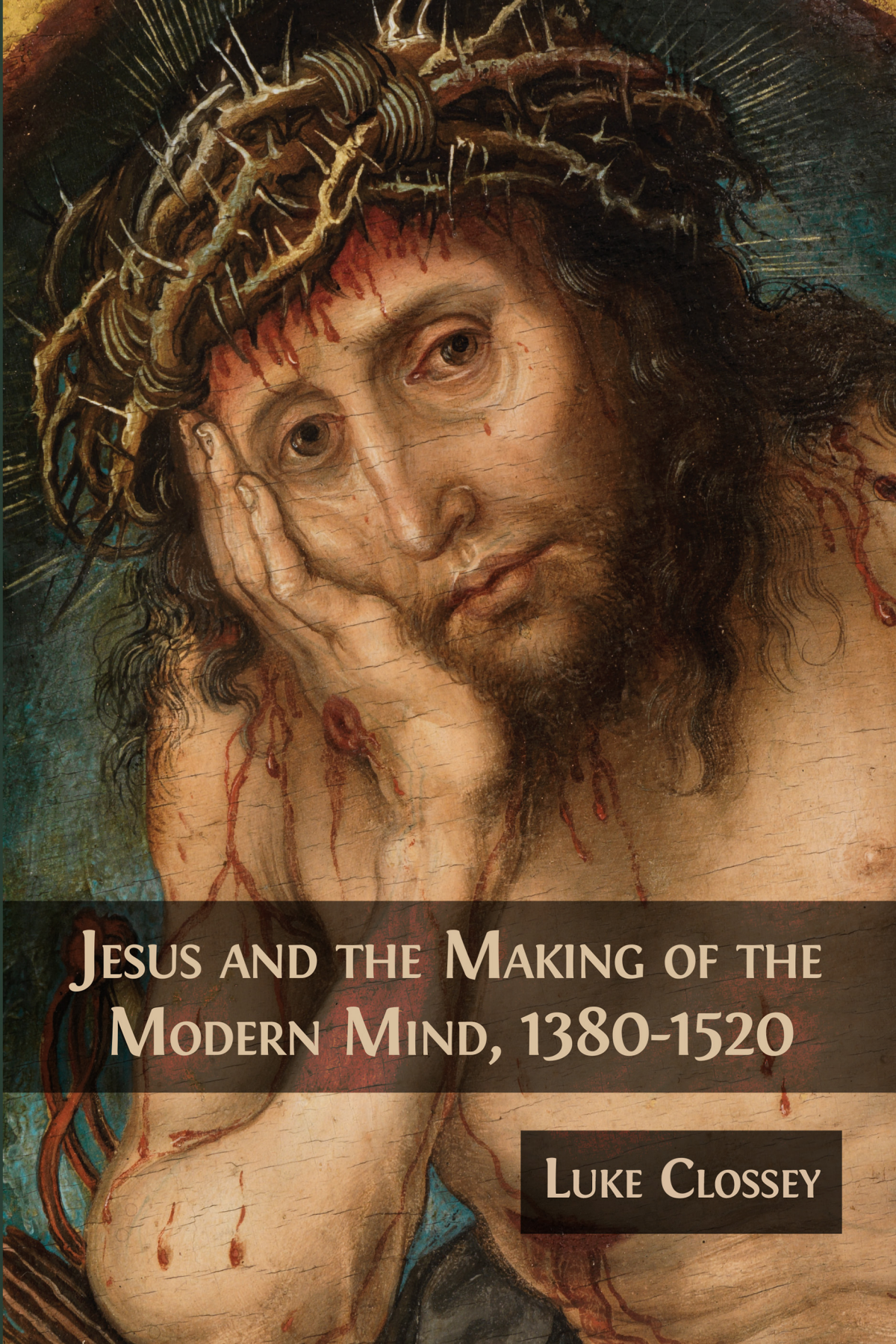

Jesus and the Making of the Modern Mind, 1380-1520

Luke Clossey

https://www.openbookpublishers.com

Any digital material and resources associated with this volume will be available at https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0371#resources

ISBN Paperback: 978-1-80064-818-0

ISBN Hardback: 978-1-78374-957-7

ISBN Digital (PDF): 978-1-80511-001-9

ISBN Digital eBook (EPUB): 978-1-80064-305-5

ISBN HTML: 978-1-80064-307-9

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0371

Cover image: Albrecht Dürer, *Christ as Man of Sorrows* (ca. 1492–93), Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe, https://www.kunsthalle-karlsruhe.de/kunstwerke/Albrecht-D%C3%BCrer/Christus-als-Schmerzensmann/4CF6CD9D45DD6B1AC91CECAE9EC57F44/

Cover design: Isaac Schoeber and Jeevanjot Kaur Nagpal.
Cover created by Jeevanjot Kaur Nagpal.

8. Jesus Objects

Jesus, even fifteen centuries after his life on earth, could still be physically touched. Parts of his body remained to be cherished, used, or doubted. Christian priests regularly transformed bread and wine into his body and blood, to be eaten and drunk. These three chapters touch on aspects of the tangibles of the Jesus cult. This chapter presents some examples of the variety of Jesus-related objects, discusses their functions, and considers contemporary attitudes towards them. Chapter 9 looks at the body-and-blood-creating Eucharist ritual and its liturgical context of the mass. Chapter 10 focuses on the physical production and use of two most important Jesus books, the Qur'an and the Bible.

For modern eyes, perhaps the most impressive Jesus objects were machines. In the 1350s, two Three Magi automata were built in Germany (Strasbourg, Frankenberg in Hessen), and in the early fifteenth century, two new German ones were built (Villingen, Olmütz), as well as a Swedish one at Lund. In the second half of the century, the trend reached Italy (Bologna, Reggio Emilia, Venice).[1] The Strasbourg Magi automaton was part of a large (11.7 m tall and 4.1 m wide) astronomical clock, called the Eighth Wonder of the World. At its base, a calendar disk, correctly showing the distance between Christmas and Easter, rotated at a rate of 0.10 cm per hour to complete one revolution each year. Above was an astrolabe revealing the current location of the sun and the moon. Above this the robotic Three Magi emerged to bow homage to the newborn Jesus.[2] In the similar Villingen version the Baby Jesus automatically turned to the Magi to acknowledge their bows.[3] Perched upon a side tower was a clockwork cock, a wooden rooster augmented with iron feathers and a copper comb, that crowed to alarm parishioners into alertness, not only recalling the cock who crowed

1 Günther Oestmann, *The Astronomical Clock of Strasbourg Cathedral* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 9–23, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004423473

2 Conradus Dasypodius, *Warhafftige Ausslegung und Beschreybung des Astronomischen Uhrwercks zu Strassburg* (Strasbourg: Wyriot, 1580), 1–7.

3 Franz Xaver Kraus, ed., *Die Kunstdenkmäler des Kreises Villingen* (Freiburg: Mohr, 1890), 124.

 https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0371.08

three time at Peter's denial of Jesus but also looking forward to Jesus's return (see Fig. 8.1).[4]

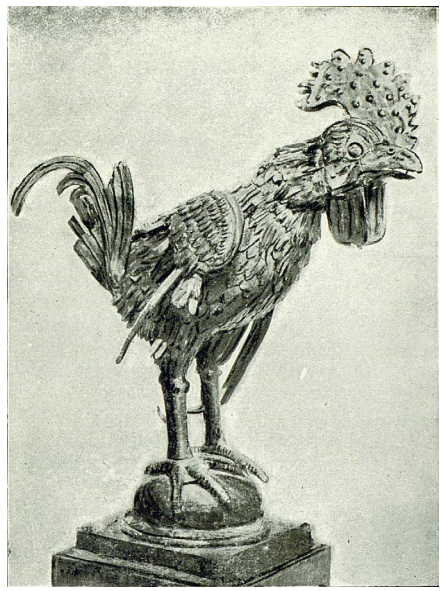

Fig. 8.1 Mechanical Cock, Alfred Ungerer, *Description de l'horloge astronomique de la cathédrale de Strasbourg* (Strasbourg: Ungerer, 1919), Wikimedia Commons, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Coq_automate_de_l%27horloge_astronomique_de_la_cath%C3%A9drale_de_Strasbourg.jpg

Collections of Jesus-cult objects could also be awesome for their quantities. We can get a sense of their number, both absolute and relative to all the goods in a household, by looking at the ca. 1398–99 list of the treasures owned by King Richard II of England (1367–1400). This scroll inventory comprises 1206 entries along its length of 28 m. About a quarter, some three hundred, are for chapel use, including processional and altar-top crosses as well as mass utensils. The inventory notes their monetary value. It would have taken a master craftsman about 23,000 years to earn the equivalent.[5] Even in a single pious household, at least in a commercial node like Venice, you might find "paternosters and rosary beads; medals and plaquettes bearing sacred subjects; crucifixes wrought in precious metals and ornamented with gemstones; small basins containing holy

4 Mt 26:69–75; Mk 14:66–72; Lk 22:54–62; Jn 18:15–27.

5 Inventories of the Treasures of Richard II (1398–99), National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew, E 101/411/9.

water; wooden holy dolls; and the Agnus Dei."[6] Rome was seen as a giant "Jesus giftshop."[7]

Relics

Most of the physical objects used in the Jesus cult were made by humans out of cloth, metal, and wood. Their power derived from their utility, their resonance, and their grandeur. More important was the class of objects not recently made, but preserved through the centuries: a "relic"—the word literally means "what is left behind"—had some physical contact with Jesus but had been "left behind," and kept some of the power "left behind" by Jesus. Similarly, but on a much smaller scale, the ability to heal which manifested in Bernardino of Siena's (1380–1444) sermons was, after his death, left behind in his body parts, which his successor John of Capistrano (1386–1456) used to effect more healings.[8]

Body Relics

The most intimate Jesus relics were parts of his body. These included his umbilical cord (at Chalons-sur-Marne) and his nails (at Charroux). The Abbey de la Trinité in Vendôme had a tear shed by Jesus at the death of Lazarus, which Mary Magdalene had entrusted to an angel.[9]

Especially common and powerful was Jesus's blood. Mantua had a blood relic. Bruges did as well, although during the fifteenth century it became less reliably miraculous[10] Melchiorre Trevisan (1434–1500) in 1480 donated a drop of Jesus's blood, dissolved in Mary Magdalene's funeral oil, probably brought from Constantinople, to the Franciscans' Santa Croce Basilica in Florence. A tabernacle was made to hold the blood, in the church's Chapel of St. Michael.

6 Margaret A. Morse, "Creating Sacred Space: The Religious Visual Culture of the Renaissance Venetian Casa," *Renaissance Studies* 21 (2007): 151–84 (163), https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-4658.2007.00357.x

7 Peter Burke, *The Italian Renaissance: Culture and Society in Italy*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2014), 236.

8 Katherine Jansen, "The Word and its Diffusion," in *Christianity in Western Europe, c.1100–c.1500*, ed. Miri Rubin and Walter Simons, Cambridge History of Christianity 4 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP 2009), 114–32 (129), https://doi.org/10.1017/chol9780521811064.011

9 Philipp Blom, *To Have and to Hold: An Intimate History of Collectors and Collecting* (London: Penguin Books, 2002), 146, counts thirty-one nail relics in Europe today.

