival of traditional objects that had been rescued from the iconoclasm of the 1530s by pious believers. We can also observe the transfer of sacred significance from the destroyed material object to the place where it had once stood. As Walsham has noted, books and book covers became almost indistinguishable from relics in the language that was used to describe them as 'receptacles of numinous power.'[44] Relics became objects of mockery and later curiosity, but never quite disappeared, materially or metaphorically. Wrapped in

legends and traditions that were intertwined in social memory, the persistence of that memory of the relic contributed to the survival of ideas about sacrality that inhered in material objects.[45]

By the late seventeenth century, most Protestants were willing to approach the material culture of medieval Catholicism with what has been referred to as an air of 'benign amusement'; relics had ceased to be spiritually and politically dangerous, becoming instead a focus for antiquarian collectors.[46] But the migration of the meaning and materiality of the relic from object of devotion to object of scorn or curiosity owed much to the devotional imperatives that had defined and promoted the cult of the sacred object. Richard Southern, writing on medieval relics, encouraged us to consider that relics mattered because of what they were: 'ordinary men could see and handle them, yet they belonged not to this transitory work but to eternity. On the last day they would be claimed by the saints and become an integral part of the kingdom of heaven'.[47] But they were also human objects, constructed and understood in human terms, and subject to a range of personal, political, and pragmatic impulses. Relics became relics not simply because of what they were, but because of what they were believed to be. As physical remains became the focus of devotional activity, they were subject to human thought processes that imbued them with meaning, purpose and value. The veneration of the object provided it with authority; when that veneration was withdrawn, the memory of the cult became subject to the same human processes that had created it. Whether made visible after centuries of occlusion, or removed from the physical and mental location that had defined it, the relic, 'divorced from a specific milieu (...) is unintelligible and incomprehensible.'[48] Patrick Geary's comment on the consequences of relic theft applies equally to the iconoclasm of the reformation. Relics connected devotional activities in the present to the saints and miracles of the past, but they also became agents and protagonists in the rewriting of sacred history. Removed from its context, the relic (and the empty space that it left behind) served as a palimpsest onto which a new rhetoric might be inscribed, and new memories imprinted. Truth traded places with legend, and reverence gave way to reformation. Provided with a new written record, 'multe etiam alie reliquie' migrated in their religious, political, and cultural meaning.

Notes

1  T. Wright, *Chapters of Letters Relating to the Suppression of Monasteries* Camden Society No. 26, (London: Nichols, 1843) pp.58-59. Joyce Youings, *The Dissolution of the Monasteries* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1971) and D. Knowles and R. N. Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses in England and Wales,* 2nd edn (London: Longman,1971) continue to exert a powerful influence over the historiography of the dissolution of the monasteries. The political context of the dissolutions is discussed in G. W. Bernard, 'The Dissolution of the Monasteries', *History*, 96 (2011): 390-409. doi:10.1111/j.1468-229X.2011.00526.x; G.W. Bernard, *The King's Reformation: Henry VIII and the Remaking of the English Church (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005); R.W.* Hoyle, 'The Origins of the Dissolution of the Monasteries', *Historical Journal*, 38 (1995): 275-305; Peter Marshall, 'The Rood of Boxley, the Blood of Hailes and the Defence of the Henrician Church', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 46 (1995): 689-696; E. Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009) and M. Aston, *Broken Idols of the English Reformation* (Cambridge: CUP, 2015). Study of the connection between the dissolution, memory, and the landscape has been much enhanced by M. Aston, 'English Ruins and English History: The Dissolution and the Sense of the Past', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, lxv (1973): 231-255; A. Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape: Religion, Identity and Memory in Early Modern Britain & Ireland* (Oxford: OUP, 2011); H. M. Colvin, 'Recycling the Monasteries: Demolition and Reuse by the Tudor Government,1536–47', in Colvin, ed. *Essays in Architectural History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), *52-66.*
2  Wright, *Three Chapters*, p.85.
3  Wright, *Three Chapters*, pp.183-186.
4  Wright, *Three Chapters*, p.221ff.
5  Wright, *Three Chapters*, p.225.
6  Wright, *Three Chapters*, p.226.
7  Youings, *Dissolution*, p.151.
8  R. Axton and P. Happé, *The Plays of John Heywood* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991), pp. 95, 112, 125.
9  Thomas More, *Dialogue Concerning Heresies,* ed. T. M. C. Lawler, G. Marc'hadour and R. Marius, (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1991): 6.1.98; Robyn Malo, 'The Pardoner's relics (and why they matter the most)', *The Chaucer Review*, 43.1 (2008): 82-102 (p. 83).

10  Helen Parish, *Monks, Miracles and Magic: Reformation Representations of the Medieval Church* (London: Routledge, 2005); Aston, *Broken Idols*, chapter 4.

11  Aston, *Broken Idols*, chapter 1; Shagan, *Popular Politics,* chapter 1.

12  P. Marshall, 'Forgery and Miracles in the Reign of Henry VIII'*, Past and Present*, 178 (2003): 39-73.

13  W. Tyndale, *Expositions and Notes on sundry portions of the Holy Scriptures, together with The Practice of Prelates* (Cambridge: Parker Society, 1848), pp. 216, 278; *Doctrinal Treatises and Introductions to different portions of the Holy Scripture* (Cambridge: Parker Society, 1848), p.122; *An Answer to Sir Tho. More's Dialogue, The Supper of the Lord after the true meaning of John vi. and 1 Cor. xi., and Will. Tracy's Testament expounded* (Cambridge: Parker Society, 1850), pp.60, 124. The 'pigs' bones' phrasing was not unique to Tyndale; Chaucer used the same derogatory description in the Prologue to the Pardoner's Tale.

