

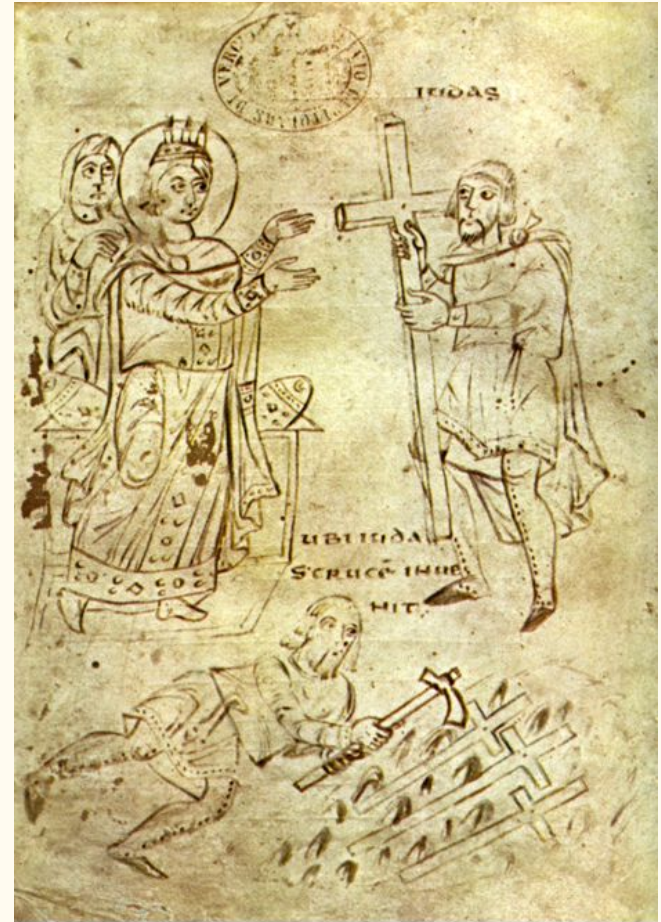


# The Medieval Christian Pilgrimage

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# The Pilgrimage

- Descriptions of the veneration of relics and Christian travel to relics begins in the 3rd and 4th centuries
- Most popular destinations were pilgrimages made to sites connected with the life of Christ
- Saint Jerome encourages pilgrimage
- Saint Helena, mother of Constantine, takes pilgrimage to the Holy Land



St. Helena discovers The Holy Cross , italian illustration c 825.

# Pope Benedict XVI (d. 2022)

To go on pilgrimage is not simply to visit a place to admire its treasures of nature, art or history. To go on pilgrimage really means to step out of ourselves in order to encounter God where he has revealed himself, where his grace has shone with particular splendour and produced rich fruits of conversion and holiness among those who believe. Above all, Christians go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, to the places associated with the Lord's passion, death and resurrection. They go to Rome, the city of the martyrdom of Peter and Paul, and also to Compostela, which, associated with the memory of Saint James, has welcomed pilgrims from throughout the world who desire to strengthen their spirit with the Apostle's witness of faith and love.

# First sites of pilgrimage

- Earliest pilgrimages made to sites connected with Jesus
- Early example is Origen who searched “of the traces of Jesus, the disciples, and the prophets
- Accounts of Christian pilgrimages to Jerusalem date to the 4th century → perhaps modelled on earlier Jewish traditions of pilgrimage, esp. to Solomon’s Temple
- The Bordeaux Pilgrim's Itinerarium Burdigalense c. 333 CE (“Bordeaux Itinerary”) - anonymous - is the oldest surviving recount of a Christian pilgrimage to Jerusalem and chronicles his visit



**Pilgrim's Badge of the Shrine of St. Thomas Becket at Canterbury**

British

1350–1400

## 4th century, Paulinus of Nola

“No other sentiment draws men to Jerusalem than the desire to see and touch the places where Christ was physically present, and to be able to say from our very own experience ‘we have gone into his tabernacle and adored in the very places where his feet have stood.’ There is a truly spiritual desire to see the places where Christ suffered, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven...The manger of His birth, the river of His baptism, the garden of His betrayal, the palace of His condemnation, the column of His scourging, the thorns of His crowning, the wood of His crucifixion, the stone of His burial: all these things recall God’s former presence on earth and demonstrate the ancient basis of our modern beliefs.”