10 Craig Harbison, *Jan Van Eyck: The Play of Realism*, 2nd ed. (London: Reaktion, 2012), 212.

That blood proved to be miraculous, and annual processions continued at least into the sixteenth century.[11]

From our perspective, perhaps the most unexpected body-part relic is the Holy Prepuce, Jesus's foreskin. According to tradition, Mary had given the foreskin, and perhaps the umbilical cord, to Mary Magdalene, who gave it to an angel, who gave it to Charlemagne (747–814), whose grandson Charles the Bald (823–77) brought it to Rome.[12] In the centuries around 1400, the foreskin was alleged to be in over thirty locations, including Aachen, Charroux, Rome, and Coulombs (Eure-et-Loir).[13] We might explain multiplicity by excess confidence in cautious reports, a foreskin moving between places, its division by humans, or its multiplication by miracle. In some cases, the foreskin existed in a more mystical sense: in the 1370s, Catherine of Siena (1347–80) had written that nuns intent on "marrying" Jesus understood his foreskin as engagement rings (see Chapter 20).[14] This multiplicity increased the foreskin's usefulness. In 1379, Antipope Clement VII (1342–94) proclaimed an indulgence linked to the Holy Foreskin at Charroux,[15] and Pope Martin V (1369–1431) did the same for its counterpart at Boulogne.[16] Parallel foreskin indulgences were proclaimed in 1446, 1584, 1640, 1647, and 1661.[17] The Abbey Church at Coulombs rushed their

11 Francesco Sansovino, *Venetia, città nobilissima et singolare* (Venice: Sansovino, 1581), 38r, 65rv. See Marie-Dominique Chenu, "Sang du Christ," in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, ed. Alfred Vacant, 15 vols. (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1939), XIV, part 1, col. 1094–97; Rona Goffen, *Piety and Patronage in Renaissance Venice* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1990), 21; Amédée Teetaert, "Sixte IV," *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, ed. Alfred Vacant, 15 vols. (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1941), XIV, part 2, col. 2199–2200.

12 A variation of this standard account is recorded in Petrus Comestor, *Historia Scolastica*, in Adam of Dryburgh, *Opera Omnia*, in *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne, 217 vols. (Paris: Garnier, 1855), CXCVIII, col. 1541.

13 Johannes Gielemans, "Translatio SS. Praeputii Antverpiam," in *De codicibus hagiographicis Iohannis Gielemans* (Brussels: Bollandistes, 1895), 428–30; Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legende* (Westminster: Caxton, 1483), fol. 7v–8r. See Robert P. Palazzo, "The Veneration of the Sacred Foreskin(s) of Baby Jesus—A Documented Analysis," in *Multicultural Europe and Cultural Exchange*, ed. James P. Helfers (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 155–76 (173–74), https://doi.org/10.1484/m.asmar-eb.3.3039; Amy G. Remensnyder, "Legendary Treasure at Conques: Reliquaries and Imaginative Memory," *Speculum* 71 (1996): 890–97.

14 Catherine of Siena, *The Letters of Catherine of Siena*, trans. Suzanne Noffke, 4 vols. (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2000), I, 147–48,

15 Pierre Saintyves, *Les Reliques et les Images légendaires* (Paris: Mercvre de France, 1912), 179.

16 "Monasterium Caroffense, O.S.B., in quo praeputium Jesu Christi, destructum, proventus annihilati," in *La désolation des églises, monastères, hopitaux en France pendant la guerre de cent ans*, ed. Henri Denifle, 2 vols. (Paris: Picard, 1897), I, 167–68.

17 Cesare Sinibaldi Gambalunga, *Narrazione Critico-Storica del Reliquia preziosissima del Santissimo Prepuzio di N.S. Gesu' Cristo* (Rome: Poggioli, 1802), 32–35.

foreskin to England when the Queen Consort Catherine of Valois (1401–37) was pregnant; this medical intervention allowed her to bear a healthy baby, the future King Henry VI (1421–71).[18]

Contact Relics

Less intimate were those relics empowered by having been in physical contact with Jesus, especially at key moments, primarily his death, and secondarily his birth. These included wood from the holy manger (Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome), the foot beam from the cross (Manglisi),[19] the Sudarium of Oviedo (a linen covering his face at entombment), various Holy Grail relics used at the Last Supper (one at Valencia, and another, carved from a single emerald, at Genoa),[20] and the unction stone where his corpse was anointed with oil (Jerusalem, a recent discovery from the 1330s).[21]

The Aachen Cathedral, visited by Margery Kempe (ca. 1373–1438), had the *Josefhosen*, Jesus's father's stockings. Joseph had removed them to use as swaddling clothes for his baby son. A Nativity image, from around 1410, in a parish church in Lézignan featured a speech scroll allowing Joseph to proclaim, "Mary, take my hose and wind your dear baby in them." In the deep ken, this relic resonated with the Old Testament: one English sermon explicitly linked this act to Moses approaching the burning bush only for God to warn him, "Do not come any closer [...] Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground" (Exodus 3:5).[22]

Relics of the Passion attracted a particular devotion. In addition to relics of the scourging post, as at Santa Prassede in Rome, a shorter (63-cm-high) column was in the Oratory of San Zeno in Rome, inconspicuously located on the "chapel floor under the sarcophagus." Despite its dissimilar appearance to

18 Chartularium monasterii S. Maglorii Parisiensis, BnF MS Lat. 5413, fol. 200r–01r.

19 Ori Z. Soltes, *National Treasures of Georgia* (London: Philip Wilson, 1999), 371.

20 Catalina Martín Lloris, *Las Reliquias de la Capilla Real en la Corona de Aragón y el Santo Cáliz de la Catedral de Valencia (1396–1458)* (PhD thesis, Universitat De València, 2010); Pero Tafur, *Andanças é Viajes* (Madrid: Ginesta, 1874), 26; Richard Barber, *The Holy Grail: Imagination and Belief* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2004), 168–70; Juliette Wood, *The Holy Grail: History and Legend* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012), 94–98.

21 Yamit Rachman-Schrire, "Christ's Unction and the Material Realization of a Stone in Jerusalem," in *Natural Materials of the Holy Land and the Visual Translation of Place, 500–1500*, ed. Renana Bartal, Neta Bodner, and Bianca Kühnel (London: Routledge, 2017), 216–29, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315210315-13

22 J. de Coo, "In Josephs Hosen Jhesus ghewonden wert," *Aachener Kunstblätter* 30 (1965): 144–84; Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 58–59.

the more famous larger column, some argued that it was a part of it. Bridget of Sweden (ca. 1303–73) in 1372 had seen another portion of the column at the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.[23] Paris around 1400 housed Duke John of Berry's (1340–1416) reliquary of a Holy Thorn taken from Jesus's crown of thorns.[24] The Church of the Santissimo Crocifisso in Noto, near Syracuse in Sicily, also kept a Holy Thorn, shown annually on Good Friday.[25] The Scala Sancta in Rome were identified as the stairs Jesus had climbed to attend his trial, shipped by Helena from Jerusalem in the early fourth century.

In the gospels, the soldiers at the Crucifixion, admiring the seamless robe Jesus wore, decided to cast lots for it, rather than ruin it by dividing it among themselves (Jn 19:23–24). This "seamless robe" (or tunic, or chiton) of Jesus was claimed to be held in multiple places, including at Trier, in the Patriarchal Cathedral at Mtskheta in Georgia, and in the Benedictine church at Argenteuil in Seine-et-Oise, near Paris.[26] Manuel II Palaiologos (1350–1425) gave "particles" of Jesus's robe to Pope Boniface IX (ca. 1350–1404) (with a declaration of authenticity) in 1401 and to Queen Margaret I of Denmark (1353–1412) in 1402.[27] The Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II (1432–81) wore an amulet that included a piece of it.[28] At the end of the life of Louis XI (1423–83), a holy man sent him "a fragment of the tunic of the Saviour for which the soldiers gambled with dice during the Passion."[29]

Although contemporary theologians debated whether Jesus was crucified with three nails ("triclavianism") or four,[30] at least two dozen were known in the Far West. One of the nails was, according to tradition, beaten flat into

23 Barbara Wisch, "The Passion of Christ in the Art, Theater, and Penitential Rituals of the Roman Confraternity of the Gonfalone," in *Crossing the Boundaries: Christian Piety and the Arts in Italian Medieval and Renaissance Confraternities*, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1991), 237–62 (246–47).

24 The Holy Thorn Reliquary (ca. 1400), British Museum, London, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_WB-67

25 Maria Adele Di Leo, *Feste popolari di Sicilia* (Rome: Newton and Compton, 1997), 237.

26 François Le Quéré, *La Sainte Tunique d'Argenteuil: histoire et examen de l'authentique tunique sans couture de Jésus-Christ* (Paris: Artège, 2016).

27 George T. Dennis, "Two Unknown Documents of Manuel II Palaeologos," *Travaux et Mémoires* 3 (1968): 397–404.

28 Francesco Suriano, *Il Trattato di Terra Santa e dell'Oriente*, ed. Girolamo Golubovich (Milan: Artigianelli, 1900), 94.

29 Anne Denieul-Cormier, *Wise and Foolish Kings: The First House of Valois 1328–1498* (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 356; Maren Elisabeth Schwab and Anthony Grafton, *The Art of Discovery: Digging into the Past in Renaissance Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2022), 247–79, https://doi.org/10.1353/book.109177

30 In the early Church centuries, it was even debated whether Jesus was crucified with just two nails.

a band, and placed in what would become known as the Iron Crown (which also had relief crosses on its outer rim), used to crown emperors as the King of Italy, such as Charles IV (1355), Sigismund (1431 at Milan), Charles V (1530 at Bologna), and Napoleon I (1805 at Milan, placing it on his own head), who also established the Order of the Iron Cross. In 1449, a nail was used in a procession against plague in Siena.[31]

The greater piece of a broken walnut board, kept in Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, in Rome, was claimed to be the title piece (*titulus*) mockingly labelling Jesus during the Crucifixion. It reads, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" in three languages, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. All three languages run right to left, like Hebrew normally does, and the "Greek" is in fact a highly stylized variation of the Latin.[32] This relic, because text-oriented, was frequently copied. The humanist Hartmann Schedel (1440–1514), who had a general interest in ancient inscriptions,[33] owned multiple woodcuts of it.[34] Note that on these woodcuts (see Fig. 8.2) the letters run in the reverse of the relic, perhaps for easier legibility or to give the impression that they are impressions of the original. To one exemplar, Schedel added his own inscription, *Omnia tempus domat nec ulli fortuna perpetuo bona est* [time tames all, and fortune is not always good to anyone], a quotation from a 1444 letter of the future Pius II (1405–64).[35] These words sum up a plain-ken attitude towards the power and capriciousness of time, perhaps prompted by the 1500-year-old relic or its role in the unjust mocking and torture of Jesus.

31 John Koenig, "Mary, Sovereign of Siena, Jesus, King of Florence: Siege Religion and the Ritual Submission (1260–1637)," *Bullettino senese di storia patria* 115 (2008): 43–163 (63) and 116 (2009): 9–119.

32 Raimondo Besozzi, *La storia della Basilica di Santa Croce in Gerusalemme* (Rome: Salomoni, 1750), 29–30, 41, 76–78, 150–52; Stefano Infessura, *Diario della città di Roma*, ed. Oreste Tommasini (Rome: Forzani, 1890), 269–71. See Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone, 2010), 218–39, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1453n0p; David S. Areford, "Multiplying the Sacred: The Fifteenth-Century Woodcut as Reproduction, Surrogate, Simulation," *Studies in the History of Art* 75 (2009): 135–41.

33 Christopher S. Wood, "Notation of Visual Information in the Earliest Archaeological Scholarship," *Word and Image* 17 (2001): 94–118 (105–09), https://doi.org/10.1080/02666286.2001.10435704

34 BSB Rar. 287, fol. 333 bis, 334rv.

35 Rudolf Wolkan, ed., *Der Briefwechsel des Eneas Silvius Piccolomini*, 3 vols. (Vienna: Hölder, 1909), I, 352. See Schwab and Grafton, *Art of Discovery*, 109–61.

