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Florian Wöller • Ueli Zahnd (eds.)

Dominican Culture, Dominican Theology

The Order of Preachers and Its Spheres of Action (1215 – ca. 1600)

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Rethinking Relic Devotion in Medieval Dominican Culture

Marika Räsänen[1]

What did devotion to religious relics look like in medieval Dominican culture? In this article, I seek to answer the question from a new perspective by turning my gaze to various types of Dominican hagiographical texts and suggest that through analysing Dominican activity in producing texts that emphasise holy matter and people's interaction with that materiality, we can gain a more varied understanding of late medieval Dominican relic culture than that given by theological treatises. Seeing the concept of a relic from a new angle leads me to propose that relics are often seen from too narrow perspective on Dominican culture and the lives of late medieval people in large.

From the outset, it must be stated that in modern scholarship, the role of relics and their significance has often been diminished, especially with regard to the late Middle Ages. The strict limits set to the relics by the Catholic Church from the beginning of the thirteenth century, together with profound societal changes and decisive historical events (such as the Fourth Crusade, the Black Death, and the Great Western Schism) have often been interpreted as a watershed moment after which the holy remains were held in lesser regard both in political discourse and in people's lives in Western Europe.[2]

Similar opinions are related with regard to the Order of Preachers, although more in terms of an inner attitude within the Order than in terms of a sociopolitical phenomenon. According to a common scholarly view, the Order and the friars were not interested in venerating their saints and their relics. The rea-

[1] Writing of this chapter has been funded by The Finnish Research Council, the project (no. 349210) *Rethinking the Late Medieval Relic, c. 1200–1550.*

[2] In 1979 Martin Heinzelmann, for example, published an influential study, *Translationsberichte und andere Quellen des Reliquienkultes*, in which he meticulously examined the relic cults up to Lateran IV, which in his view inaugurated a decline in relic cults. He claimed that they increasingly lost their originality and such text genres as *Historiae translationes* or *inventationes* settled for routinely and briefly repeating old models with no innovative character of their own, even though the historical situation had changed. Heinzelmann, Martin: *Translationsberichte und andere Quellen des Reliquienkultes* (Typologie des sources du Moyen Âge occidental 33), Turnhout 1979. See further Schmitt, Jean-Claude: *Religione, folklore e società nell'Occidente medievale*, Rome 1988; Vauchez, André: *La Sainteté en Occident aux derniers siècles du Moyen Âge. D'après les procès de canonisation et les documents hagiographiques*, Rome 1988; Camille, Michael: *The Gothic Idol. Ideology and Image-making in Medieval Art*, Cambridge 1989, pp. 271–277; Krötzl, Christian: "Miracles au tombeau—miracles a distance. Approches typologiques", in ed. Denise Aigle: *Miracle et Karāma* (Bibliothèque de l'École des hautes études. Sciences religieuses 109), Turnhout 2000, pp. 557–576; Lester, Anne E.: "What remains: women, relics and remembrance in the aftermath of the Fourth Crusade", in *Journal of Medieval History* 40 (2014), pp. 311–328; Perry, David M.: *Sacred Plunder: Venice and the Aftermath of the Fourth Crusade*, University Park PA 2015.

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son for the friars' supposed reserve towards miraculous materiality has often been presented as a result of their 'intellectualism' and scholasticism.[3] Examples mentioned of this reluctance include the attitude of the first generation of friars towards Dominic's relics as well as indifference to the canonization of Thomas Aquinas and his miracles.[4] My view is that relics received varying attention in several fields of Dominican activity, a fact which itself tells us much about the friars' interests in holy matter.[5]

While I am focusing here on Dominican relic practices, I am still seeking at the same time to contextualize them within wider discussions on relics and expressions of sacred materiality. I ask what kind of expressions holy bones and other forms of materiality received in Dominican culture and what the significance of the relics was in this culture. In analysing the pertinent sources—a range of Dominican *vitae*, miracle collections, and liturgical and canonisation materials—I utilise the concept of lived religion, understood here to have been expressed in hagiographical discourse in such themes as practices for handling holy materiality or emotions awakened by these items within people who communicated with them.[6] Understanding practices of discussing and communicating with different items from the angle of lived religion can offer us a bottom-up perspective to objects acting as relics: it opens us up to a new pluralism in regard to holy matter.

[3] Donald Prudlo considers especially the friars' negative attitude towards the miraculous from this perspective, see Prudlo, Donald: "Heretics, Hemorrhages, and Herrings. Miracles and the Canonization of Dominican Saints," in eds. Sari Katajala-Peltomaa/Jenni Kuuliala/Iona McCleery: *A Companion to Medieval Miracle Collections* (Reading Medieval Sources 5), Leiden/Boston 2021, pp. 102–124.

[4] Walz, Angelo: "Historia canonizationis sancti Thomae de Aquino", in ed. Sadoc Szabó: *Xenia Thomistica: Divo Thomae doctori communi ecclesia occasione VI centenarii ab ejus canonizatione oblata*, 3 vols., Rome 1925, vol. 3, pp. 105–172; Vauchez 1988, *passim*, esp. pp. 88–89; Canetti, Luigi: *L'invenzione della memoria. Il culto e l'immagine di Domenico nella storia dei primi frati predicatori*, Spoleto 1996; Barone, Giulia: "L'agiografia domenicana alla metà del XIII secolo," in eds. Leonard E. Boyle/Pierre-Marie Gy: *Aux origines de la liturgie dominicaine*, Rome 2004, pp. 365–378; Dubreil-Arcin, Agnès: *Vies de saints, légendes de soi: L'écriture hagiographique dominicaine jusqu'au* Speculum Sanctorale *de Bernard Gui († 1331)* (Hagiologia 7), Turnhout 2011, pp. 74–75 and 82; Bergin, Patrick M. Taylor Jr.: *The Offices for the Two Feasts of Saint Dominic* (PhD Dissertation, Ohio State University 2019), p. 42.

[5] One example of relic discussions in the early days of the Order can be found from Moneta of Cremona, a Dominican friar who lived at the end of the twelfth and the first half of the thirteenth centuries, see Moneta Cremonensis: *Adversus Catharos et Valdenses, libri quinque*, ed. Tommaso A. Ricchini, Rome 1743, see for example Lib. 5, Cap. 2, § 1, pp. 410–411. On examining and testifying on the sanctity in connection with the bodies of Dominican friars, see Räsänen, Marika: "Scent, Sight, Awe: Examining the Bodily Signs of Sainthood in the Canonization Processes of Dominican Saints", in ed. Sari Katajala-Peltomaa: *Companion to Medieval Canonization Processes. New Contexts, Perspectives and Comparisons* (Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition 109), Leiden 2025, pp. 237–258.

[6] More broadly on the concept of lived religion, Katajala-Peltomaa Sari/Toivo, Raisa Maria: "Introduction to Medieval and Early Modern Experiences of Gender and Faith", in eds. Sari Katajala-Peltomaa/Raisa Maria Toivo: *Lived Religion and Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Abingdon/New York 2021, pp. 1–24.