# Popular Pilgrimage Sites

- Earliest Christian pilgrimages had destinations in the Holy Land → wanting to revisit sites associated with Jesus
  - Early example is 3rd century Origen
  - Bordeaux Pilgrim's Itinerarium Burdigalense ("Bordeaux Itinerary") → early account of pilgrimage to Jerusalem 333-334 CE
- Santiago de Compostela or Way of St. James: 9th Century discovery of the remains of Apostle James (James the Greater)
  - Pope Alexander VI (d. 1503) officially declared the Camino de Santiago to be one of the "three great pilgrimages of Christendom"
- Rome: popular destination Pilate's stairs, ascended by Jesus on his way to trial → brought by St Helena (mother to Constantine) to Rome in 4th century

# The Reality of Evil

- Most people lived in rural areas and were under the care of their parish → born, lived, baptised, married, died, buried in this parish
- The world operated through divine intervention → every gust of wind, storm, illness, etc. associated with God
- Since we could not control these forces, only recourse was supplication
- Jonathan Sumpton: “Ordinary people could not regard evil as an abstract force; to them it was real, visible, tangible, capable of inflicting actual physical damage.”
- Damnation a very real probability → believe that only very few were saved
- Burning in the fires of hell was for all eternity

# The Role of the Saints

- Bertold of Regensburg (d. 1272): the salvation of a sinner “was one of the greatest miracles that ever God does. That is why we sing in the Mass ‘*Mirabilis Deus in sanctis suis*’ God is wonderful in his saints.”
- Relics (articles of clothing, items associated with saints’ lives, physical body parts) thought to have powerful influence and power
- How people on earth have access to divinity



(l-r) SS Gregoy & Jerome



# The Cult of Relics

- Proximity to relics allows for people to resist the power of evil
- Made people healthy (2 Kings 13:20-21): a dead man is thrown into the tomb of Elijah and when his corpse touches that of Elijah's, he is resurrected
- 5th Century, Victricius of Rouen says that the saints are an army in the battle against evil
- 156 CE, Christians of Smyrna on the martyrdom of the bishop Polycarp: after burned to death, Christians “took up his bones which are more valuable than refined gold and laid them in a suitable place where, the Lord willing...we may gather together and celebrate the anniversary of his martyrdom”
- As early as 2nd-4th centuries, martyrs were venerated for their physicality left behind → at moment of martyrdom, Christians would dip clothing in blood (e.g. death of St Vincent and Martyrdoms at Samosata in 308)

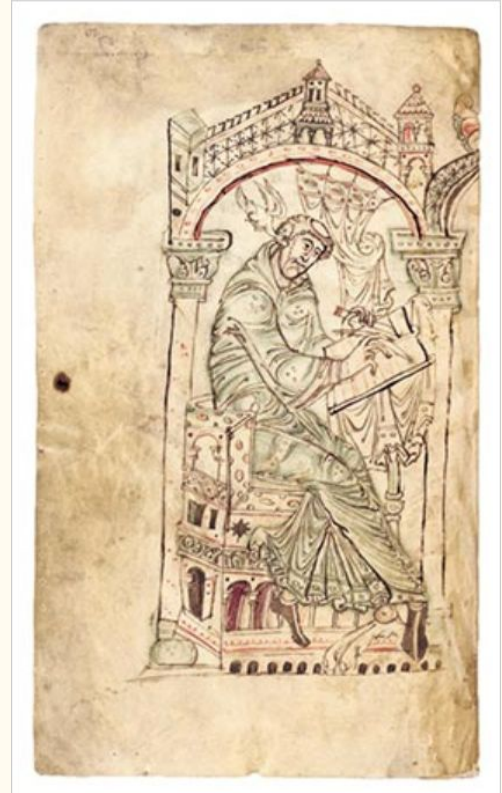
# Thomas Aquinas on relics

- Relics should be venerated for three primary reasons
- First: physical reminders of the saints: “he who loves some one reveres the things that they leave behind them”
- Second: *doctor angelicus*, the body has intrinsic merit, not mere objects, but their connection with the soul of the saint → Holy Spirit worked through the soul → the bodies are sanctified by God, more holy than holy images in the church
- Thirdly: the miracles of the tomb → God demonstrates his desire for relics to be venerated → “We ought therefore to hold them in the deepest possible veneration as limbs of God, as children and friends of God, and as intercessors on our behalf”



# Rejection of Civilization

- Contempt for society important for followers of St. Jerome
- Melania the Younger, left Rome in 410 → allowed the wind to take her ship where it would → ended up in North Africa. Stayed there for seven years before arriving in Holy Land. Said she would “Depart from the midst of Babylon”
- Desire to renounce civilization powerful among Christian pilgrims since late antiquity
- Rejection of urban values
- St Jerome described himself as “forsaking the bustling cities of Antioch and Constantinople so as to draw down upon the myself the mercy of Christ in the solitude of the country”



# Christian Theology of Embodiment

- In Judaism, no personal afterlife before 200 BCE → developed into a belief that God will give life to the righteous dead so that they can live eternally
- Universal resurrection in early Christianity → like Christ, we will be resurrected full bodied
- Council of Nicaea (325 CE) affirms physical resurrection of the dead
- The idea of “soul” as a term designating spirit separable from the body doesn’t exist in Aramaic → entered Christian theology through Greek pagan tradition
- Justin Martyr (b. 100 CE): a person is both soul and body and Christ has promised to raise both → no division between body and soul
- It is this original belief which helped construct the theology of embodied spirit in the relics of the saints