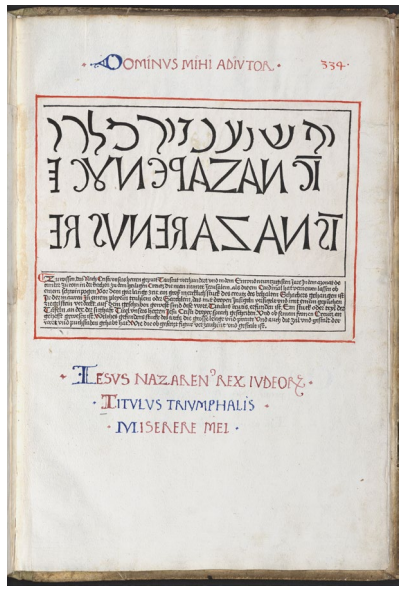

Fig. 8.2 *Titulus* (1493), Hartmann Schedel, *Registrum huius operis libri cronicarum cu Figuris et ymagibus ab inicio mudi*, BSB Rar. 287, fol. 333bis, 334rv, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, CC BY-NC-SA, https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/en/view/bsb00034024?page=750,751

A number of lance relics existed in the fifteenth century, including one at Echmiadzin and one at Antioch. The Lance "of Saint Maurice" began the century in Prague. Its power had been augmented by a holy nail and (in 1350 by Emperor Charles IV) by a gilt sleeve which indicated the depth of Jesus's side wound. In 1424, Emperor Sigismund (1368–1437) transported the lance, and a number of other relics, from Prague to Nuremberg, his birth city. There, it would be displayed annually, for most of the rest of the century.[36] This became an imperial fair, a major commercial event of free trade and free passage; one

36 Julia Schnelbögl, "Die Reichskleinodien in Nürnberg 1424–1523," *Mitteilungen des Vereins für Geschichte der Stadt Nürnberg* 51 (1962): 78–159; Christoph Gottlieb von Murr, "Diplomatarium Lipsano-Kleinodiographicum s. rom. imp. ab a. 1246 ad a. 1764," *Journal zur Kunstgeschichte und zur allgemeinen Litteratur* 12 (1784): 37–55; Alfred Wendehorst, "Nuremberg, the Imperial City," in *Gothic and Renaissance Art in Nuremberg, 1300–1550* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986), 14–16; Hartmut Kühne, *Ostensio reliquiarum: Untersuchungen über Entstehung, Ausbreitung, Gestalt und Funktion der Heiltumsweisungen im römisch-deutschen Regnum* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2000), 133–52. For an illustration, see Peter W. Parshall, *Origins of European Printmaking: Fifteenth-Century Woodcuts and their Public* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2005), 212–14 (no. 59).

year almost two thousand carts and wagons arrived full of wares. At least one year Barbara Holper attended the festival to hawk engravings made by her son, Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528). The municipal government regulated access to it, for fear of chaos if everyone attempted to capture its power by stabbing it into a piece of cloth or paper. They did agree to use it to pierce cloth for Ferdinand II of Aragon (1452–1516) and Isabella I of Castile (1451–1504), and to dunk it in wine to transfer its power to a healing liquid that could be produced in volume and sold.[37]

By far the most important relic and symbol of the Jesus cult was the cross and its remains.[38] These fragments were often placed in reliquaries made in the form of crucifixes, thus giving the crucifix the power of the actual cross. In the late fourteenth century, the Sumela Monastery in the Empire of Trebizond was given a True Cross relic. Other contemporary bits of the True Cross are in a museum at Opole (Upper Silesia) and the cathedral in Dubrovnik. The Stavrovouni Monastery in Cyprus also claimed a piece.[39] In a 1440 deposition, Gilles de Rais (ca. 1405–40), Joan of Arc's (ca. 1412–31) general, was accused of using a True Cross relic for protection against a winged serpent, a highly suspect use of the relic.[40]

As the premier Jesus relic, True Cross fragments were used for high-level gift-giving. In 1398, Vytautas (ca. 1350–1430) gave a cross relic to an embassy from Muscovy to coax an alliance against the Golden Horde Khan Temür Qutlugh (ca. 1370–99).[41] Charles V of France (1338–80) gave a piece of the True Cross from the Sainte-Chapelle Paris to his brother John of Berry, who had other such pieces in his collection. Emperor Dawit I of Ethiopia (d. 1413) asked visiting European merchants about the fate of the Cross discovered by Helena,

37 Volker Schier and Corine Schleif, "Seeing and Singing, Touching and Tasting the Holy Lance: The Power and Politics of Embodied Religious Experiences in Nuremberg, 1424–1524," in *Signs of Change: Transformations of Christian Traditions and their Representation in the Arts, 1000–2000*, ed. Nils Holger Petersen, Claus Clüver, and Nicolas Bell (New York: Rodopi, 2004), 401–26 (406–08, 415–22).

38 Barbara Baert, *A Heritage of Holy Wood: The Legend of the True Cross in Text and Image* (Leiden: Brill, 2004); Charles Rohault de Fleury, *Mémoire sur les instruments de la passion de N.-S. J.-C.* (Paris: Lesort, 1870), 45–163; Natalia Teteriatnikov, "The Role of the Devotional Image in the Religious Life of Pre-Mongol Rus," in *Christianity and the Arts in Russa*, ed. William C. Brumfield and Milos M. Velimirovich (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1991), 30–45.

39 John Mandeville, *The Book of Marvels and Travels*, ed. Anthony Bale (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012), 8, 128.

40 Reginald Hyatte, *Laughter for the Devil: The Trials of Gilles de Rais, Companion-in-arms of Joan of Arc* [1440] (London: Associated University Presses, 1984), 74.

41 Darius Baronas and Stephen Christopher Rowell, *Conversion of Lithuania: From Pagan Barbarians to Late Medieval Christians* (Vilnius: Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, 2015), 381.

and was told that the rulers of Europe had divided it up. Imperial ambassadors then went to Venice and in 1402 were given a piece. A century later (1509) the Ethiopian Empress Eleni (d. 1522) sent, via an Armenian ambassador, a portion of this piece as a gift to the king of Portugal. Another portion of it was gifted by Dawit II (ca. 1496–1540) to Pope Clement VII (1478–1534) in 1533.[42]

The importance of the cross to the Christian subcult motivated the development of a variety of traditions and theories. John Mandeville's *Travels* (ca. 1357–71) reported the tradition, localized in Greece, by which Adam's son Seth had placed four seeds from the forbidden-fruit tree under Adam's tongue before burying him; later, wood from the tree growing out of Adam's mouth would be used for the cross on which Jesus was crucified. Thus, in a deep-ken-satisfying way, the tree that had facilitated the first sin also produced the cross that had allowed for Jesus's sacrifice counter to sin. Mandeville also explained that the Jews chose rot-resistant cedar to extend the life of the cross and thus the suffering of Jesus, and fragrant cypress to shield passers-by from the smell of Jesus's decaying body. They used palm and olive to symbolize, respectively, victory (their victory over Jesus) and peace (the expected peace in their community when Jesus was no longer causing divisions).[43] Here, Mandeville was presenting what would be deep-ken information in a plain-ken context: these are symbolic resonances, but resonances understood to be in the minds of the historical Jews of the first century.

Jesus relics were less prominent in the Muslim subcult, perhaps due to their insistence on his non-divinity. One Islamic tradition did recognize that Jesus's sword had previously belonged to David, who used it to behead Goliath. Other prophets inherited the sword, which eventually came into the hands of Jesus. Its post-Jesus history was no less impressive. Muhammad came to own it, one of his many swords. This sword he called "sharp" (*al-Battar*) or "sword of the prophets," because of its previous owners, whose names were inscribed on it. One hundred one centimetres long, it is now part of the swords of Muhammad collected at the Topkapi museum. One tradition held that Jesus would again wield this sword, when he returns to fight the Antichrist.[44]

---

42 Sergew Hable-Selassie, "The Ge'ez Letters of Queen Eleni and Libne Dingil to John, King of Portugal," in *IV Congresso internazionale di studi etiopici*, ed. Enrico Cerulli, 2 vols. (Rome: Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 1974), I, 554, 557; Kate Lowe, "'Representing' Africa: Ambassadors and Princes from Christian Africa to Renaissance Italy and Portugal, 1402–1608," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 17 (2007): 101–28 (123), https://doi.org/10.1017/S0080440107000552; Osvaldo Raineri, "I doni della Serenissima al re Davide I d'Etiopia (ms Raineri 43 della Vaticana)," *Orientalia christiana periodica* 65 (1999): 363–448.

43 Mandeville, *Book of Marvels*, 8–11.

44 سيوف الرسول وعدة حربه, محمد حسن محمد التهامى (Cairo: 1992 هجر للطباعة والنشر); Brannon Wheeler, *Mecca and Eden: Ritual, Relics, and Territory in Islam* (Chicago,

Other Relics from the Jesus Narrative

Other Jesus relics were less immediately and physically linked to him, and instead took their significance from their role in his life story. The bones of one child murdered by Herod were interred at the foundation stone of the Bethlehem Chapel in Prague in 1394; the entire foot of another, labelled as such, was protected in an ornate 1450 reliquary.[45] John of Berry owned Joseph's engagement ring.[46] The Holy House, where the Annunciation and the Incarnation took place, had been miraculously moved from Nazareth to Loreto, Italy; by 1400, there was a Marian church at Loreto, but the details of the movement were uncertain. Pietro di Giorgio Tolomei of Teramo, the governor of the Loreto shrine from ca. 1450 to his 1463 death, wrote an account that included testimony (from 1296 or 1396) as well as a personal account from one Paolo di Rinalduccio (d. ca. 1448) whose great-great-grandfather saw the relocation happen.[47]

Perhaps the most tenuous Jesus relic was one that he never touched, but could have. Enthusiasts on Cyprus possessed, and touted, a jasper sarcophagus that *would have* been used to house Jesus's body, had he remained dead.[48] Similarly, a Jerusalem chapel wall included a stone that Jesus references as ready to "cry out" if he kept his disciples from praising him (Lk 19:40).[49] The logic that valued such a non-relic, if not driven by a desire to attract pilgrims, reflected a plain-ken logic that saw a world full of "might haves" and alternative possible histories.

IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 39–40. See Sahih Muslim 2937a, "The Book of Tribulations and Portents of the Last Hour," *Sunnah*, https://sunnah.com/muslim:2937a

45 Foot reliquary, 1450 (inscription), Schweizerisches Landesmuseum, Zurich ("INTEGER PES DE INNOCENTIBUS"), https://www.muensterschatz.ch/en/Fussreliquiar.html; Andrej Abplanalp, "A Window on a Supernatural Helper," *National Museum Blog* (26 August 2017), https://blog.nationalmuseum.ch/en/2017/08/a-window-on-a-supernatural-helper/. See Timothy Husband, *The Treasury of Basel Cathedral* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001), 118–19; Frank Welsh, *Battle for Christendom: The Council of Constance, the East-West Conflict, and the Dawn of Modern Europe* (Woodstock: Overlook Press, 2008), 108.

46 Raymond Cazelles and Johannes Rathofer, *Illuminations of Heaven and Earth: The Glories of the Très riches heures du duc de Berry* (New York: Abrams, 1988), 86.

47 Pietro Giorgio Tolomei, *Translatio miraculosa Ecclesie beatissime virginis Marie de Loreta* (Rome: Silber, 1509). See Ronald Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2004), 42–45; Karin Vélez, *The Miraculous Flying House of Loreto: Spreading Catholicism in the Early Modern World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2019), https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691184494

48 Sigmund Feyerabend, *Reyßbuch deß heyligen Lands* (Frankfurt: Johann Feyerabend, 1584), 56v, 127v; George Jeffery, *A Description of the Historic Monuments of Cyprus* (Nicosia: Archer, 1918), 75–76.

49 Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *The Holy Land* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 73.