In discussing relics and the complexity of holy materiality, I am inspired by the influential studies of Caroline Walker Bynum, Julia Smith, Tomasz Borowski, and Christopher Gerrard, who all have noted several challenges concerning the study of relics, not least the propensity of relics to defy easy categorisation.[7] The alternating power dynamic between relics and reliquaries containing them has also been discussed by several scholars. Such research has influenced my own thinking on relics, but an examination of reliquaries proper is beyond the scope of this article.[8] Instead, I propose a new way of thinking about relics: namely, that one can experience an immaterial relic-ness, or in other words, one can 'sense' a relic without having the holy item actually in hand. My broader aim is to widen the understanding of the concept of a religious relic and indicate how the turbulence of the later Middle Ages did not curtail the importance of relics, but rather gave rise to varying possible ways of perceiving sacred materiality. In order to contextualise the question of the perception of relics within the Dominican cultural milieu, it seems natural to start the discussion with the early veneration (or lack thereof) of Saint Dominic's relics.

1. Looking for the Beginnings of Dominican Relic Culture

The idea that the Dominicans rejected relic veneration of their own saints seems to originate with Jordan of Saxony's *Libellus de principiis Ordinis Paedicatorum* (c. 1234) and the canonisation testimonies (1233): these texts emphasise how the friars who were guardians of Dominic's tomb at the convent of San Nicolò in Bologna tried to prevent expressions of devotion on the part of the laity at the tomb.[9] Perhaps the most impressive description is the detailed testimony of Brother Ventura of Verona in the canonisation hearings; he depicts how numerous men and women arrived at the tomb with candles, images, and vows, and how they talked about the miracles that had been wrought for them by God because of the merits of Dominic. Brother Ventura seems to indicate that it was

[7] Bynum, Caroline Walker: *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe*, Brooklyn 2011; Smith, Julia M. H.: "Relics. An Evolving Tradition in Latin Christianity," in eds. Cynthia Hahn/Holger A. Klein: *Saints and Sacred Matter. The Cult of Relics in Byzantium and Beyond*, Washington DC 2015, pp. 41–60; Borowski, Thomasz/Gerrard, Christopher: "Constructing Identity in the Middle Ages: Relics, Religiosity, and the Military Orders", in *Speculum* 92 (2017), pp. 1056–1100; Bynum, Caroline Walker: *Dissimilar Similitudes: Devotional Objects in Late Medieval Europe*, New York 2020.

[8] Belting, Hans: *Bild und Kult: eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst*, Munich 1990; Legner, Anton: *Reliquien in Kunst und Kult: Zwischen Antike und Auklärung*. Darmstadt 1995; Boesch Gajano, Sofia: "Le tesaurizzazione delle reliquie", in *Sanctorum* 2 (2005), pp. 7–8; Hahn, Cynthia: "The Voices of the Saints: Speaking Reliquaries", in *Gesta* 36 (1997), pp. 20–31.

[9] The *Libellus* is usually thought to have been finalised at the time of Dominic's canonisation. Iordanus de Saxonia: *Libellus de Principiis Ordinis Praedicatorum*, ed. Heribert Christian Scheeben (Monumenta Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum Historica 16), Rome 1935 pp. 3–88, editio: pp. 25–88; *Acta canonizationis sancti Dominici*, ed. Angelus Maria Walz (Monumenta Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum Historica 16), Rome 1935, pp. 91–194, editio: pp. 123–194.

a special wish of the laity to enclose Dominic's body in a new tomb which was to be covered by silk cloth.[10] Jordan of Saxony's *Libellus* depicts the lay visitors at Dominic's tomb in a similar manner to Brother Ventura.[11]

If we reconsider and recontextualise these sources, we can note that the question as to the Dominican attitude towards relic veneration was ambivalent, and not originally as negative as has often been claimed. First, it is important to notice that the beginning of the thirteenth century marked a kind of transition to tighter papal control over new sanctoral cults, which might have had some effect on nascent Dominican relic veneration as well as on hagiography as a record of the cult. Through the declarations of the Lateran Council (1215), Pope Innocent III had sought to monopolise the definition and use of relics for the Church in taking measures against illegitimate and dubious relics. The new measures became European-wide law only with Gregory IX's *Liber extra* in 1234. The decretal *Cum ex eo* was based on the constitution that had also been promulgated at the Council, according to which the pope alone could authenticate new relics and no new relic could be venerated without this authentication.[12] It must be added, however, that at the same time as they were tightening regulations on proving the sanctity of relics, the popes seemed to continue to favour, indeed even encourage, new cults emerging from a correct, well-controlled milieu, especially when they were related to religious members of religious orders—like Dominic of Caleruega.[13]

It was in this atmosphere that Ventura gave his testimony and Jordan wrote his *Libellus*. The fact that Ventura's deposition had been given in the canonisation process has rarely been sufficiently discussed in research related to the question of Dominic's relic cult. In her recent article, Alessandra Bartolomei Romagnoli has acknowledged the concurrence of the canon law collection *Liber Extra* and the bull *Fons sapientie* with which Pope Gregory IX declared Dominic's canonisation.[14] Although the formalisation of the canonisation process was formally entrusted to the hands of the popes in 1234, the tradition of (and certain requirements for) the declaration of sainthood had already existed long before then.[15] Among these requirements were an existing public cult, i.e., that the candidate for sainthood must have enjoyed popular veneration in order to be elevated into the ranks of saints.[16]

[10] *Acta canonizationis sancti Dominici* 10, ed. Walz, pp. 131–132.

[11] Iordanus de Saxonia *Libellus* 122, ed. Scheeben, p. 83.

[12] Herrmann-Mascard, Nicole: *Les reliques des saints: Formation coutumière d'un droit*, Paris 1975; Paciocco, Roberto: "The Canonization of Saints in the Middle Ages: Procedure, Documentation, Meanings," in eds. Katajala-Peltomaa/Kuuliala/McCleery 2021, pp. 54–77.

[13] Bynum 2011; Bergin 2019, p. 42.

[14] Bartolomei Romagnoli, Alessandra: "Il processo di canonizzazione di Domenico di Caleruega," in eds. Viliam Štefan Dóci/Giannni Festa: *Fra trionfi e sconfitte: "La politica della santità" dell'Ordine dei Predicatori* (Dissertationes Historicae 39), Rome 2021, pp. 19–40: 20.

[15] Paciocco 2021.

[16] Vauchez 1988, pp. 43–44, 81, and *passim*.

For witnesses like Brother Ventura, the prior of San Nicolò, it would have been clear that to obtain papal canonisation, the existence of a public cult would be necessary. This might have been the reason why he so eagerly depicted visitors at Dominic's tomb. He was testifying before the officials at the canonisation hearings on the situation some ten years previously at Dominic's tomb (Dominic died in 1221). Both the special situation and the time lapse make clear that we cannot by any means take Ventura's testimony as an 'authentic voice' from the past, perhaps not even a particularly accurate one.[17] In fact, Italian scholar Luigi Canetti has affirmed in his exhaustive study on the remembrance of Saint Dominic the likelihood that the popular cult at Dominic's tomb was overemphasised and perhaps basically invented from nothing as no signs of pilgrimage can be found in other sources.[18] Canetti's view may be too negative: not only because the question of medieval source material is often complex, but also especially because canonisation testimonies were given under oath and for that reason they must be respected as proofs of belief on the part of the witnesses at least.[19] I would assume that giving a deposition in this kind of legal procedure was something that a Dominican friar would have taken seriously, but if the people's enthusiasm was more half-hearted than wished, Brother Ventura may have interpreted the activity at the tomb in a manner respecting his own views, and the views which were favourable for Dominic's successful canonisation.