14  H. Latimer, 'Sermon Before Convocation, 1536' in Latimer, *Sermons and Remains*, (Cambridge: Parker Society, 1845), pp. 53-55.

15  Thomas Becon, *Of the doctrine of Christ and antichrist*, (Cambridge: Parker Society, 1844) p. 521.

16  John Bale, *The Image of Both Churches* (Cambridge: Parker  Society, 1849), p. 254.

17  James Kearney, T*he Incarnate Text: Imagining the Book in Reformation England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), p. 57.

18  Kearney, Incarnate Text, p. 60.

19  Kearney, Incarnate Text, p.62; Lucy Razzall, '"A good booke is the pretious life-blood of a master-spirit": Recollecting Relics in Post-reformation English Writing', Northern Renaissance 2 (2010): 93-110.

20  Malo, 'Pardoner's relics', 86-87.

21  Razzall, 'Good Booke', 96.

22  Malo, 'Pardoner's relics', 88; Patrick Geary, 'Sacred Commmodities: the circulation of medieval relics' in The Social Life of Things, ed. A. Appadurai (Cambridge, CUP: 1986) pp.169-191; Cynthia Hahn, 'Seeing and Believing: The Construction of Sanctity in Early-Medieval Saints' Shrines', *Speculum* 72.4 (1997):1079-1106.

23  Cynthia Hahn, 'The Voices of the Saints: Speaking Reliquaries', Gesta, 36.1 (1997): 20-31. doi:10.2307/767276 28.

24  Matthew Milner, *The Senses and the English Reformation (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), chapter 7.*

25  Caroline Walker Bynum, Christian Materiality. An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe, (New York, Zone Books: 2011); Julia Smith,

'Portable Christianity: Relics in the Medieval West (c.700-1200)', Proceedings of the British Academy, 181 (2012): 143-167.

26 Adam Morton, 'Images and the Senses in Post-Reformation England', Reformation, 20:1 (2015): 77-100, doi: 10.1179/1357417515Z.0000000039.

27 W. H. St John Hope, 'Notes on the Holy Blood of Hayles', Archaeological Journal, 68 (1911): 166-172 (quotation at 170-171), Shagan, Popular Politics, chapter 5; Marshall, The Rood of Boxley.

28 Charles Wriothesley, A Chronicle of England During the Reigns of the Tudors, From A.D. 1485 to 1559, Camden Society New Series, 11 (2 volumes, (London: Camden Society, 1875): volume 1, p.90.

29 Latimer, Sermons and Remains, p.395; Wriothesley, Chronicle, I.74-77; 80; 83-84.

30 T. Finucane, Miracles and Pilgrims. Popular Beliefs in Medieval England (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1977), p.205.

31 Wriothesley, Chronicle,, I. 31

32 Alexandra Walsham, 'Skeletons  in the cupboard: relics after the English Reformation', Past and Present suppl 5 (2010): 121-143, https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtq015; Walsham, 'Miracles and the Counter Reformation Mission to England', Historical Journal, 46 (2003): 779-815.

33 Walsham , 'Skeletons', 126; H. Robinson, ed. The Zurich letters : or, The correspondence of several English bishops and others with some of the Helvetian reformers during the reign of Queen Elizabeth : chiefly from the archives of Zurich (Cambridge: Parker Society, 1846), p. 41

34 Walsham, 'Skeletons', 127.

35 John Gerard, The Autobiography of an Elizabethan (London: Longmans, 1951), p. 50.

36 Walsham, 'Miracles', 794-9.

37 Geary, 'Sacred Commodities', 174-5.

38 Hahn, 'Voices', 28.

39 Walsham, 'Skeletons', 126.

40 R. Whiting, The Blind Devotion of the People: Popular Religion and the English Reformation (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), pp. 55, 72; John Leland, The Itinerary of John Leland in or about the years 1533-43, ed. L. T. Smith (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), Part I, 52, 180, 208, 290, 284.

41 Alexandra Walsham, 'Relics, writing, and memory in the English Counter Reformation: Thomas Maxfield and his afterlives', British Catholic History, 34.1 (2018): 77–105; D. Woolf, The Social Circulation of the

*Past: English Historical Culture 1500–1730* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

42 Simon Yarrow, *Saints and Their Communities: Miracle Stories in Twelfth Century England* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), pp.198-200; B. R. Kemp, 'The Hand of St James at Reading Abbey', *Reading Medieval Studies* 16 (1990): 77-96.

43 Walsham, 'Skeletons' passim.

44 Alexandra Walsham, 'Jewels for Gentlewomen: Religious Books as Artefacts in Late Medieval and Early Modern England', in R. N. Swanson (ed.), *The Church and the Book* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer), pp. 123–142.

45 D. Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 238–59; J. Fentress and C. Wickham, *Social Memory. New Perspectives on the Past,* (Oxford: OUP, 1992).

46 D. Woolf, *The Social Circulation of the Past: English Historical Culture 1500–1730* (Oxford: OUP, 2003).

47 Richard Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (London, 1990 reprint), p.32.

48 Patrick Geary, *Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), p.5.