Circulation and Accumulation

Many Jesus relics had complex histories. In the 1350s, a knight of Philip VI of France (1293–1350) gave a 4.4 m-long linen shroud to a church at Lirey, near Troyes, and a cult developed. The shroud's double negative imprint of a body suggested that this had been used to bury Jesus. Two successive bishops of that city attempted to suppress the developing cult, perhaps alarmed at the money it attracted away from their traditional revenue streams. One of these, Henri de Poitiers (d. 1370), launched an investigation, and theologians decided that it was fake because it was not mentioned in scripture. In 1418, the Lirey church gave the shroud to a nobleman for safe keeping. After his death, his widow in 1453 bartered it to Duchess Anne of Cyprus (1418–62), who, as daughter of the King of Jerusalem, likely had special interest in this Passion relic. In the sixteenth century, it was moved to Turin, which gave it its modern name, the Shroud of Turin.[50]

Other Jesus relics passed between the Muslim and Christian subcults. In 1492, Sultan Bayezid II (1447–1512) gifted Pope Innocent VIII (1432–92) with a Holy Lance, apparently in gratitude (or payment) for keeping his half-brother (and rival) Cem Sultan as a guest (or hostage) in Rome. The existence of the famous lance at Nuremberg cast doubt on its authenticity, and its provenance from the hands of the Ottoman Sultan cast doubt on its appropriateness, especially given its potential for triggering popular unrest. The papal advisers debated whether and how to have a procession through Rome to bring the relic to its new home. Should it be refused outright? Should they give out wine en route, to avoid a nightmare scenario where no one came out to welcome a relic regarded as fraudulent?[51] The consensus was to accept the gift, and then investigate whether it was the true (*verum*) lance. The entire enterprise went well: popular interest was widespread, and the lance proved its power by curing the deaf and the mute.[52]

In 1400, at Famagusta, Cyprus there was an earthenware amphora (a two-handled shipping-container vase, long in use in Mediterranean trade), 1.5 m tall, with handles too beautiful and weak to be actually used, with an Arabic inscription and painted decoration: the "Alhambra vase" (see Fig. 8.3). Scholars

50 Andrea Nicolotti, *Sindone: Storia e leggende di una reliquia controversa* (Turin: Einaudi, 2015); Herbert Thurston, "The Holy Shroud and the Verdict of History," *The Month* 101 (1903): 17–29 (22).

51 Johann Burchard, *Liber notarum*, ed. Enrico Celani, 2 vols. (Città di Castello: Lapi, 1906), I, 357–68.

52 Sigismondo De' Conti, *Storie de' suoi tempi*, 2 vols. (Florence: Barbèra, 1884), II, 28–29; Infessura, *Diario della città di Roma*, ed. Tommasini, 294. See Areford, "Multiplying the Sacred," 131–35; Margaret Meserve, *Papal Bull: Print, Politics, and Propaganda in Renaissance Rome* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2021), 212–15, https://doi.org/10.1353/book.85159

today would locate its origins in fourteenth-century Islamicate Iberia, but in 1400 (or, at any rate, by 1512) it was known to have existed in the first century, when it held the water Jesus transformed into wine at Cana (Jn 2:6).[53]

Fig. 8.3 The Alhambra Vase, Nationalmuseum, Sweden, CC BY-SA 4.0, Linn Ahlgren / Nationalmuseum, https://collection.nationalmuseum.se/eMP/eMuseumPlus?service=ExternalInterface&module=collection&objectId=37866

The most important cult centres in the Far West accumulated many important Jesus relics. St. Chad's shrine at Lichfield included, in a 1345–16 inventory, "Some of Mount Calvary. Some of Golgotha… A piece of the rock standing upon which Jesus wept bitterly and wept over Jerusalem…" and, oddly juxtaposed, "some sardine oil."[54] Charles IV's (1316–78) relic collection included two thorns from the crown, the tablecloth from the Last Supper, Mary's breast-milk, and Mary Magdalene's breast.[55] For much of the century the imperial collection of relics at Nuremberg was displayed annually. A coloured woodcut from the 1487 Heiltumsbüchlein illustrates a child and two women using mirrors to collect some of those relics' power.[56] Santa Croce in Jerusalem had the *titulus*, the

53 Summer Kenesson, "Nasrid Lustre Pottery," *Muqarnas* 9 (1992): 93–115 (105–07); Otto Kurz, "The Strange History of an Alhambra Vase," *Al-Andalus* 40 (1975): 205–12; Diego de Mérida, "Viaje a Oriente [1512]," ed. Antonio Rodríguez Moñino, *Analecta Sacra Tarraconensia* 18 (1945): 115–87 (123).

54 J. Charles Cox, ed., *Catalogue of the Muniments and Manuscript Books Pertaining to the Dean and Chapter of Lichfield* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1886), 199–200, 209.

55 Welsh, *Battle for Christendom*, 105.

56 *Heiligthumpuchlein: Wie das hochwirdigst Auch kaiserlich Heiligthum vnd die grossen Römischen gnad darzu gegeben Alle Jaer außgerufft vnd geweiß wirdt in der*

sponge offered to him, Thomas's finger, two thorns, part of the true cross, and a nail. Ragusa Cathedral's treasury is an armoury of relics, including one of John the Baptist's hands, parts of the true cross, and Jesus's swaddling clothes in a silver chest.[57]

The greatest relic collector was Frederick III, the Wise (1463–1525), of Saxony, a grandson to Frederick II, the Gentle (1412–64), and a member of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre. Frederick, through his own pilgrimage and his purchasers' commercial efforts, assembled a vast set of relics, almost 20,000 in total. Lucas Cranach the Elder (ca. 1472–1553) made woodcuts illustrating 117 of his reliquaries. The prince-elector's stockpile included beard hair, eight thorns from the crown of thorns, myrrh and gold brought by Magi, straw and wood from Jesus's crib, a towel used to dry disciples' feet after Jesus washed them, Mary's milk, wood from the tree that bowed to Jesus in Egypt, a piece of Longinus's spear, particles from the place where Jesus's disciples hid from the Jews, a piece of the bread Jesus gave disciples after his Resurrection, and fragments from the cross, the clothing he wore while being flagellated, the stone from which he ascended into heaven, the Holy Sepulchre, the table from the Last Supper, a cross nail, and the Crucifixion sponge.[58] Pilgrims who came to Wittenberg to partake in the cult of these relics could have their post-mortem time in purgatory reduced by 1,902,202 years and 270 days, through a mechanism called an "indulgence."[59]

Indulgences

Perhaps inspired by the fifteenth-century love of accumulation and inventories, the previous section might read like one blessed thing after another. Historians would like to know more about how Jesus objects were used, and what specific powers they had, than the sources tell us. Unfortunately, most of the pilgrims

löblichen Statt Nüremberg (1487), Nuremberg, Staatsarchiv, Reichsstadt Nürnberg Handschriften 399a, fol. 4.

57 Robin Harris, *Dubrovnik: A History* (London: Saqi Books, 2006), 223.

58 Kathryn M. Rudy, *Rubrics, Images and Indulgences in Late Medieval Netherlandish Manuscripts* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 33, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004326965

59 Robert Bruck, *Friedrich der Weise als Förderer der Kunst* (Strassburg: Heitz and Mündel, 1903), 208–16; Hildegrad Zimmermann, *Lukas Cranach d. Ä. Folgen der Wittenberger Heiligtümer und die Illustrationen des Rhau'schen Hortulus animae* (Halle: Gebauer-Schwetschke, 1929); *Wittemberger Heiligthumsbuch* (Munich: Hirth, 1884 [1509]); Paul Kalkoff, *Ablass und Reliquienverehrung an der Schloßkirche zu Wittenberg unter Friedrich dem Weisen* (Gotha: Perthes, 1907), 50–66; Livia Cárdenas, *Friedrich der Weise und das Wittenberger Heiltumsbuch: Mediale Repräsentation zwischen Mittelalter und Neuzeit* (Berlin: Lukas, 2002), 19–24; Ernst Schulte-Strathaus, "Die Wittenberger Heiligtumsbücher von Jahre 1509 mit Holzschnitten von Lucas Cranach," *Gutenberg-Jahrbuch* 5 (1930): 175–86.

who used a mirror to save a relic's power and then returned home to apply it to a sick cow did not record the application, or the outcome; their concern was for present livestock not future historians. The one aspect of relics that sources address in abundance is the mechanics of indulgences.[60]

Every sin entailed a penalty, appropriate in degree to the gravity of the sin. Normally, that penalty was paid off by some pious activity, for example, fasting during Lent. Any penalties "unpaid" at the time of death would have to be worked off, far less comfortably, in purgatory, before the soul could enter heaven. Unlike in heaven and hell, time passed in purgatory, and passed painfully. Purgatorial sentences could last days, years, or millennia. Indulgences cancelled out these sentences. An indulgence was a kind of pardon issued by bishops for the remission of a penalty incurred by the sinner. By this mechanism, the Church transferred some of the merit earned by Jesus, or by some saint, to the sinner who had performed a specified action.

The practice was justified in terms of the canon,[61] and theorized in terms of a redistribution of the vast leftover merit from Jesus's Passion that had gone into an infinite "treasury of merit" under Church control. Only valid after the sinner had felt regret and undergone a formal confession, the indulgence was a kind of restitution also thought to make the sinner less likely to offend in the future. An indulgence document typically specified terms and conditions, and was authorized by the seals of the various bishops involved.

The power of an indulgence was quantified in terms of time. Theologians disagreed on whether those time measurements represented time spent during life in penance or rather time spent after death in purgatory. The twelfth century saw a shift from fractional quantities (e.g., one third of existing penalty) to absolute quantities (e.g., ten years). Note that fractional calculations had been done in iterations: if you had twenty-seven years' penalty, and an indulgence removed a third of that, the first application of the indulgence reduced the penalty to eighteen years, the second removed a third of that new balance (so six years, with the new balance at twelve), and the third removed a third of that new balance (so four years), with the final balance at eight. In contrast, the new method with absolute quantities was less complicated and, in one explanation, *discretius* [more discrete]—a complex adjective that could mean

60 Walter Gibson, "Prayers and Promises: The Interactive Indulgence Print in the Later Middle Ages," in *Push Me, Pull You: Imaginative, Emotional, Physical, and Spatial Interaction in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art*, ed. Sarah Blick and Laura D. Gelfand (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 277–324, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004215139_009; R. N. Swanson, ed., *Promissory Notes on the Treasury of Merits: Indulgences in Late Medieval Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047410522

61 Mt 16:18; Jn 20:23.

either prudent or disconnected, like integers with separated and distinct values. A contemporary commentator likened the new indulgence-calculation system to the way a king paid his mercenaries.[62]

Each indulgence was linked to an action required to earn the indulgence, and such action varied widely. Pilgrims visiting a relic could get an indulgence linked to that relic. On a 1486 pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Konrad Grünemberg (d. 1494) kept a journal recording the indulgences he collected, using a cross T to mark the locations where he acquired them, such as the Golden Gate of Palm Sunday.[63] Attending a mass or participating in a procession could earn an indulgence. They could be "purchased" with prayers, or with money, or both. Indulgences were offered for acts of charity, for the "protection" of Christendom (as through a crusade), for the establishment and refurbishment of churches, and for the construction and maintenance of transportation infrastructure, valuable for its potential to decrease travellers' swearing.[64] Voicing the name of Jesus after completing such a good work allowed for an indulgence of ten or twenty days.[65] Members of one confraternity at Assisi earned forty days' indulgence each time they began a meeting by intoning, "Jesus Christ be Praised."[66] Reciting the prayers known as the Fifteen Os every day for a year sprung fifteen souls out of purgatory.[67] In 1391, Boniface IX announced that anyone who had a valid excuse for not attending the 1390 Jubilee in Rome could obtain the same indulgence won by an attendee: after giving a sincere confession, visit four churches in Liège and remit directly to the papacy all the money that the would-be pilgrim saved by not travelling all the way to Rome. In 1514–15, Pope Leo X (1475–1521) and Emperor Charles V (1500–58) worked out an agreement on sharing proceeds for an indulgence, one third for the construction of St. Peter's in Rome, and two thirds for the construction of anti-flooding dykes in the Netherlands.[68]

62 Robert W. Shaffern, "The Medieval Theology of Indulgences," in Swanson, ed., *Promissory Notes*, 11–36 (23–24), https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047410522_003. We might also associate the old ratios with deep-ken and the new absolute quantities with plain-ken measurement.

63 Andrea Denke, *Konrad Grünembergs Pilgerreise ins Heilige Land 1486* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2011), 251.

