

Wall, Charles J., Shrines of British Saints. Methuen & Co. London, 1905.

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CHAPTER I

GENERAL REMARKS ON SHRINES (Part One)

The saints' shrines in England were famous throughout Christendom ; for the people of this land sacrificed of their substance to honour their saints, whose virtues shone pre-eminently throughout the whole Christian world, and attracted the devotion of countless pilgrims from abroad, in addition to those within her own borders.

Not only in Great Britain , but in those provinces in Europe to which many of our sainted missionaries carried the gospel news, shrines were erected in their honour, and were accounted as the most precious of treasures by the people they had converted.

Yet while the shrines on foreign countries still draw the faithful to their precincts, those in England are debased ; in vain we look for the monuments of the sanctified, and arduous search is necessary to trace the smallest remains.

This is not to be attributed solely to the reforming wave which swept over this country in the sixteenth century, but chiefly to the avaricious and jealous king who at the time ruled with Tudor autocracy. The greed of Henry VIII caused him to covet the riches of the accumulated offerings of centuries ; and his despotic disposition could not brook that others—even though in Paradise—should in any way

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share the honour and reverence which he considered due only to his own august person. It was no question of religion with him which made him withhold the donations he once lavished on shrines and prompted him to commit the most overwhelming system of sacrilege.

It was truly a Reign of Terror for the "religious," either in the technical or common sense, and the destruction, both moral and structural, was so vast that when the nation could again breathe without fear of the gibbet, true religion was not a conspicuous virtue in the breasts of her children. A compulsory hypocrisy forced upon them by a hypocritical tyrant had become too ingrained to be lightly cast away. And if the spirit, or will, survived to restore the desecrated shrines, in

however humble a manner, the very essence had gone, the relics were in the most cases irrecoverably lost. They had been burnt, scattered, and defiled—as it were, again martyred as witnesses for their Lord ; for in those relics were enshrined the principles which actuated the saints in life, of Christian charity and humility, and of boldness in the defense of those things which were God's. Yet Caesar coveted all ; he was his own god, and as the Roman Emperors of old deified their predecessors, and themselves, so Henry the Eighth thrust himself before the nation as the only legitimate being to receive the offering of the incense of homage.

In the following pages are occasional quotation from the King's State papers, and in them the real motives by which he was prompted in this reforms are more clearly apparent than can be conveyed by modern pen. The principal instruction is for the spoils to be conveyed to the royal treasury in the Tower of London.

A shrine is literally a place or receptacle for the preservation of some precious object, and in Christian countries is applied to the tomb or coffer containing the relics of a saint.

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The subject of relics cannot be considered here, except for far as it affects the form and decoration of the shrine and the position they occupied in the sanctuary.

The practice of building Christian altars over the relics of martyrs obtained from the Book of the Apocalypse ; "I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held."

The earliest examples of this use of martyrs' tombs



Illustration: Crypt of St. Cedd, Lastingham

are probably those of the Catacombs, and although it cannot be proven that they were thus used during the period of persecution, it is certain that as early as the opening of the fifth century the Church of Africa erected altars over the bodies of the martyrs, not only in the churches, but in the roadside or in fields,¹ wherever the saint had suffered and been buried. Such altars became the shrines of those saints, and the custom yet pertains to Western Christendom

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of placing relics in a cavity of the altar slab beneath the Holy Stone, or Seal. The same idea prevails where a casket containing relics is placed within an open altar, as in the case in the ancient church of St. Etheldreda in Ely Place, London, formerly the chapel of the town house of the bishops of Ely ; or where the tomb of a saint is in a *confessio*, or crypt beneath the high altar of the church above, as the tomb of the Apostles in St. Peter's, Rome, or the crypt of St. Cedd at Lastingham, Yorkshire.

In allusion to this custom of building over the graves of martyrs St. Chrysostom writes:—

“One might see whole cities running to the monuments of martyrs,” and “apostles in their death were more honorable than the greatest kings upon earth ; for even at Rome, the royal city, emperors and consuls and generals left all and ran to the sepulchers of the fisherman and tent-maker.”

The shrine of chapel thus built was early known as a martyr.²

The tombs, or shrines, of those saints which were not covered by an altar oftentimes assumed lofty proportions, and as art increased they became things of great beauty, being built of marble and alabaster, decorated by the most skilled sculptors. On some of these structural shrines were placed covers containing the relics, and in a thirteenth-century restoration of the shrine of St. Egwin at Evesham Abbey the stone shrine on which the coffer was exalted is called a throne.³

The portable coffer—a coffin or smaller chest—was called a *feretrum*, or bier, capable of being borne in procession. It contained either the whole body of the saint, as was the case with St. Cuthbert and St. Edward the Confessor, or part of the relics, in this case of

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Plate one: Foot Shrine

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St. Thomas of Canterbury, and many another. The smaller feretories were used when, in a translation of the relics, the body was found to have perished and the bones only were preserved, which would naturally occupy only a small compass. Another reason for the use of a small feretory was occasioned by the division of relics. This division could easily be effected with dry bones, which were frequently distributed among various religious houses ; but it was also done by the severance of a limb or member from the otherwise perfect body. The Eastern Church seems to have been the first to dismember bodies for this purpose. Such and action, at once revolting and sacrilegious, encouraged the coveting and thieving of relics, and that trafficking in fragments of saints, which led to much scandal during the Middle Ages.