From the perspective of then-contemporary papal policy, we may ask whether the possible overemphasis on devotional practices and the prohibition of expressing veneration at the tomb gave the Order an excellent opportunity to stress its obedience regarding the new decretal. Was the way of describing Dominic's nascent cult mere a rhetoric to show the Order's respect towards the tightening attitude on sainthood, including the prohibition of venerating bones and other objects of those candidates for sainthood who had not yet been canonised by the pope? Or was the alleged hiding of popular activity at Dominic's tomb a real safety precaution from the friars so as not to irritate the pope? A parallel case could be Catherine of Siena's veneration. Records of a so-called *Processo castel-*

[17] The "authenticity" of the canonisation testimonies is discussed with the special focus on the nature of the sources, i.e. how this group of sources have been produced from oral words to texts by several rounds of processing them to those written records which are surviving. See Klaniczay, Gábor: "Proving Sanctity in the Canonization Processes", in ed. Gábor Klaniczay: *Procès de canonisation au Moyen Âge: Aspects juridiques et religieux/Medieval Canonization Processes: Legal and Religious Aspects* (Collection de l'École française de Rome 340), Rome 2004, pp. 117–148; Finucane, Ronald C.: *Contested Canonizations: The Last Medieval Saints, 1482–1523*, Washington DC 2011; Katajala-Peltomaa, Sari/Kuuliala, Jenni: "Practical matters. Canonization Records in the making", in eds. Katajala-Peltomaa/Kuuliala/McCleery 2021, pp. 78–101.

[18] Canetti 1996, pp. 96–117. Contrary to Canetti's view, and in fact without particular signs of source criticism, on the beginning of Dominic's cult when his bony was entombed, see Borghi, Beatrice: "La Basilica e il convento di San Domenico in Bologna: custode di sepolture e di reliquie. Dal *Libellus Funerum* agli inventari dei sacri pegni", in ed. Roberto Lambertini: *Università, teologia e studium domenicano dal 1360 alla fine del medioevo. Atti del convegno di studi (Bologna, 21–23 ottobre 2011)* (Memorie Domenicane 45), Florence 2014, pp. 245–262.

[19] On cultural conventions as a part of testimonies, see most recently Paciocco 2021, p. 54.

lano (1411–1416) of Catherine of Siena refer to this scandal, which resulted in official hearings. The scandalous elements were caused by Catherine's public commemoration, including sermons, processions with relics and other items, and the decoration of Catherine's image with flowers.[20] Public notoriety and inflammatory speeches were always a danger in medieval communities, but it is possible that the narrative elements of the scandal were also a rhetorical means to gaining the attention of dignitaries who tried to help with securing her official canonisation.[21] Yet the situation at the beginning of the thirteenth century was perhaps more precarious as explained above and required more prudence in expressing veneration towards yet not canonized saint-candidates than in the beginning of the fifteenth century.

The discussion over the so-called "Encyclical" on the translation of Saint Dominic brings some interesting additional spice to the question of the early veneration of his relics. Traditionally, the letter was said to have been written soon after the translation and was attributed to Jordan of Saxony, who allegedly would have notified the Order on what had happened at San Nicolò. Simon Tugwell has convincingly argued that the text is apocryphal, originating only from the mid-thirteenth century—that is, twenty years later than previously thought. At any rate, the tone of the letter is strongly hagiographical. The narrative indicates that the people, not the friars, hid the miracles, and in so doing not only harmed the Order, but the Church at large as well. For that reason, the friars were forced to seek papal permission to relocate Dominic's body to a more honourable place.[22] A similar narrative pattern was utilized in Thomas Aquinas's case by William of Tocco, who levied the accusation in his *Ystoria* that Cistercian monks had hidden Thomas's body from the Dominican friars and other devotees. When people venerated Thomas at his tomb, not knowing that it was empty, they were being misled and even worse, Thomas was not receiving the honour he merited. In the telling of the *Ystoria*, Thomas himself is said to demand the transfer of his body to its original resting place, after which the

[20] Laurent, Marie-Hyacinthe: "Introduzione", in eds. Tito S. Centi/Angelo Belloni: *Il Processo Castellano: Santa Caterina da Siena nelle testimonianze al processo di canonizzazione di Venezia* (Biblioteca di Memorie Domenicane 2), Florence 2009, pp. 9–26. Justifying the celebrations, the witnesses emphasised that the normal Sunday liturgy was respected (the festivities were organised on the following Sunday from Saint Peter Martyr's feast on 29 April) and they did not contain anything which could have been seen as opposing the decretals of the Church. References to respecting Church law are numerous in the trial, and Bartolomeo da Ferrara for example also presents some Church authors who had earlier stressed that there existed such venerable individuals who, although not yet canonised, could have been considered as such by their lives and doctrine; see *Il Processo Castellano*, eds. Centi/Belloni, pp. 32 and 45–47.

[21] Krafft, Otfried: "Many Strategies and One Goal: The Difficult Road to the Canonization of Catherine of Siena," in eds. Jeffrey F. Hamburger/Gabriela Signori: *Catherine of Siena. The Creation of a Cult* (Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts 13), Turnhout 2013, pp. 25–46.

[22] *Anonymi Bononiensis Opusculum de translatione sancti Dominici*, ed. Simon Tugwell: *The so-called 'Encyclical' on the Translation of St Dominic ascribed to Jordan of Saxony. A Study in early Dominican hagiography*, Oxford 1987, pp. 151–160. Bartolomei Romagnoli 2021, pp. 22 also briefly discusses the case.

situation gets better.[23] Both cases show us wrongdoers and how God's justice prevails; the texts propagate the values and power of the saint's bodies, and by extension the importance of the relics.

I propose that the location of Dominic's original tomb "below the brethren's feet" is highly significant from the perspective of his relic cult.[24] At the friars' choir in San Nicolò, it appears more than likely that the friars who gathered around the tomb for their daily services were constantly aware of Dominic's bodily presence in their community.[25] In this kind of situation, it would be unrealistic to exclude the alternative that Dominic's relics were at the centre of the friars' attention, if not indeed veneration. The matter is also acknowledged by Agnès Dubreil-Arcin, who states that Dominic's tomb was not the target of any larger cult, but nevertheless some individual friars may have venerated Dominic discretely at his tomb.[26] Taking seriously the placement of the tomb at the friars' choir, as well as the friars' spiritual identity as the followers of Father Dominic, I would suggest that the friars' daily prayers might have contained special and regular—while at the same time unofficial—elements intended to honour Dominic's body.

In the earliest texts, such as Jordan's *Libellus* and the canonisation hearings, the initial impulse behind Dominic's public cult is attributed to the Bolognese laity. Brother Ventura seems to claim that it was public pressure that urged the friars to translate the body. As the extant sources are heavily hagiographical, it is important to read them sensitively, a tack that opens up several interpretational possibilities. One quite straightforward interpretation would be that the transfer was a simple act to promote the cult among the laity. On the other hand, the emphasis on potential lay pressure as the primary agent behind Dominic's relic cult could possibly have reduced or even removed the accusations that the friars were acting against their rule of poverty hypocritically.[27] This could also have been very important for the self-understanding of the friars. Alessandra Bartolomei Romagnoli has remarked how in Dominic's case, the emphasis on the strict observance of the Order's rule holds a key position in the canoni-

[23] Guillelmus de Tocco: *Ystoria sancti Thome de Aquino de Guillaume de Tocco (1323)*, cap. 66, ed. Claire le Brun-Gouanvic, Toronto 1996, pp. 205–207. See also Räsänen, Marika: *Thomas Aquinas's Relics as Focus for Conflict and Cult in the Late Middle Ages: The Restless Corpse* (Crossing Boundaries—Turku Medieval and Early Modern Studies 6), Amsterdam 2017, pp. 79–81.