64 Shaffern, "Medieval Theology," 17–18.

65 For an example of a twenty-day indulgence, see BodL MS Lat. liturg. e. 17. See Swanson, "Praying for Pardon," in Swanson, ed., *Promissory Notes*, 215–40 (229), https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047410522_010

66 Francesco Santucci, ed., "Statuto della fraternita dei disciplinati di S. Lorenzo," in *Le fraternite medievali di Assisi*, ed. Ugolino Nicolini, Enrico Menestò, and Francesco Santucci (Assisi: Accademia Properziana del Subasio, 1989), 217–304 (300).

67 BodL MS Lyell 30, fol. 41v–43r.

68 Eugène Bacha, ed., *La chronique liégeoise de 1402* (Brussels: Kiessling, 1900), 419–20; Paul Frédéricq, *Codex documentorum sacratissimarum indulgentiarum neerlandicarum* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1922), 23–24; Charles M. A. Caspers, "Indulgences in the

In the fourteenth century, indulgences began to be used for the dead. This was debated by theologians, but, in 1476, Pope Sixtus IV (1414–84) officially issued an indulgence for both the living and the dead.[69] This was an attractive, affordable alternative for the mass for the dead—so direct a competition that Church officials feared it would cut into the market for masses.[70]

Given the huge quantity of Jesus's merit that the Church had access to, as well as unscrupulous salesmen who could make unauthorized promises, the total volume of claimed remissions sky-rocketed. By the fifteenth century, indulgences often had tens of thousands of days linked to them.[71] A century later, one English indulgence, claiming authorization from John XXII (1244–1334), and tied to the Holy Cross, for saying three prayers promised "ten hundred thousand Years of Pardon."[72] Others offered days or years equal to the number of gravel stones in the ocean, the number of raindrops on a rainy day, or the number of grain-sheaves or grass-blades that grow during the Easter season.[73] Praying before one image of the instruments used to torture Jesus offered up 6755.5 years and 3 days.[74] Reciting a given prayer before the Veil of Veronica (ca. 1482) would offer so many days' remission "that I could not hardly conceive."[75] Plausibility was the only limit. Those quantities often had deep-ken meaning, either through large round numbers or through consonance with natural or Biblical imagery. Some indulgences gave a number of years equal to the number of Christ's wounds, with 6666 being a frequent count of them.[76] Even an ugly number, and thus oriented to the plain ken, like "6755.5 years and 3 days," was possibly the result of adding together more obviously deep-ken figures.

We can take a closer look at a booklet of prayers and indulgences published in Augsburg in 1515, the *Jubilacio Anime* [The Soul's Joy]. A complete statement of an indulgence links the action to three variables: the number of bishops authorizing it, and the magnitude of the indulgence expressed in years, and/or

---

Low Countries, c. 1300–c. 1520," in Swanson, ed., *Promissory Notes*, 65–99 (73–74, 84–85), https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047410522_005

69 Craig M. Koslofsy, *The Reformation of the Dead: Death and Ritual in Early Modern Germany, 1450–1700* (New York: St. Martin's, 2000), 26.

70 Christine Göttler, "Is Seeing Believing? The Use of Evidence in Representations of the Miraculous Mass of Saint Gregory," *The Germanic Review* 76 (2001): 121–42 (133), https://doi.org/10.1080/00168890109601550

71 Gibson, "Prayers," 321.

72 Johann Erhard Kapp, *Sammlung einiger zum Päpstlichen Ablaß…gehörigen Schriften* (Leipzig: Martini, 1721), 511.

73 Rudy, *Rubrics*, 37; Diana Webb, "Pardons and Pilgrims," in Swanson, ed., *Promissory Notes*, 241–75 (247–48), https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047410522_011

74 John B. Friedman, *Northern English Books, Owners and Makers in the Late Middle Ages* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 171–73, 331.

75 Reproduced in Parshall, *Origins of European Printmaking*, 241 (cat. no. 71).

76 Rudy, *Rubrics*, 44.

in days. The *Jubilacio* indulgences have authorizations ranging up to 138 bishops (fol. 22r), an ugly number with plain-ken force. One set of indulgences in it specified values for doing different things with respect to the name of Jesus: saying it (140 days), bowing at it (5 years, 20 days), looking at it (5 years), and beating the heart (300 days).[77] Consider three year-day totals, and how they look from the two kens:

FOL.	YEARS	DAYS	COMMENT
22v	33,000	40	This indulgence has deep-ken power in both numbers: 33,000 is the number of Jesus's years(!) on earth, times 10^3, while 40 days is the number of days he spent in the desert, and thus the number of days in Lent.
18v	3	15,860	This duration might have been expressed as, roughly, 43 years and 154 days, but 3 has more deep-ken strength than 43, and 15860 has more plain-ken strength than 154. Note that numbers of days greater than 365 are not typically converted to years.
19r	40,024	96	Here, 40024 is attractive to the plain ken, but perhaps is the sum of two numbers attractive to the deep ken, 40,000 and 24. The 96 days adds precision; the total is equal to, approximately, 40024.26 years.[78]

Table 8.1 Examples of Indulgence Periods in the *Jubilacio Anime*.

The printing press allowed for mass, and therefore economical, production of indulgences, usually with an image, a prayer, and a promise.[79] Johann Geiler von Kayserberg (1445–1510) explained how to behave before such images, sold for a penny apiece: "Then show yourself to them [the saints depicted on the images] in outward respect, kiss the image on the paper, kneel down before it!"[80] A similar indulgence offers viewers who say five paternosters and five Ave Marias an indulgence of forty years and one hundred and forty days through

77 The German verbs are *nennen*, *naigen*, *anplicken*, *klopfenn ans herze*. *Jubilacio Anime* (Augsburg: n.p., 1515), fol. 27v–28r.

78 Note that all these numbers are given in Roman numerals, so this is "xl thousand xxiiii year and xlvi day." Perhaps xxiiii is even uglier than 24. I would think xlvi is also highly ugly, with four units, not in order of magnitude, but can see the contrary argument.

79 Nikolaus Paulus, *Geschichte des Ablasses im Mittelalter*, 3 vols. (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1923), III, 294–96.

80 Otto Clemen, *Die Volksfrömmigkeit des ausgehenden Mittelalters* (Dresden: C. Ludwig Ungelenk, 1937), 14.

the authority of four popes and forty bishops.[81] Prayers before images such as the Arma Christi, the Gregory the Great mass, and the various Veronica icons could trigger the remission of thousands of years of punishment.[82] One ca. 1450 woodcut of the Crucifixion, painted with red to show off the volume of blood, under the caption "ecce homo" has a prayer to the Sacred Heart that promised an 80,000-year remission.[83]

Few critics objected fundamentally to the practice of indulgences, although many denounced serious abuses of it. The popular understanding underwent a shift regarding what an indulgence could accomplish: where once it was a mere remission of penance, increasingly there arose a more optimistic, and ungrounded, expectation that it allowed sinners to sin freely, without remorse or consequence. Scholars attempted, without much success, to curb indulgence inflation. Jean Gerson (1363–1429) repeatedly denounced "certain fatuous and superstitious" indulgences, such as 20,000-year remission for reciting the paternoster before an image.[84] The difficulty in verifying indulgences allowed for fraud, a dangerous deceit: in 1481, hoodwinked locals in Kampen beheaded a man for selling fake indulgences. Even writers in the Modern Devotion movement, never shy about criticizing Church practices contrary to how they understood Jesus's message, accepted the basic mechanism of a contrite sinner purchasing a reduction of time in purgatory.[85]

The indulgence practice was thus a man-made system to take advantage of a "natural" resource, Jesus's merit. It was not renewable, but it was infinite. Why should Church officials drawing from an infinite treasury set any numbers? Perhaps the apparent randomness suggested, in the plain ken, authenticity. Numbers might have been chosen to maximize participation and overall salvation—to encourage greater piety by priming the pump.

Cross Cult

The cross's importance propelled the spread of cross relics, replications, and representations across a vast geography—throughout the Christian subcult's geography, so most of the Far West and some of the Near West, and even in the Core—as they were adapted locally into a wide-ranging diversity (see Chapter 7). Crosses were prominent in partly converted Lithuania by 1400, and

81 The Mass of St. Gregory (ca. 1470–95), British Museum, London, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1850-0713-16

82 Sixten Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative: The Rise of the Dramatic Close-Up in Fifteenth Century Devotional Painting* (Doornspijk: Davaco Publishers, 1984), 25–26.

83 Crucifixion, middle fifteenth century, woodcut, Cambridge University Library, GBR/0012/MS Add.5944/11.

84 Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative*, 24.

85 Caspers, "Indulgences," 68, 78–81.

by the seventeenth century had become the national symbol.[86] Crosses, or their metalwork, were featured conspicuously in the naves, right before the altar, of Georgian churches; these, often plated with gold and decorated with gospel images, were a unique feature in Georgian art.[87] Ivan the Great (1440–1505) erected a huge cross at the top of the main dome of the Moscow Kremlin. Novgorod, 500 km away, had church domes that historians have described as taking "the form of a military helmet crowned by a cross."[88] The Armenian *khachkars* were rectangular slabs with the crosses carved in relief. The lattices of Ethiopian crosses, the knots of Celtic crosses, and the floral adornments of Armenian crosses, while retaining distinctive identities, shared a complexity. Some have speculated that these complexities did not develop independently of one another, and, perhaps in the centuries before our period, missionaries from Armenia had brought them to Ireland.[89] Perhaps Armenian missionaries also brought them to Ethiopia, which is closer to Armenia than Ireland is.

Particularly visible were the large outdoor crosses that dotted the Christian landscape. By 1400, there were enough crosses and steeples, some visible ten miles at sea, to make compasses redundant until the sixteenth century: a knowledgeable pilot could navigate using steeples.[90] Across the Christian zone, large outdoor crosses marked locations for preaching ("preaching crosses") or trade ("market crosses"). They were erected as memorials for the dead, or for victories in battle. They are still known today as *Betkreuz* [prayer-cross] in German. At the western edge of the Far West, we see the Bristol High Cross (ca. 1373), or the fifteenth-century market cross of Bishops Lydeard, Somerset.[91] The Bristol cross, then or soon gilded and painted, marked the location of executions and blacksmith trade.[92] The so-called Eleanor Crosses blazoned a thirteenth-century funeral route from Lincoln to London. At the other extreme, in Kerala in the Indian Core, we see large outdoor crosses made of stone. There, in 1348–39, the Franciscan Giovanni de' Marignolli (fl. 1338–53) had erected just such a cross, but broke with tradition in adding papal arms to it. He anointed it with oil, perhaps following a local custom, perhaps importing or inventing a

86 Kevin O'Connor, *Culture and Customs of the Baltic States* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2006), 229.
87 Soltes, *National Treasures*, 108–09, 116.
88 Georgy Petrovich Fedotov, *The Russian Religious Mind: Kievan Christianity, the Tenth to the Thirteenth Centuries* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), 353.
89 A. E. Redgate, *The Armenians* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 242–43.
90 Eric Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades* (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 13.
91 Charles Pooley, *An Historical and Descriptive Account of the Old Stone Crosses of Somerset* (London: Longmans, Green, 1877).
92 M. J. H. Liversidge, *The Bristol High Cross* (Bristol: Bristol Branch of the Historical Association, 1978), 9.

new one.[93] In 1502, a Crucifixion statue was erected in Orléans, with Charles VII (1403–61) and Joan of Arc kneeling on either side.[94]

Such outdoor crosses often served as the setting for sermons. In February 1413, a foreign, unknown preacher in Wigston, England, ordered by the chaplain to stop preaching in the church, told the parishioners he would preach at the cross outside. The parishioners asked him to stay, because it was too cold out.[95] Cardinal Bessarion (1403–72) theorized the relationship between cross and sermon. In his instruction to his crusade preachers (1463), he valued the cross for its ability to inspire the faithful to military victory, as a reflection of its soteriological power. He traced its history back to the tenth plague of Egypt (Exodus 12) when it was used to mark in lamb's blood the houses of the Israelites so that their first-born would not be killed in God's wrath.[96] Thus, the Cardinal created a chain of tradition to justify the cross as something more than a mere symbol, but found its ancestor in another symbol.

The abstracted symbol of the cross had a variety of uses, for authentication, navigation, and military technology. By the fifteenth century, some people not literate enough to sign their own names, such as Africans visiting Portugal, would simply make the mark of the cross. Some merchants used stylized crosses to brand their wares.[97] The Catalan map of 1375, based apparently on earlier materials, noted Christian kingdoms in India, one near Colombo (Quilon), one near Deogiri (Daulatabad), where it placed a cross with double horizontal bar (see Fig. 8.4). Joan of Arc's sword was enhanced by five crosses.[98] Cultists

93 Carlo G. Cereti, Luca M. Olivieri, and Joseph Vazhuthanapally, "The Problem of the Saint Thomas Crosses and Related Questions," *East and West* 52 (2002): 285–310, http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/29757546; Iain Gardner, S. N. C. Lieu, and K. Parry, ed., *From Palmyra to Zayton: Epigraphy and Iconography* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 238–39; Achim Timmermann, *Memory and Redemption: Public Monuments and the Making of Late Medieval Landscape* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017).

94 Nora M. Heimann, "The Princess and the Maid of Orléans: Sculpting Spirituality During the July Monarchy," in *Joan of Arc and Spirituality*, ed. Ann W. Astell and Bonnie Wheeler (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 229–47 (235–36), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-06954-2_13

95 Lincolnshire Archives MS Vj-O, fol. 22. See Ian Forrest, *The Detection of Heresy in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 218–19, https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199286928.001.0001

96 Norman Hously, ed. and trans., *Documents on the Later Crusades, 1274–1580* (London: MacMillan Press, 1996), 147; Ludwig Mohler, ed., "Bessarions Instruktion für dir Kreuzugspredigt in Venedig (1463)," *Römische Quartalschrift* 35 (1927): 337–40 (339).

97 Examples are on the inn signs of Bicci di Lorenzo's painting *Saint Nicholas Resuscitating Three Youths*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/435669

98 Pierre Champion, ed., *Procès de condamnation de Jeanne d'Arc*, 3 vols. (Paris: E. Champion, 1920–21), II, 50–51, 140–41; Régine Pernoud, *Joan of Arc by Herself and*

at Rhodes honoured a cross made out of the water vessel Jesus used to wash the feet of a disciple.[99] Other saints could use the abstracted cross symbol, thus infusing it with their own authority. The vegetarian Francis of Paola (1416–1507) used the sign of the cross to instantly cook vegetables. Jesus's mother Mary had given a cross made of vines, with a distinctive drooping horizontal, to the fourth-century Saint Nino, a key woman in the evangelization of Georgia. Nino bound the vines with strands of her own hair, creating what became known as the grapevine cross, now in the Sioni Cathedral in Tbilisi.[100]

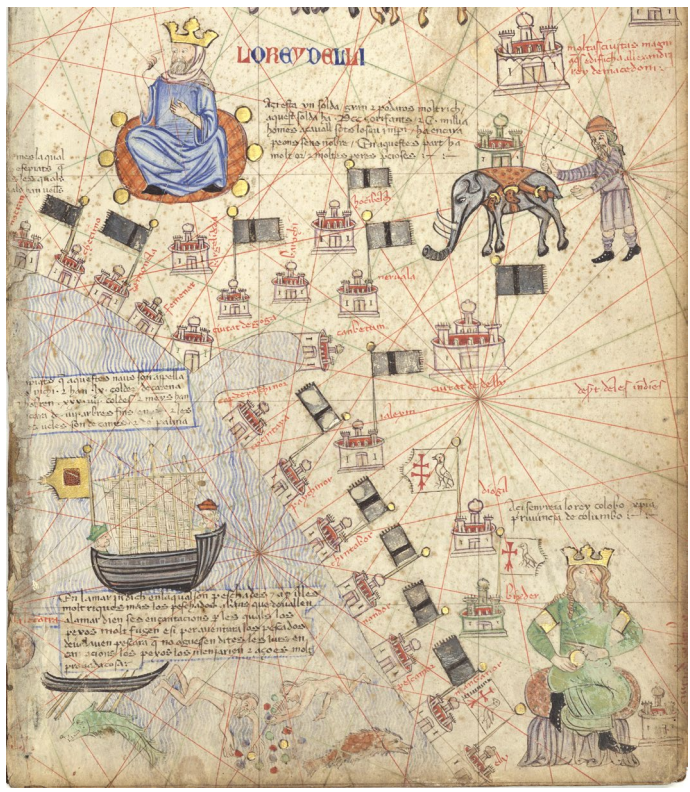

Fig. 8.4 Detail from Cresques Abraham, Atlas Catalan (1375), BnF, Espagnol 30. Wikimedia, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sultan_of_Delhi_(top)_and_King_of_Vijayanagar_(bottom)_in_the_Catalan_Atlas_of_1375.jpg

Her Witnesses (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1962), 68–69.

99 William Wey, *The Itineraries of William Wey* (London: Nichols, 1857), 52.

100 Nino Ghambashidze, "Vine and Woman—One of the Cardinal Symbols of Georgian Identity (Ethnological Research)," *Sociology Study* 7 (2017): 285–91, https://doi.org/DOI: 10.17265/2159-5526/2017.05.006

Crosses also served as prominent symbols of rulers and their ruled. Today thirteen flags of European sovereign states, as well as ten extra-European states, have the cross shape in its own right, and five more feature crowns topped with crosses. Like the evolution of the states themselves, the evolution of these crosses was slow and complex; some of their origins are modern, others obscure, perhaps in the crusades. In our period, crosses stood on banners, on coins, and on or near coats of arms. At this time, a handful of crosses solidified their identities as symbols of lords and proto-nations. In 1385, Scotland's parliament ordered Scottish soldiers to bear the cross of St. Andrew.[101] The late-fourteenth-century Gelre Armorial features dozens of crosses in its collection of arms, including those of Denmark, and the Trier and Cologne archbishoprics.[102]

Crosses had varying degrees of prominence. Some could be hard to forget: Ethiopians branded three crosses into their foreheads (the practice was documented in 1509, and we saw it on the forehead of one of our guides there in 2011).[103] On 17 January 1510, before dawn, a fiery apparition, a mile high and half a mile wide, blasted a hill village just north of Ragusa with lightning, and then took the form of a fiery cross, the size of two crossed galleys, persisting until sunrise. The air filled with crosses. A few weeks later, 100 km to the northwest, in the Croatian ghetto of Hvar, a crucifix bled from its wounds, and was brought in procession to the cathedral. The next day, the roof of the church next door to the house where the crucifix had bled collapsed. These events were interpreted as divine disapproval of the Venetian elite's treatment of Indigenous Croatians, who began a four-year rebellion.[104] Less famous crosses remained forgotten throughout our period. Some processional-cross heads were made around 1400 in England, but throughout most of our period remained lost in Hereford Cathedral's central tower's vault, where they were eventually discovered among some 250 cartloads of rubbish.[105]

101 Edinburgh, National Records of Scotland, Liber Niger, PA5/4, fol. 71rv.

102 Gelre Armorial, Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS 15652–56, fol. 32r, 48v, 55v. A cross's referent was not necessarily immediately Jesus, but could also be the associated saint who fought under it, such as George, or died on it, such as Andrew.

103 Francis M. Rogers, *The Quest for Eastern Christians: Travels and Rumor in the Age of Discovery* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1962), 126–27.

104 Speratus Nodilo, ed., *Annales Ragusini Anonymi item Nicolai de Ragnina* (Zagreb: Academia Scientiarum et Artium, 1883), 94.

105 Francis T. Havergal, *Fasti Herefordenses* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1869), 146; John Merewether, *A Statement of the Condition and Circumstances of the Cathedral Church of Hereford* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, 1842), 20–21.

Charms and Amulets

Beyond relics, some more ordinary objects in the Jesus cult were infused with power through their design and application.[106] In the fifteenth century, the English word "charm" referred to words or deeds that had supernatural power. Such power was so closely associated with physical things that, a century later, "charm" came to also refer to objects that produced charms. In the nineteenth century, the transfer of meaning was complete, and one could refer to a "charm bracelet" without any implication of magic. This chapter follows modern scholarly English to refer to these objects as "charms" or "amulets"—the latter a seventeenth-century word that has not yet lost its magical connotations.

We can look at some English Jesus charm scrolls, created throughout the fifteenth century and used, in particular, for childbirth. These were written in the vernacular, except for more critical words, which were written in Latin. Such a scroll's power could be used by looking at it, or by carrying it on one's person, or, in the case of a woman in labour, by laying it across her body. Some passages have been rubbed beyond legibility, indicating frequent use. Their technology was measurement: one scroll, probably used as a childbirth girdle by Queen Elizabeth of York (1466–1503), wife to King Henry VII (1457–1509), with a prominent IHS, enumerated the drops of blood Jesus spilled.[107] Another had the same length as Jesus's body.[108] Others featured images of scale drawings of a cross at one-fifteenth of Jesus's height, and the Crucifixion nails and side wound at a 1:1 scale (see Fig. 8.5). The advertised promises varied, but beyond safe childbirth usually included protection against weapons, fire, water, disease, evil spirits, false judgment, and false witness. With their power, one could

106 Chiara Benati, "À la guerre comme à guerre but with Caution: Protection Charms and Blessings in the Germanic Tradition," *Brathair* 17 (2017): 155–91 (175–76); Curt F. Bühler, "Prayers and Charms in Certain Middle English Scrolls," *Speculum* 39 (1964): 270–80 (277); Margaret Healy, "Wearing Powerful Words and Objects: Healing Prosthetics," *Textual Practice* 30 (2016): 1233–51, https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2016.1229905; Rosanne Hebing, "'Allmygti god this lettyr sent': English Heavenly Letter Charms in Late Medieval Books and Rolls," *Studies in Philology* 114 (2017): 720–47, http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/sip.2017.0027; Gustavo Uzielli, *Le misure lineari medioevali e l'effigie di Cristo* (Florence: Seeber, 1899); Don C. Skemer, *Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, PA: Penn State UP, 2006), 263–64; Kathryn M. Rudy, "Kissing Images, Unfurling Rolls, Measuring Wounds, Sewing Badges and Carrying Talismans," *Electronic British Library Journal* (2011), article 5.

107 Wellcome Library, MS 632. Bühler, "Prayers and Charms," 274; Walter J. Dilling, *Girdles: Their Origin and Development* (Glasgow: Macdougall, 1914), 43; *Privy Purse Expenses of Elizabeth of York*, ed. Nicholas Harris Nicolas (London: Pickering, 1830), 78, 197–98; S. A. J. Moorat, *Catalogue of Western Manuscripts on Medicine and Science in the Wellcome Historical Medical Library*, 2 vols. (London: Wellcome Historical Medical Library, 1962), I, 491–93.

108 BL Harley Roll Ch 43 A 14.

avoid dying suddenly in a state of sin without having received the sacraments. Henry VII's prayer roll, over three meters long, included a number of prayers and images, and a cross that could be multiplied to find Jesus's height, and a measure of the side wound.[109]

Fig. 8.5 Instruments of the Passion, British Library, London, Harley Roll T 11. © The British Library Board, https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=harley_roll_t_11_f001r

109 BL Add. MS 88929. See David S. Areford, "The Passion Measured: A Late-Medieval Diagram of the Body of Christ," in *The Broken Body: Passion Devotion in Late-Medieval Culture*, ed. A. A. MacDonald, H. N. B. Ridderbos, and R. M. Schlusemann (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1998), 211–38 (225–26); Benati, "À la guerre," 175–76; Hebing, "'Allmygti god this lettyr sent,'" 733–40.