[24] *Acta canonizationis sancti Dominici* 8, ed. Walz, p. 129. According to Brother Ventura's testimony, Dominic himself expressed his wish to be entombed "sub pedibus fratrum meorum".

[25] On the discussion about Thomas Aquinas's tomb at the choir of the Cistercian church in Fossanova and the veneration the monks presumably rendered to Thomas, see Räsänen 2017, pp. 86–103.

[26] Dubreil-Arcin states that in the beginning, Dominic's tomb was not the target of any larger cult, but she allows that some individual friars may have venerated Dominic discretely at his tomb, see Dubreil-Arcin 2011, pp. 74–75.

[27] On poverty and devotional materiality in Dominican church buildings, see Cannon, Joanna: *Religious Poverty, Visual Riches: Art in the Dominican Churches of Central Italy in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, New Haven/London 2013.

sation testimonies.[28] In the situation in which the canonisation process was a religious-political tool and was seeking its final formulation, it might have been wise to follow time-related demands in confirming Dominic's sanctity.

The concurrence of Dominic's canonisation and the promotion of new canon law regulations supposedly created a special tension in how to perceive relics in Dominican culture. In the foregoing, some hints at tensions in proclamations relating to Dominic's body can be observed: the body allegedly became the target of both intense veneration and repulsion/oblivion. Although we cannot be sure how faithfully the stories present the historical situation, it is clear that relics were regarded as powerful; they were described as causing a public reaction either for or against their veneration in both parties, the friars and the laity. The autonomous importance of relics for recognising sainthood was a strong archetype in Western religious tradition, and the tradition appears to have continued as the part of the canonisation after their papal formalisation.[29]

After Dominic's canonisation, texts such as the *Libellus* and other hagiographies based on the canonisation hearings and other oral traditions served as a model for how to be a good Dominican. Although these early texts mostly avoid explicit discussions of the significance of holy materiality on the friars' spirituality, the goodness present in Dominic's life was made manifest in a physical world. As Donald Prudlo remarks, Dominic's preaching provided convincing examples of the world of God's wonders.[30] In what follows, I suggest that the miraculous still needed to be turned into matter and be manifested through relics in everyday life.

2. Transformations of Holy Materiality

A particular moment of more explicit relic veneration in Dominican culture is the actual translation of Dominic's body (1233), approved by Pope Gregory IX.[31] In the canonisation process, several witnesses stated that when the old grave was opened, the body was found to be exuding a marvellous fragrance.[32] Brother Ventura describes how Jordan of Saxony, the Master of the Order, took Dominic's head in his hands and presented it to the friars; there were around three hundred Dominicans in the convent of Bologna at this time, gathered for the General Chapter of the Order, and they all paid tribute to the founding father of the Order by kissing his skull. Ventura adds how the miraculous odour issuing from the body and the head adhered for a long time on the friars who had touched the relics. I interpret this performance of presenting the head relic, the long-lasting perfume, and the kisses as the friars' commitment to the cult of Saint Dominic and veneration of his relics.

28 Bartolomei Romagnoli 2021.

29 Canetti, Luigi: *Frammenti di eternità. Corpi e reliquie tra Antichità e Medioevo* (Sacro/Santo N.S. 6), Rome 2002, pp. 23–75 and 152–53; Räsänen 2025.

30 Prudlo 2021, p. 111.

31 Scholars agree to a great extent on the significance of the translation for the cult, see for example Dubreil-Arcin 2011, p. 75.

32 *Acta canonizationis sancti Dominici* 10, ed. Walz, pp. 131–132.

After the canonisation, new hagiographical texts were written. First, Petrus Ferrandi (c. 1238) and then Constant of Orvieto (c. 1244–1248) composed extensive accounts concentrating on the remembrance and veneration of the saint.[33] In these texts, the translation of the body and the miraculous odour are present, but the miracle stories regarding Dominic's relics and the relic discourse in general are not continued further. Scholars have quite commonly stated that Saint Dominic's early cult remained rather traditional in these early hagiographies.[34] The impression of the friars who were uninterested in relics is present in the texts discussed above, but the image changes if we scrutinise a more varied sample and stay open even to obscure expressions of holy materiality. In so doing, we may find a vivid Dominican relic tradition from the texts gathered slightly later than Dominic's first proper hagiographies: from Gerardus de Fracheto's *Vitae fratrum* (1250s) and Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda aurea* (c. 1260), including episodes in connection with the first two Dominican saints, Dominic (1234) and Peter Martyr (1252).[35] The third Dominican to be canonised a saint was Thomas Aquinas (1323), whose case will give us greater perspective on the question of how relics were perceived. All these texts are rich in descriptions of holy matter. Their narratives appeal to all five senses in experiencing the presence of the holy. However, the *Vitae fratrum* and *Legenda aurea* also describe items which do not easily fit into the categories we tend to use when defining relics, and the significance of these descriptions seems to have gone unrecognised when speaking about devotional materiality in Dominican culture.[36]

Commonly used and influential scholarly categories of relics that divide these into 'primary' and 'secondary' ones derive from the early modern era.[37] Among others, the Dominican liturgist Pierre-Marie Gy has given a basic explanation for these two categories and what they include: "the term *relics* refers

[33] On these texts and the remembrance of Saint Dominic in general, see Canetti 1996, pp. 39–40.

[34] Barone 2004, p. 370; Dubreil-Arcin 2011, pp. 74–80.

[35] Gerardus de Fracheto O.P.: *Vitae fratrum ordinis praedicatorum: necnon Cronica ordinis ab anno MCCIII usque ad MCCLIV*, ed. Benedikt Maria Reichert, Leuven 1896. For the *Legenda aurea* I had the old version of Grässe at my disposal, but as this edition does not follow the original collection, I have also used the English translation, faithful to Jacobus's *Legenda*. Jacobus de Voragine: *Legenda aurea: vulgo historia lombardica dicta*, ed. Johann Georg Theodor Grässe, 1846; Jacobus de Voragine: *The Golden Legend. Readings on the Saints*, ed. William Granger Ryan, Princeton 1993.

[36] Julia Smith has emphasised how our main concept and its different sub-categories are a modern creation (by canon law, the Church, and theology) to classify religious items when medieval theology and thinking were much more flexible. See Smith 2015.

[37] On the term's etymology and early relic cults, see especially: Brown, Peter: *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, London 1983. The ancient world, the word 'relic', *reliqua*, was used in Classical Latin to signify the dead, but among early Christians it received a more specific meaning indicating only the bodies of those who were venerated as martyrs, i.e., saints, a meaning that subsequently took hold. In addition to bodies and body parts, early Christian authors such as Augustine recognised objects and other materials in contact with living or dead saints, or their tombs, as relics and did not differentiate them in value from bodily relics. Boesch Gajano, Sofia: *La santità*, Rome/Bari 1999; Smith 2015, p. 51.

primarily to the bodily remains of saints and martyrs, and secondarily to objects that are directly associated with the life of Christ (the Cross, for instance) or of a saint, or again, objects which have touched the saint's body."[38] Moreover, although the categorisations such as bodily/corporeal relics and contact relics apparently developed during the Middle Ages, these theological definitions do not seem to reflect the lived religion of the period.[39] Consequently, reading late medieval sources in the light of fixed categories and their restrictiveness may hinder or even prevent us from understanding what late medieval people regarded as relics at the practical level.