One set of textual amulets were understood to be "heavenly letters," letters sent from God.[110] One from 1500, offering protection against weapons, begins with German, elevates to Latin, switches to Greek, and then returns to German before ending with the names of the Magi between cross symbols.[111] Another letter, prescribing the saying of five paternosters,[112] and another, inviting the user to take the Trinity as a mantle,[113] give protection against fire, drowning, false judgment, and heartbreak. The latter helpfully advises that to be effective the letter can be either read or heard. A late-fifteenth-century golden ring has engravings of the five wounds, which were originally filled with red enamel. The interior inscription reads, "the five wounds of God are my blessed medicine / the cross and passion of Christ are medicines to me." The power is enhanced by the names of the three kings and the words "tetragrammaton" (YHWH) and "ananyzapta." The latter may be an acronym for *Antidotum Nazareni Auferat Necem Intoxicationis Sanctificet Alimenta Pocula Trinitas Alma* [May the antidote of the Nazarene prevent death by poisoning and may the Holy Trinity bless my food and drink].[114]

Amulets' promises were powerful. One charm defends against all weapons forged after the birth of Jesus.[115] A fifteenth century text invokes the cross as a protection, to defeat swords and to shield against enemies.[116] A French amulet of the side wound was unisex, but offered different protections for women (safe birth) and men (against enemies and sudden death).[117] A ca. 1500 Irish manuscript with Jesus's body measurements explains that on the day you see those numbers you would not suddenly die, the devil would not harm you, and "Jesus would be kind to you."[118]

110 Skemer, *Binding*, 96–105.

111 D. Imesch, "Zwei alte Besegnungen," *Schweizerisches Archiv für Volkskunde* 4 (1900): 340–41. See Adolf Jacoby, "Heilige Längenmasse: Eine Untersuchung zur Geschichte der Amulette," *Schweizerisches Archiv für Volkskunde* 29 (1929), 1–17 (11).

112 Imesch, "Zwei alte Besegnungen," 341; Jacoby, "Heilige Längenmasse," 7.

113 Anton E. Schönbach, "Altdeutsche Funde aus Innsbruck," *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 33 (1889): 339–94 (393–94).

114 British Museum, AF.897 (fifteenth century), British Museum, London, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_AF-897. See Werner Karl, "Ananizapta und der Middleham Jewel," *Sammelblatt des Historischen Vereins Ingolstadt* 110 (2001): 57–74.

115 Extract in Verena Holzmann, *Ich beswer dich wurm vnd wyrmin: Formen und Typen altdeutscher Zaubersprüche und Segen* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2001), 267.

116 Benati, "À la guerre," 170; Holzmann, *Ich beswer dich*, 264–65.

117 David S. Areford, "Reception," *Studies in Iconography* 33 (2012): 73–88 (80).

118 BodL MS Rawl. B. 512, fol. 52v. See Kuno Meyer, "Die Leibeslänge Christi," *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 10 (1915): 398–402 (401–02).

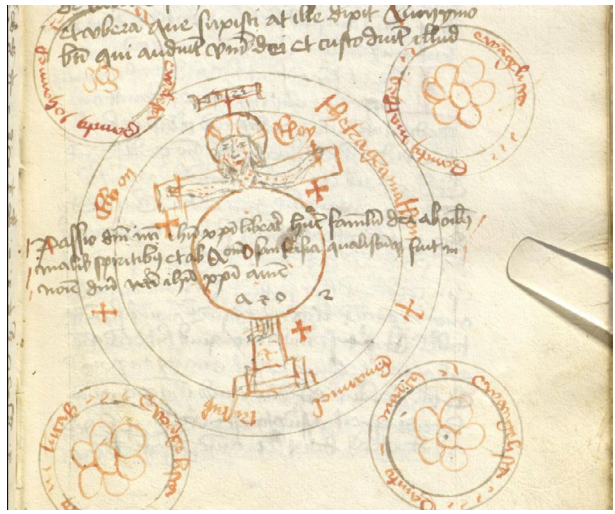

Fig. 8.6 Exorcism diagram, Rituale exorcismorum, Frankfurt am Main, Universitätsbibliothek, MS lat. oct. 113, fol. 55r. Digitized by the J. C. Senckenberg University Library Frankfurt am Main (2013), urn:nbn:de:hebis:30:2-46299, public domain, https://sammlungen.ub.uni-frankfurt.de/msma/content/pageview/4935701

How did these work? Passages from canon were often a key component. Jn 1:1–14, a description of high Christology, and Lk 11:27–28, an epilogue to an exorcism, were common texts in amulets. Carrying some Books of Hours, according to explanations noted in those books themselves, was apotropaic.[119] An illustration in an exorcism manual, after a gospel passage in which Jesus casts out demons (Lk 11), shows how to draw appropriate circles on the ground for the ritual, and includes a Crucifixion alongside powerful names of God and the evangelists, and alpha and omega (see Fig. 8.6).[120] Some charms worked through consonance between a moment in Jesus's life and the effect desired in the present. One could make a sword harmless by three times invoking the Trinity and telling it to be as gentle as Mary was towards Baby Jesus. Other charms allowed the user to escape from captivity by invoking Jesus's escaping from

119 Alp.[honse] Aymar, "Le sachet accoucheur et ses mystères," *Annales du Midi* 38 (1926): 315–17, 323–24; Paul Saenger, "Books of Hours and Reading Habits of the Later Middle Ages," in *The Culture of Print: Power and the Uses of Print in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Roger Chartier, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1989), 141–73 (147, 156, 173); D. C. Skemer, "Amulet Rolls and Female Devotion in the late Middle Ages," *Scriptorium* 55 (2001): 197–27 (212), https://doi.org/10.3406/scrip.2001.1929

120 *Rituale exorcismorum*, Frankfurt am Main, Universitätsbibliothek, MS lat. oct. 113, fol. 55r.

imprisonment, as when he ascended to heaven.[121] One Latin amulet roll from early-fifteenth-century France invoked Longinus to staunch the flow of blood. One charm (1475) specified, in English, that to be effective you should bind it to a woman in labour; the words themselves, left in Latin, included statements that Mary gave birth to Jesus, Anne gave birth to Mary, and Elizabeth gave birth to John the Baptist, with each statement visually separated from the next with a cross symbol. Other amuletic devices required kisses to be activated.[122]

Sometimes the physical scripture itself worked as an amulet. Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) wrote about Qur'anic amulets in the Islamic world. Surah 112 appeared throughout our period on amulets, and remained visible on the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. One doorway in east Africa had half of the Qur'an written on either side of it; thus, those who entered must pass through the Qur'an, which acted as a kind of guard. Passers-through did not need to read it to enjoy its protection. One Qur'anic word was taken out of context with its apotropaic meaning intact: Qur'an 2:137 includes one of the longest words of the Qur'an: فَسَيَكْفِيكَهُم *fasayakfikahum*, meaning "will thus be sufficient for you against them." The context is a promise that if Christians turn away from Islamic beliefs, then God "will suffice [or 'protect'] you against them." The 'Abbasid dynasty was fond of this word, and it became something like an amulet itself, appearing by itself on objects throughout the fourteenth century.[123]

The physical gospels, often in conjunction with crucifixes, had the power to guarantee contrition or promises. On Good Friday in 1426, the former heretic John Walcote of Hazelton was readmitted to the Church in Worcester Cathedral. He kissed the gospels, then with bare feet and head crawled around the cathedral after a crucifix held by two monks, kissing it when they stopped the circuit. In Ireland, oaths, whether for general promises, or to secure specific contractual obligations, such as the exchange of land for military service, would be sworn on the cross or on the gospels. If the cross or gospels were not sufficient, the oath could be supported by threats of interdict and excommunication, and a hostage

121 Medellågtysk läkebok, Stockholm, Kungliga Biblioteket, MS X 113, fol. 34v, 48r; Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. Pal. germ. 163, fol. 144v. See Benati, "À la guerre," 160–65.

122 Areford, "Reception," 78–82; John Brand, *Observations on Popular Antiquities* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1900), 332; Skemer, "Amulet," 226.

123 Sheila S. Blair, "Written, Spoken, Envisioned: The Many Facets of the Qur'an in Art," in *Word of God, Art of Man: The Qur'an and its Creative Expressions*, ed. Fahmida Suleman (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), 371–284 (275); Sheila Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2006), 21–22, https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474464475; Abderrahmane Lakhsassi, "Magie: le point de vue d'Ibn Khaldûn," in *Coran et talismans: Textes et pratiques magiques en milieu musulman*, ed. Constant Hamès (Paris: Karthala, 2007), 95–112.

might be taken to guarantee it further.[124] The Bohemian judge Ondřej z Dubé (ca. 1320–1412/13) explained (ca. 1400) that, after a paternoster, an oath could be said "to the cross," with a notary observing the oath taker's hands to ensure they remained down; raising them would damage the reliability of the oath.[125] In Iceland in 1440, an accused man, along with eleven compurgators, swore on the Bible that he had never slept with a specific person. That Biblical guarantee of his character, magnified eleven times, contributed to his acquittal.[126]

Doubts

Attitudes towards powerful objects, especially relics, could vary widely. Church authorities sometimes accepted the use of amulets—Thomas Aquinas (1225–74) had approved them when used with reverence[127]—and sometimes outlawed them. Louis XI (1423–83) was preoccupied, in the words of a modern historian, with "everything that heaven had left in the way of tangible signs of its passage on earth," and that preoccupation sped the King on pilgrimages to relics.[128] One fifteenth-century prohibition singled out the use of Jesus measurements.[129] Early in the sixteenth century, William Tyndale (ca. 1494–1536) complained about those who "hang a piece of St. John's gospel about their necks."[130] Conditioned by contemporary recognition of the power of Rome's Scala Sancta, Martin Luther (1483–1546) climbed to the top while praying the paternoster to save his grandfather from purgatory, but later mused, "Who knows whether it's true."[131] Some of the humanists and figures like John Wycliffe (ca. 1328–84) were concerned about the popular cults that surged around relics. Lollards mocked the entire concept of relics: they were "blind" and "deaf," and the offerings pilgrims gave to shrines gave benefit not to Jesus, but only to the shrine itself. If you need to honour a relic from the time of Jesus, they asked sarcastically, why not instead

124 James A. Watt, "Gaelic Polity and Cultural Identity," in *A New History of Ireland, Volume II: Medieval Ireland 1169–1534*, ed. Art Cosgrove (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005), 352–96 (327, 342).

125 Jeanne E. Grant, "Oaths and Credibility in the Middle Ages: *Práva zemská česká* as a Starting Point," in *Evropa a Cechy na konci stredoveku*, ed. Eva Doležalová, Robert Novotný and Pavel Souku (Prague: Filosofia, 2004), 159–69 (166).

126 Jón Þorkelsson, ed., *Diplomatarium Islandicum: Íslenzkt Fornbréfasafn, sem hefir inni a halda bréf og gjörninga, dóma og máldaga, og arar skrár, er snerta Ísland ea íslenzka Menn*, 16 vols. (Reykjavík: Kaupmannahöfn, 1899–1902), V, 13–14.

127 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, II–II, q. 96, art. 4.

128 Denieul-Cormier, *Wise and Foolish Kings*, 349–50.

129 *Heidelberger Bilderkatechismus*, Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. Pal. germ. 438.

130 William Tyndale, *An Answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue*, ed. Henry Walter (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1850), 61.

131 Martin Luther, *Werke*, 120 vols. (Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1914), LI, 89.

worship Judas's lips?[132] Intellectual elites had no monopoly on doubt; we have seen papal concerns about how the Roman masses would react to the arrival of a Holy Lance of dubious origin. Opinions could vary with a single observer: Bernardino of Siena ridiculed some relics ("Maybe the Virgin Mary was a cow, who had given her milk [...] like a beast?"[133]) but supported others, such as the straw from the Nativity, now in Rome—and noted that the Bible book Ecclesiastes reported the straw as untouched by the pious donkey and ox there.[134] Because belief in relics did not imply belief in all relics, discernment was required.