The following examples from the *Vitae fratrum* and *Legenda aurea* show how ambiguous the image of relics was in these hagiographical texts. The texts were used also for didactic purposes, and accordingly steer us towards considering what these narratives can tell us about the understanding of relics and holy materiality in Dominican culture. In both collections, the bodily relics of the Dominican saints are rarely mentioned, but the items that touched a saint's body or his tomb and items which looked like relics or were transformed as such play a major role. Was touching holy matter enough to bestow the functions and status of a relic on any item, including everyday objects? It seems so. Towels, pieces of bread or wood, pots of liquids and alike were presented in altars of the European churches and were venerated as remnants of saintly persons.[40] To begin with, I shall take a closer look at earth or powder, a common relic material in medieval narratives.

In the *Vitae fratrum,* a story which probably originated from Metz (as this was where a particular miracle of the narration occurred), one reads of a friar who suffered great pain in his hand. Nevertheless, he was with some other friars helping the sacristan of a church to prepare the high altar for the first vespers of the feast of Saint Mary Magdalene when two friars from some remote place in Germany entered the church announcing that they bore "a small quantity of the powder of our Father Dominic". The two friars left the relics on the altar and the friar with the sick hand was filled with devotion and joy; upon kissing the relics he was cured. According to the story, another friar with a stomach-ache was cured in the infirmary when the relics were carried there, after he had touched them.[41] The powder of Saint Dominic is but vaguely described but we can presume that it was some kind of dirt from his tomb, as such dirt or dust was apparently something that accumulated on or around the graves and became quite a popular relic to take home as a memory from a pilgrimage site. We may speculate whether these friars had attended Dominic's funeral and the General Chapter, and the powder was taken as relics in connection with the translocation of the body to the new tomb; when the old was opened, there perhaps was a large

38 Gy is referred here to by Smith 2015, p. 43.

39 On the development, see Smith 2015, p. 52.

40 Bischoff, Bernhard: *Mittelalterliche Schatzverzeichnisse I: Von der Zeit Karls des Großen bis zur Mitte des 13. Jahrhunderts* (Veröffentlichungen des Zentralinstituts für Kunstgeschichte in München 4/1), Munich 1967. The veneration was justifiable by Biblical texts, see for example Acts 5:15–16 and 19:11–12.

41 Gerardus de Fracheto *Vitae fratrum* 41, ed. Reichert, pp. 96–97: "Detulimus nobiscum de pulveribus beati Dominici, patris nostri."

amount of soil available.[42] Regardless of the truthfulness of the story and its details, it is worth emphasising the significance of earth as a way of associating saints' lives with the Passion of Christ and Passion relics collected from the path to Golgotha, including the very earth. Thus, the presence of holy dirt or powder in miracle stories is a convention, an often necessary tie linking the saint and Christ, but the narratives were also rewritten and utilised quite innovatively, as can be seen from the following examples.

According to the commonly related tale of Peter Martyr's death, the earth that was soaked with his blood when he was killed became a popular and powerful relic. This earth appears to have been preserved by various people and functioned as a source of healing miracles.[43] Perhaps the most interesting case relating to the earth-relic is a story in which a travelling schoolboy had fallen and injured himself. Since he had heard about the fame of the bloodied earth, he took a handful of the local soil and prayed: "Lord God, I don't have any of that earth, but you gave that earth so much power by the merits of Saint Peter, you can give the same power to this earth!"[44] According to Jacobus, the youth made the sign of the cross over the earth and was healed at once.[45] It is fascinating to see how in this case, a handful of dirt seems to have been transformed from being mere earth into a kind of relic by the power of prayer and faith, and how it obtained similarly miraculous power just like the earth soaked with the martyr's blood. Although the earth in the schoolboy's hand did not contain any of the genuine bloodied dirt and had not been in any contact with the saint, it gained healing power because of its similarity with the bloodied earth relic. Thus, Jacobus's narration seems to imply that mere material similarity combined with faith made the substance an efficient bearer of sacred power, and perhaps transformed the dirt into a true relic.

Thus, it seems that there were also objects of resemblance, available to sight or touch in everyday life, which were similar to, but not self-same as, those elements that had touched a holy body or tomb. Recently, Caroline Walker Bynum has discussed such similarity in her book, *Dissimilar Similitudes*, and called attention to new scholarly concepts such as the "visual contact relic" proposed by Anthony Cutler and the "similarity relic" put forward by Nadine Mai. All of these scholars have remarked on the power and agency which an item has gained without any contact with an original relic, but merely through a resemblance to it.[46] The similarity evoking holiness was not just something connectable to the

[42] William of Tocco, Thomas Aquinas's hagiographer, tells us how some earth was preserved as a relic when Thomas's body was entombed at Fossanova. Guillelmus de Tocco *Ystoria* 66, ed. le Brun-Gouanvic, p. 207.

[43] Jacobus de Voragine *Legenda aurea* 63.5, ed. Grässe, p. 283; trans. Ryan, p. 260. Another popular relic, functioning in a similar way, seems to have been water in which Peter's bone or bones were dipped or washed; see more on the living tradition of Peter's water in Prudlo, Donald: *The Martyred Inquisitor: The Life and Cult of Peter of Verona ([Martyred] 1252)*, Farnham 2008, pp. 161–163.

[44] Jacobus de Voragine *Legenda aurea* 63.25, ed. Grässe, pp. 290–291; trans. Ryan, p. 266. In Grässe's edition the main story is the same, but the localisation of the miracle differs.

[45] Jacobus de Voragine *Legenda aurea* 63.25, ed. Grässe, p. 291; trans. Ryan pp. 265–266.

[46] Bynum 2020, pp. 36–38.

worldview of the laity. Caroline Walker Bynum and Miri Rubin have both argued that medieval didactic literature and theological thinking make it possible to understand any linen cloth as a representative of the veil of Veronica, and any piece of bread as a representative of the bread Christ blessed at the Last Supper.[47]

In Jacobus's *Legenda aurea*, there is one interesting case which does not seem to fit into either category of visual or similarity relics. Jacobus narrates how two women in Utrecht were mocking the local friars and denying Peter's martyrdom while they were at their spinning wheels and watching the people go to the church of the Friars Preachers to honour Saint Peter Martyr. All of a sudden, their thread started to be soaked in blood and the women's fingers were covered with the red liquid. When they understood that the thread was the source of the blood, and not any injury of their fingers, they believed in Peter's martyrdom and sanctity. The story implies that it was not easy to convince the prior of the local Dominican house of the miracle, but apparently the women were successful as the prior officiated at a solemn preaching service, explained what had happened, and presented the bloodstained thread publicly.[48] Was the prior sceptical or prudent? Was caution with miraculous materiality a way of providing an image of the friars as supportive?

Some more hints can be grasped with regard to understanding holy materiality in well-educated Dominicans circles when studying the canonisation process of Thomas Aquinas. John of Naples, a famous Dominican theologian, provided testimony in which he does not stress Thomas's doctrine or teaching as grounds for canonisation, but rather refers only to a miracle that happened to his fellow Dominican, Landulf of Naples. Once, when visiting the Cistercian monastery of Fossanova where Thomas's tomb was, Landulf suffered a stomach-ache, a type of colic, and was cured by lying on Thomas's tomb.[49] What is particular to this miracle story is the description of how the monks of the monastery advised Landulf to do what they usually did: he was to take his belt or rope with which he was girt, stretch it out first on Thomas's tomb, and then laid down himself upon the rope.[50] The stretched-out rope seems to have been a kind of visual connotation of intestinal problems and may have been powerfully associated with a cure when its taut straightness was felt under the belly on the sepulchral stone. Unfortunately, the significance of the belt is not better explained in the text itself, but the testimony is curious as, according to medieval customs, just

47 Walker Bynum, Caroline: *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, Berkeley, CA 1987; Rubin, Miri: *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture*, Cambridge 1991; Jung, Jacqueline E.: "The Boots of Saint Hedwig. Thoughts on the Limits of the Agency of Things", in eds. G. Jurkowlaniec/I. Matyjaszkiewicz/Z. Sarnecka: *The Agency of Things in Medieval and Early Modern Art: Materials, Power and Manipulation*, New York 2017, pp. 173–196: 185.

48 Jacobus de Voragine *Legenda aurea* 63.10, ed. Grässe, pp. 285–286.

49 According to the testimony, Landulf of Naples was also a man of great theological expertise, see *Processus canonizationis S. Thomae, Neapoli*, cap. 48, ed. Marie-Hyacinthe Laurent: *Fontes Vitae S. Thomae Aquinatis*, vol. 4, Toulouse [1911], pp. 265–407: 329: "qui fuit in ordine ipso lector gratiosus, et prior et inquisitor heretice pravitatis, et postea episcopus Equensis et tandem archiepiscopus Acherontinus."

50 *Processus canonizationis* 48, ed. Laurent, p. 329.

lying down on the saint's grave was a common ritual for the cure and no more 'medium' was necessary. The emphasis given to the belts and ropes by the highly reputed Dominican theologians in the juridical process is enlightening, I think, when considering the significance of holy matter to the friars.[51]

In the case of the thread in the story from Utrecht, it is worth noting that the item was transformed into a testimonial of the martyr's authentic sanctity and also into a relic through mocking and disbelief, and not because of prayer and belief. Moreover, the thread did not have any resemblance, visual or otherwise, to items generally perceived as Peter's relics. By contrast, the thread appears to have experienced a process of transformation, closer to the theological doctrine of transubstantiation than to an evident change into a relic, by physically touching a holy body or other holy object. In fact, there is a remarkable similarity between the miracle of the thread and the so-called miracle of Bolsena, in which a doubtful priest was convinced of the doctrine of transubstantiation when a host started to bleed and soaked a corporal (the small cloth) with blood during the Mass. The linen was transported to Orvieto and is still venerated there as an influential relic.[52] With regard to the Utrecht story, Jacobus does not call the bloodstained thread a relic, but he seems to imply that the thread was transformed into a valuable item, and as such it was possible, perhaps even necessary, to honour it locally. With this story from Utrecht, and the tradition of the miraculous bread to which it seems connected, I want to stress the significance of how important a given material was theologically and didactically as a sign of a saint's authentic sanctity and his or her presence for believers and unbelievers, as well as of how promptly the friars seem to have encouraged devotional materiality.

Another interesting medieval relic type is that of healing ointment, which in Dominican hagiography appears in a remarkable variety of contexts. Both Gerardus and Jacobus narrate a miracle story set in the Dominican monastery of Mary Magdalene in Tripoli. There, a nun called Mary is said to have suffered from a badly inflamed and painful leg for quite some time. She prays to God in Saint Dominic's name and reaches a state of ecstasy when Dominic and two other friars appear to her. As the nun wishes to be healed so as to better serve God, Dominic takes out from under his cape a marvellously fragrant ointment and anoints her leg with his own hand. The leg is cured instantly in both

[51] Any rope or belt placed on Thomas's tomb and thus charged with his holiness may have been considered as a relic of the saint, but no hint at this kind of perception is given in John's or any other testimony. On the interpretation of the miracle story, see also Räsänen, Marika: "Rituals and Spaces of Devotion in Cistercian Everyday Religion", in eds. Katajala-Peltomaa/Kuuliala/McCleery 2021, pp. 144–163.

[52] Lazzarini, Andrea: *Il miracolo di Bolsena. Testimonianze e documenti dei secoli XIII e XIV* (Temi e testi 1), Rome 1952; Polc, Jaroslav V.: "Il miracolo di Bolsena e Pietro di Praga. Un'ipotesi", in *Rivista di Storia della Chiesa in Italia* 45 (1991), pp. 437–449; Räsänen, Marika: "The Memory of St. Thomas Aquinas in Orvieto in the Late Middle Ages", in eds. Marika Räsänen/Gitje Hartmann/E. Jeffrey Richards: *Relics, Identity, and Memory in Medieval Europe* (Europa Sacra 21), Turnhout 2016, pp. 285–317. As the local Orvietan tradition gives us an image in which both Pope Urban IV and Thomas Aquinas were involved in the celebrations of the new relic, its scope was perhaps to strengthen the genuineness and doctrinal purity of the relic in the first place.

Gerardus's and Jacobus's narrations. According to the writers, Dominic tells Mary that the ointment was a sign of love, and it can only be preserved with great care. Mary then dries her anointed leg reverently with a silk cloth. In Gerardus's version, Mary keeps the silken cloth secretly to herself for several days before revealing the miracle and the cloth to others. The texts emphasise how the silk linen soaked by the holy ointment was redolent with an extremely pleasing, miraculous perfume and how the cloth was preserved with reverence.[53]

In this story, the fragrance was evidence of the miraculous ointment, a substance offered to the nun by Saint Dominic in a vision. Although Saint Dominic was not physically present at the nun's bedside, in a sense we understand there to be some kind of presence: the ointment he gives to the nun appears to be material in form since she can wipe it from her skin. These kinds of relics received in ecstasy were not uncommon in medieval miracle stories. Another famous case in Dominican literature is Thomas Aquinas's belt of chastity, which he received from angels and which became very popular during and after the Catholic reform in the seventeenth century.[54] Both texts, the *Vitae fratrum* and the *Legenda aurea*, appear to emphasise implicitly the biblical context of the miracle: it is said to have happened in a convent dedicated to Mary Magdalene, famous for her anointing of Jesus, and this might have given an extra layer to the story and understanding of the ointment relic in Dominican culture.[55] The texts imply that the ointment was a relic given by Saint Dominic himself to the nun. The relic, perceivable by the physical senses, especially by nose, was stored in a silk cloth which became a relic container providing the relic with a visible form.

These examples from medieval hagiography show us two transformations: (1) an earthly, material item is transformed into something sacred with and without a contact or visual similarity to the source of holiness; and (2) something given in a vision, and presumably invisible to the bodily eyes, is transformed into a visible, holy item. Beyond being mere relic stories, the narrations also underline in my opinion the importance of matter in Dominican culture. In fact, all these examples refer to active and reciprocal relations between medieval people and materiality.