The Shroud of Turin's status was slippery, and required careful treatment. Sometimes it was promoted as the Shroud itself, and at other times as merely a "figure or representation" of the shroud. Buttressed by ducal support, the Shroud earned the careful support of the papacy. Pope Clement VII, for example, in blocking an attempt to suppress the cult entirely, insisted that the priest who displayed it should announce "in a loud and intelligible voice, without any fraud" that this was only an image of the Shroud. Papal indulgences were offered in 1466, 1506, 1507, 1519, 1530, 1552, 1582, and into the seventeenth century and beyond.[135]

True Cross relics especially attracted doubts. John Mandeville rolled his eyes about the cross fragment on Cyprus: what local monks passed off as the True Cross was really only the cross of Dismas, the good thief executed next to Jesus. Mandeville did not doubt that it was a relic, but merely downgraded its identity to something more plausible.[136] Some Muslim writers were disturbed by the Christian practice of worshipping the cross, mere matter.[137] The Egyptian historian Taqi al-Din al-Maqrizi (1364–1442) debunked the cross cult with the plain ken, by pointing out that Jesus himself had never held the cross as an

132 H. S. Cronin, "The Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards," *English Historical Review* 22 (1907): 292–304 (300–01).

133 Bernardino of Siena, *Prediche volgari sul Campo di Siena 1427*, ed. Carlo Delcorno, 2 vols. (Milan: Rusconi, 1989), II, 809. See Franco Mormando, *The Preacher's Demons: Bernardino of Siena and the Social Underworld of Early Renaissance Italy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 102.

134 Bernardino of Siena, *Le prediche volgari*, ed. Luciano Banchi, 3 vols. (Siena: Tip. edit. all'inseg. di S. Bernardino, 1884), II, 375. I find no references to straw in Ecclesiastes.

135 Ulysse Chevalier, *Autour des origines du Suaire de Lirey* (Paris: Picard, 1903), 35–37; Paolo Cozzo, Andrea Merlotti, and Andrea Nicoletti, ed., *The Shroud at Court: History, Usages, Places and Images of a Dynastic Relic* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004390508; Robin Cormack, *Painting the Soul* (London: Reaktion, 1997), 114–29; Andrea Nicolotti, *Sindone: Storia e leggende di una reliquia controversa* (Turin: Einaudi, 2015); John Beldon Scott, *Architecture for the Shroud: Relic and Ritual in Turin* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 12–14.

136 Mandeville, *Book of Marvels*, 8–11.

137 Mikel de Epalza, *Jésus otage: Juifs, chrétiens et musulmans en Espagne* (*VI*e*–XVII*e *s.*) (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1987), 225.

important symbol.[138] After the Reformation, doubters noted that the quantity of cross fragments, combined, far exceeded the size of the cross itself—an impossibility given the plain-ken rules of spacetime.

Jesus's Resurrection and Ascension into heaven problematized the status of any earthly remains on earth. The early fifteenth century saw controversies in France and Italy about whether blood relics could be venerated. Opponents pointed out the Jesus was whole in heaven, and so any blood shed on earth would have been re-united with his body at the Resurrection. Thus, any blood remaining on earth could not be Jesus's. Eventually, in 1449, Pope Nicholas V (1397–1455) ruled in favour of the bloodcult, bypassing the problem by deciding that blood relics were not leftover from the Passion, but newly created blood of miraculous origin.[139]

The bodily integrity of Jesus also arose in debates about the foreskin relics. We can better understand their perspective on the foreskin by considering some of their thoughts on Jesus's circumcision. We can look at two approaches, which proceed along similar lines. Gerson, in Paris, 1392, delivered a sermon on Luke, including a passage on the Circumcision.[140] Gerson explained, with the plain ken, that Jesus was circumcised only out of respect for the Jewish cultural sensibilities and respect for the law he was about to fulfill. With the deep ken, Gerson linked the eight days to the eight beatitudes, and circumcision to his own morality: he prayed, via Mary, that Jesus, circumcised, might "circumcise" Gerson's own "mental ears."[141]

Leonardo Dati's (1360–1425) was a rare pro-papal voice at the Council of Constance (1414–18). On the first day of 1417, he delivered to the Council a sermon for the Feast of the Circumcision, drawn from the festal reading, Lk 2:21: "After eight days were accomplished, that the child should be circumcised." Dati's argument had tracks in both kens. With the plain ken, he recognized that Jesus was circumcised eight days after his birth in part because of the cultural-medical practices of the time. Dati recognized the custom of circumcision as a part of first-century Jewish law. That law was limited in time and space, and indeed it was Jesus himself who ended it, by introducing its replacement, the law of baptism. From the first century on, circumcision was no longer required, but became at best irrelevant and potentially positively dangerous. With the

138 Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, "Some Neglected Aspects of Medieval Muslim Polemics against Christianity," *The Harvard Theological Review* 89 (1996): 61–84 (76), https://doi.org/10.1017/s0017816000031813

139 Chenu, "Sang du Christ," col. 1094–97.

140 Jean Gerson, OC, V, xiv; Thomas M. Izbicki, "Leonardo Dati's Sermon on the Circumcision of Jesus (1417)," in *Friars and Jews in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Steven J. McMichael (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 191–98 (196–97), https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047400219_013

141 Jean Gerson, "In Circumcisione Domini," in OC, V, 459–63.

deep ken, Dati asserted that decorum (*congruitate*) required any legislator to voluntarily submit to the law, and so Jesus had to submit to the law of circumcision even as he repealed it. In addition, circumcision worked as a symbol with deep-ken force. Jesus's bleeding during the Circumcision prefigured bleeding during his execution. Original sin was *transfunditur* [transfused] (through the penis, implying that injuring that organ gave a moral benefit). The eight days between birth and circumcision to the plain ken was a historical custom, but to the deep ken was a symbol of the seven—a number of perfection—virtues plus their fulfillment (7+1=8).[142]

In general, theologians believed that circumcision had once been important, but with Jesus's new dispensation the operation no longer had any sacramental use. Instead, it was a first-century cultural artifact now useful only for its ability to teach a moral lesson. This reflects a double shift of the deep ken to the plain. These circumcision complications problematized debates on the foreskin relics themselves. Some contemporary theologians, using the plain ken, objected to multiple foreskins. Others repeated the argument about the blood relics: The existence of even one foreskin undermined the Resurrection, as Jesus's body should be fully intact in Heaven. Jan Hus (ca. 1370–1415) found the entire business ridiculous: Jesus's foreskin was no more independent of Jesus than his head was.[143]

In some cases, the authenticity of a Jesus object was proved not by intellectual argument, but by the relic's manifest ability to work miracles.[144] The True Cross's ability to multiply itself in defiance of plain-ken spacetime rules was taken not only as evidence of fraud, but of its power and truth.[145] Similarly, crucifixes, as well as statues of the Madonna, would miraculously travel long distances around the Mediterranean. Sicily was a hotspot for this, and on Corsica the Église Sainte-Croix de Bastia housed a black-oak crucifix recovered from the Mediterranean by fishermen in 1428.[146] Crucifixes bled miraculously for the 1400 Jubilee at Rome.[147] One pilgrim at Cyprus described that the ambiguous cross, of Jesus or of the Good Thief, floated in the air without support, and at Rhodes the holy thorn blossomed annually on Good Friday.[148]

Very few dismissed all relics, even those existing in implausibly high numbers. Some relics might have only touched the original, or contained some

142 Izbicki, "Leonardo Dati's Sermon," 191–98.
143 Jan Hus, "Tractatus," in *Opera Omnia*, ed. Václav Flajšhans, 3 vols. (Prague: Bursik, 1904), I, fasc. 3, 10–11; Palazzo, "Veneration," 167–68.
144 John O'Donovan, ed., *Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters*, 2nd ed., 7 vols. (Dublin: Hodges, Smith, 1856), IV, 1118–19.
145 Morse, "Creating Sacred Space," 64.
146 Giovanni Becatti, "Il Culto di Ercole a Ostia e un nuovo rilievo votivo," *Bullettino della Commissione archeologica comunale di Roma* 67 (1940): 37–60 (53–54); Giuseppe Pitrè, *Feste patronali in Sicilia* (Palermo: Clausen, 1900), 20.
147 Welsh, *Battle for Christendom*, 74.
148 Wey, *Itineraries*, 52.

fragment of the original, and then the tactile chain forgotten, but were not necessarily intentionally fraudulent. Perhaps the plain-ken origins of such relics subordinated to the deep-ken origins—the object's relationship to the perfect object, or to Christ. Mandeville's *Travels* understood that the spear that pierced Jesus's side was unlikely to be in Constantinople and Paris simultaneously, and indeed the spear-heads in the two cities were of different sizes.[149] John Baylis of Rolvenden (d. ca. 1511) recommended relics be examined by torching them: holy relics would survive. Annoyed at his wife's pilgrimage to see local relics, which he considered a cash grab, he was antagonized by her report that the parson had claimed their sanctity on the grounds of their surviving a church fire. He insisted, perhaps sarcastically, on personally seeing them directly burnt: "When I shall see them before me put between two faggots burning and they not perished, then will I believe that they be holy relics."[150]

Envoi

This chapter, alongside those on written sources (Chapter 4) and on places (Chapter 5), together outline the main facets of the Jesus cult: written accounts, objects, and buildings. We see four characteristics stretching across these categories: first, many of the examples were biographical, in that they connected with different points of Jesus's life. One could hypothetically ignore the canonical accounts to construct a Life from the relics and temples, from his umbilical cord to the Damascus minaret that awaited his return. Second, many were instructional, in that they made an argument for (or against) Jesus's divinity. Third, many were powerful, in that they effectively added to the material or immaterial prosperity of the cultists who used them, from Palestinian women who wanted to lactate bounteously to Spanish farmers seeking to free their cows from "passions and sicknesses." Fourth, many were liturgical, in that they played roles in the public worship of Jesus and of Yahweh. We also see a rise of the plain ken as a cause of, and a result of, better astronomy and travel: Muslim improvements in the *qibla*, as well as Christians travelling to the Holy Land and collecting ugly numbers as souvenirs.

Fifteenth-century Jesus objects had functions that could be described as both magical and mundane. A textile imagery could make the invisible seen, and its decorations could reveal its own value and the value of what it depicted. A bell could consonate with the liturgy to ward off storms and spirits, while any cross-shaped object could consonate with the True Cross, the instrument of Jesus's execution and triumph. Many of the functions of the cross involved

149 Mandeville, *Book of Marvels*, 11.

150 K. L. Wood-Legh, ed., *Kentish Visitations of Archbishop William Warham and His Deputies, 1511–1512* (Kent: Kent Archaeological Society, 1984), 211.

communication, marking locations for navigators and preachers, proclaiming the generosity of the gift giver or the assent of the illiterate. When doubts arose, many spoke to the plain ken: the rules of spacetime prevented multiplication, or demoted circumcision and crucifixion from powerful symbols to everyday first-century customs.

Perhaps the most global Jesus object of the period is this chasuble (see Fig. 8.7).[151] We see a gold-threaded phoenix and a guardian lion (石獅) on this silk piece—a distinctively Chinese pattern. The phoenix flies to something not native to China—five interlaced vertical strokes forming a highly stylized version of the word "Allah." On the orphrey, the gold-thread-on-silk band, the Latin word "Maria" hovers beneath a pelican piercing its breast so the blood can nourish its chicks. This is thus a Christian-Islamo-Chinese chasuble. It had been made in central Europe by artisans inspired by Muslims aesthetics, which in turn had been inspired by the Chinese. Such a garment would have been worn by a Christian priest celebrating the Eucharist, producing the tangible blood and body of Jesus in a way less violent than a pelican, but more mysterious, as we see in the next chapter.

Fig. 8.7 Fragmentary Chasuble with Woven Orphrey Band (ca. 1380s), Cleveland Museum of Art, CC0 1.0, http://www.clevelandart.org/art/1928.653

151 See Anthony Welch, *Calligraphy in the Arts of the Muslim World* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1979), cat. 28.