3. Imaginative Relics

In the abovementioned testimony of Brother Ventura, we read of the friars gathering at the General Chapter in Bologna in 1233 and paying tribute to Dominic by kissing his skull; and how, as a consequence of this act, the miraculous odour

[53] Gerardus de Fracheto *Vitae fratrum* 36, ed. Reichert, pp. 88–92; Jacobus de Voragine *Legenda aurea* 103, ed. Grässe, pp. 481–482; trans. Ryan, vol. 2, p. 57.

[54] Guillelmus de Tocco *Ystoria* 11, ed. le Brun-Gouanvic, pp. 112–114. Karras, Ruth Mazo: "Thomas Aquinas's Chastity Belt. Clerical Masculinity in Medieval Europe", in eds. Lisa M. Bitel/Felice Lifshitz: *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives*, Philadelphia 2008, pp. 52–67.

[55] On the cult of Mary Magdalene, see Jansen, Katherine Ludwig: *The Making of the Magdalen: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages*, Princeton 2000.

of the head remained with the friars for a long time.[56] From Ventura's testimony, we can suppose from the long duration of the fragrance that it was brought back by the delegate friars to their respective Dominican houses in different parts of Western Europe and thus was diffused across a much wider geographical area. By this and other examples, we have seen how central the miraculous fragrance was in the recognition of the sanctity of the body and relics in question.[57] Apparently, even a perfume-like substance received in a vision was able to obtain the status of a relic-like object. In what follows, I move on to studying more closely the question of invisible and immaterial substance (in this case, perfume) and how it can act as an imaginative relic.

Early Dominican hagiography does not develop further the possibility of perceiving perfume alone, without a body, as a sign of a saint's presence, much less as an immaterial relic. Instead, we find an episode in Thomas Aquinas's hagiography which bears some resemblance to Ventura's testimony, but this time the consequences of kissing the body-part relic are more fully described. According to William of Tocco, a Salernitan canon once kissed Thomas's arm-relic very devoutly and sensed a miraculous odour. The perfume adhered to the canon and his cape, as the relic had been placed for a moment on the canon's neck. The cape is described as a memorial of the miracle and is reported to emanate the perfume constantly, often catching people's attention, in response to which the canon very willingly explained its source. Furthermore, William seems to claim that the canon was able to avoid sinful temptations thanks to this odour—and not to the cape.[58] Thus, William presents the perfume in a way as protecting the canon's soul. This idea makes one wonder whether the smell should be understood as an autonomous relic, different from the cape and perhaps resulting from the contemplation of the earlier encounter with the arm-relic and Thomas's purity. There are several cases in Thomas's hagiography in which the amount of devotion addressed to the relics directly correlates with the amount of perfume exuded.[59] Thus, the perfume appears to be an active entity, able to express the saints' presence and power in a similar manner as relics did in medieval culture.

At the very least, the previous example indicates that pleasant perfume functioned as a souvenir and served as an important and long-lasting remembrance

[56] *Acta canonizationis sancti Dominici* 10, ed. Walz, pp. 131–132.

[57] Roch, Martin: "Il Miracolo nell'alto Medioevo. Il caso dell'odore soave dei santi, tra testi e contesti," in eds. Laura Andreani/Agostino Paravicini Bagliani: *Miracolo! Emozione, spettacolo e potere nella storia dei cecoli XIII–XVII*, Florence 2019, pp. 99–116; Schmitz-Esser, Romedio: *The Corpse in the Middle Ages: Embalming, Cremating, and the Cultural Construction of the Dead Body*, London 2020, pp. 149–170; Räsänen 2025.

[58] Guillelmus de Tocco *Ystoria* 69, ed. le Brun-Gouanvic, pp. 210–211. According to the canonisation hearings organized in Naples in 1319, this canon was Thomas de Mathia, but his testimony contains only the explanation of immediately sensed perfume, not the later events and explanations. Interestingly, the *Vitae fratrum* also gives an example of Dominic, while still alive, emitting such a miraculous fragrance that a student who kissed his hand and smelled it was cured from all the obscenity to which he was earlier inclined, see Gerardus de Fracheto *Vitae fratrum* 27, ed. Reichert, pp. 82–83.

[59] *Processus canonizationis* 65, ed. Laurent, pp. 354–355.

of the saint, if not indeed as a proper relic.[60] In Dominic's case, the memory of such a pleasant odour might have been an especially efficient way, emotionally speaking, to bind friars of the still young Order to the cult of the soon-to-be canonised holy father. The fragrance became the central theme of the liturgy celebrated annually on the memorial day of the translation of Dominic's body. It seems that the same liturgy was initially used for both feast days, the *dies natalis* and the *translatio*; only later did the services for these two feast days start to become differentiated. In this development, the story of the translation of Dominic's body was set for the office commemorating the *translatio* and mentioned only in passing in the office for the *dies natalis*; basically, the only theme presented in the office for the *translatio* is the praise of the miraculous fragrance of Dominic's body. The body itself is explicitly mentioned only in one chant when specifying the source of the redolent scent.[61] The day of the *translatio* became an important feast in the Dominican Order, celebrating the founding father of the Order in the same manner as the *dies natalis*. However, considering the content of the chants, the office for the *translatio* does not seem to focus on the saint himself, but rather on the fragrance as the metaphor of the body and relics, thus creating a sensation of Dominic's corporeal presence in all those places where the friars gathered for this liturgical service.

Interestingly, the celebration of Thomas Aquinas's *dies natalis* diverges quite a bit from the office for Dominic. The first and second nocturn describe Thomas's virtuous life and some miracles, while the rest of the Matins office turns its attention to Thomas's death and its consequences for the body. The most remarkable fact in this regard is the eighth reading from Matins, which concentrates solely on describing Thomas's dead body. The body, its presence and appearance, is the central topic of the reading and its centrality must have been clear even to the most uneducated medieval audience as the word *corpus* is explicitly and clearly repeated seven times in the relatively short reading (the word occurs in nearly every sentence).[62] Thomas's *dies natalis* office thus presents an remarkable emphasis on the body within the wider collection of medieval sanctoral offices.[63]

Looking even closer at the reading, one can notice how in the middle of the narrative, when Thomas's tomb is opened, the fragrance starts to effuse into its surroundings. In the rest of the narration, the body and the fragrance

[60] On perfume and memory, see Carruthers, Mary J.: "Sweetness", in *Speculum* 81 (2006), pp. 999–1013.

[61] Bergin 2019, pp. 66–68. Bergin has suggested that the *dies natalis* liturgy received its proper character by 1240 and that for the *translatio* by 1256.

[62] The readings for Thomas's *dies natalis* feast can be found in Räsänen 2017, pp. 269–272, and a short analysis of them, pp. 226–233.

[63] This notion also applies to Dominic's office. For example, Bergin, who has studied both of Dominic's liturgical feasts, states that Dominic's *dies natalis* "avoids discussion of the translation of the body, especially the miraculous *odor sanctitatis*", Bergin 2019, p. 68. For a general overview of the contents of saints' rhymed offices, see Heffernan, Thomas, J.: "The Liturgy and the Literature of Saints' Lives", in eds. Thomas J. Heffernan/E. Ann Matter: *The Liturgy of the Medieval Church*, Kalamazoo 2005, pp. 65–94.

are intertwined together, with the latter being praised both as something miraculous and something surpassing the natural state of a corpse. The task of the corresponding great responsory of the office, which was sung right after the recitation of the reading, was to repeat, or rephrase, the central message of the lection.[64] In Thomas's case, the most essential content of the reading was the miraculous fragrance and especially his sinless life, the latter emphasised by measured repetition of the line: "Shining in his purity, he lived without sin" in the great responsory.[65] The chant implies that the miraculous odour was a mark of Thomas's purity and that this purity had given him the heavenly gift of interpreting divine mysteries.

The emphasis on Thomas's virginity and sinless life is a constant theme throughout the *dies natalis* liturgy, and not only in the third nocturn of Matins, in which the episode where he receives the belt of chastity as a mark of his vocation figures prominently.[66] I would suggest that by participating actively in their daily liturgy, the Dominican friars lived out in their own bodies the lives of their saints and predecessors in the Order. An interesting miracle story from Thomas's second tomb in Toulouse strongly implies that in clerical circles, Thomas was regarded as the perfect saint for protecting men from sinful thoughts, an idea certainly deriving from Thomas's hagiographical image.[67] I presume that here, the liturgy served as the most influential and widespread tool in promoting a favourable image of the saint and sustaining his cult, and its power was remarkable in mediating both the doctrinal and practical values of the Order.

Fragrance does not enjoy as emphasised a position in Thomas's *dies natalis* as it does in Dominic's *translatio;* nevertheless, in Thomas's case the perfume melodically receives an accentuated form, as the musicologist Hilkka-Liisa Vuori with her colleagues has remarked. The eighth great responsory illustrates how the melody rises up on the word *fragrantia* as a fragrance would do, resembling the curls of smoke given off by candles and censers into the air.[68] Thus, I suggest that the interweaving of language and melody made Thomas's sacred body perceptible to the physical senses in a similar manner as explained in the *Legenda aurea*: there, Jacobus introduces the words of Blessed Mary who was beholding a friar beside her in a vision as Peter Martyr, "who ascends glorious

64 Guillelmus Durandus: *Rationale V: Commentary on the Divine Office* 8, trans. Timothy M. Thibodeau (Corpus Christianorum in Translation 23), Turnhout 2015, 43. Vuori, Hilkka-Liisa/Räsänen Marika/Heikkinen, Seppo: *The Medieval Offices of Saint Thomas Aquinas* (DocMus Research Publications 14), Helsinki 2019, p. 61. The research is available at https://taju.uniarts.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/7140/Tuomas_www3.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

65 Vuori/Räsänen/Heikkinen 2019, pp. 144–145 for the translitteration of the chant from several manuscript sources (the notation and wording, including the citation "Qui nitens pudicitia vixit absque piaculo"), p. 291 for the English translation.

66 Guillelmus de Tocco *Ystoria* 11, ed. le Brun-Gouanvic, pp. 112–114.

67 MS Bologna, Archivio storico della provincia San Domenico in Italia, Serie VII 10160 manoscritto di Cividale, f. 124r.

68 Vuori/Räsänen/Heikkinen 2019, see the transcription of the notation on p. 144. See for an analysis of the melody also Räsänen, Marika/Heikkinen, Seppo/Vuori, Hilka-Liisa: "From a Hiding Place to the Eternal Glory. Thomas Aquinas's Saintly Presence in Dominican Liturgy", in *Quaestiones Medii Aevi Novae* 22 (2017), pp. 53–80.

like the smoke of incense."[69] Jacobus's formulation enables us to interpret the fragrance as Thomas for the friars. I would attribute a great role to the Dominican liturgy and its effectiveness in the creation of a sensory encounter with the sacred and a certain kind of 'relicness'.[70]

The overwhelming emphasis on Thomas's body in the liturgical readings and the eighth great responsory for his feasts, as compared to the Dominican (and indeed general Western) liturgical tradition can be explained at least partly by the fact that the physical body was not in the custody of the Dominican Order, but rather rested in the Cistercian monastery of Fossanova in Southern Italy. In my view, by composing a liturgy that focused on describing Thomas's bodily presence and the ways in which this presence could be sensed in different substances (here the fragrance given as an example, but the metaphors of light and enlightenment have also been utilised effectively), the friars sought to satisfy their need of having the material presence of Thomas's body among them. Another kind of example of the necessity of turning to the imagination comes from the *Legenda aurea*, which contains a story in which a nun unable to travel to St Peter Martyr's tomb from her monastery in Ottenbach (present-day Germany) succeeds in making a virtual pilgrimage and obtaining a cure by visiting the tomb in her imagination. What helped here were her prayers, the number of which she thought to be equivalent to the length of the road.[71] In a similar manner, as the nun in the narrative was able to reach a holy place in her imagination, Thomas's liturgy, as I see it, persuaded one to do the same. Thus, by sensing the perfume created in the liturgy not olfactorily, but visually and audibly by candles, incense, and chanting, the Dominican community was able to grasp Thomas's bodily presence with the saint being among them in a tangible way.

4. Conclusions

Although a coherent conclusion about the Dominican general attitude on relic veneration is difficult to make by relying on such a narrow sample of the source material examined here, it would be a misinterpretation to argue that the division of holy bodies or single relics of all kinds (not just body parts) did not pique the interest and increase veneration among the friars themselves. I would emphasise the emotions that the bodies of the saints and candidates for canonisation could have roused within Dominican culture. For the friars, the saintly remains which they venerated were not necessarily physical but rather metaphorical images or representative substances such as smoke. The language and music which describe holy bodies was palpable, powerful, impassioned and tangible. For members of a religious order, the saint's body might have been reachable by

[69] Jacobus de Voragine *Legenda aurea* 63.24, ed. Grässe, p. 290; trans. Ryan, p. 265: "Petrus, qui in conspectu domini tamquam fumus aromatum gloriosus adscendit".

[70] Vuori/Räsänen/Heikkinen 2019, pp. 213–214.

[71] Jacobus de Voragine *Legenda aurea* 63.19, ed. Grässe, pp. 288–289; trans. Ryan, p. 264. On virtual pilgrimages and religious women, see Rudy, Kathryn M.: *Virtual pilgrimages in the convent: imagining Jerusalem in the late Middle Ages* (Disciplina Monastica 8), Turnhout 2011.

the imagination, without any physical remnant necessary; and yet for them, the body was the target of their desires and testimony on salvation. Most laypeople sought their consolation in matter properly speaking. Besides the Dominican community, though, I would also suggest that the abundance of common metaphors made relics easy to imagine and encounter even for the laity.

In the foregoing, I hope to have demonstrated how multiform the concept of relic was, something requiring further discussion and the creation of new frameworks for studying relics. In many cases, the objects that do not fit into the current categories of relics have remained mere curiosities. As far as I can see, the interplay between norms, needs, and objects in Western Christendom directed the quest of medieval people for contact with the holy through new kinds of items representing relics and to new relic practices. The late Middle Ages witnessed an expansion of relics and 'relicness' to include more 'substitutes' for official relics, and also the Dominicans quite vigorously contributed to the creation and cultivation of multiple forms of relic devotion, responding to the needs arising from lived religiosity. Thus, if anything, the Church's sanctions on relic devotion from the beginning of the thirteenth century more like engendered a new pluralism than control in relation to holy matter in lived religion.