The magnificence of many of the feretories may be gathered from the description of some of these which formerly enriched the churches in England, the shrines themselves having been long since transformed into coin for the pleasures of a king. Those of the greatest renown will be described in their respective places, but many of the smaller, which were preserved in the treasuries or around the principal shrine, must have been of great beauty, and the description of one of the many kept at Lincoln indicated the art which was lavished upon them :—

“Item, one feretory of silver and gilt standing upon four pillars with one plane foot with one steeple in the height of the covering ornate with red stones and a round berall in the other end containing the finger of St. Katherine in a long purse ornate with pearls.”

This dismemberment of bodies led to the making of other forms of shrines, more properly called reliquaries, taking the form of that member of the body a piece of which it enclosed—a bust, a head, an arm, or a foot,

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made in goldsmith's work, which contained a fragment of the corresponding part of the saint's body.

When it took the form of a head it was frequently called a *chef*. The earliest known head is of St. Candidus in the church of St. Maurice, in the Valais ; this is of the ninth or tenth century. That of St. Eustace, of the eleventh century, in the British Museum, is of wood overlaid with silver, partly gilt. Around the head is a bandeau, or fillet, set with paste and stones, among them being two antique gems. The neck is mortised into a square plinth, the sides of which are ornamented with an arcade in relief, and beneath the arches are small effigies of the Apostles in embossed silver. It was originally in the treasury of Basle Cathedral, and was sold with the rest of the church property in 1834.

Another *chef* in the South Kensington Museum is of a bishop—bearded and venerable. Within the forehead is set an *adularia* or moonstone covering the letters S + I, indicative of St. Januarius, Bishop of Benevento, whose relics it once held. It is of the sixteenth century, and was obtained from the monastery of St. Gall.

At Chichester is a chapel of St. Richard's Head, in which the *chef* was kept, and at Canterbury the crown of St. Thomas was contained in a similar reliquary which, from the wealth of precious metal and jewels, came to be called the “Golden Head.”

Lincoln Cathedral had a wonderful collection of various reliquaries, according to the inventories still extant in the muniment room. Among them was a head of silver gilt standing upon a foot of copper gilt, having a garland with stones of divers colours, which contained relics of the eleven thousand virgin companions of St. Ursula ; but this class of shrine which existed in England has entirely perished.

The shrine of St. Osyth's arm at St. Paul's was set

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THE *CHEF* OR HEAD SHRINE OF ST. PETER
IN THE CHURCH OF S. JOHN LATERAN, ROME

Illustration: Plate II, the Chef, or head shrine of St. Peter.

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with twenty-two precious stones, in addition to enamels and pearls. An arm of St. Mellitus was given by the monks of St. Augustine's, Canterbury, to bishop Eustace of London—the successor in the saint's own see—which was shrined in a reliquary of this form made of silver, set with sixteen crystals, for greater and six smaller stones. The same cathedral of St. Peter also possessed an arm of St. Oswald covered with silver plates, and a rib

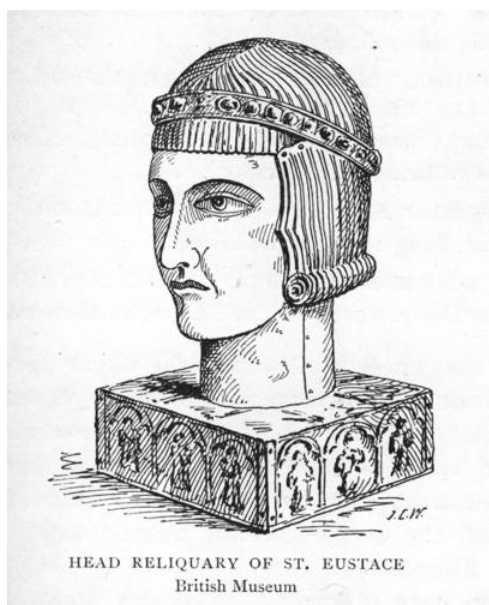


Illustration: Head reliquary of St. Eustace.

of St. Richard in a silver-gilt case held up by two angels. The shrine of St. Lactin's arm which was preserved in St. Lactin's Church, Donoughmore, County Cork, is now in the museum of the Royal Irish Academy. This is one of native workmanship, about the early part of the twelfth century, made in light bronze. The hand, which is riveted to the arm at the wrist, has the nails, the palm, the back, and around the wrist, inlaid with silver. The upper end of the arm is also ornamented with silver and a

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row of bluish-grey stones resembling the chalcedony, and there are indications of a second row of stones above. Riveted across the centre of the arm is a broad band with knots in relief, and down the arm are four flat narrow fillets at equal distances, inscribed in Irish minuscules :—

1. OR DO MAELSECHNAILL UCELLACHAIN DO ARDRIG. . . INGI IN CUMTACHS
(Pray for Maelsechnaill descendant of Cellachan . . . who made this reliquary.)
2. DO CHORMAC MAC MEIC CARTHAIGI DO RIG DAMNU MUMAN DO RATHAE
. . . D . . . D
(Pray for Cormac son of MacCarthaig, namely, for the Crown Prince of Nunster. . .)
3. OR DO TADG MAC ME . . . THIGI DO RIG . . .
(Pray for Tadg son of . . . King . . .)
4. OR DO DIARMAIT MAC MEIC DENISC DO COMARBA DIDOM

(Pray for Diarmait son of MacDenisc, for the successor of . . .)

Nearly the whole of the arm, the silver parts as well as those of bronze, is ornamented with engraved knots and scroll-work ; and at the upper part between the aforementioned rows of stones are figures of animals. The root of the arm was fastened by a circular cap, inlaid with silver, the centre having mosaic work surrounded by silver filigree.

The arm here illustrated is in the South Kensington Museum ; it is of Italian workmanship, carved in wood, covered in gesso and partly gilt. It is a good example of the usual form. Others in the same museum from Spain are long and straight ; most of them have the hand opened in benediction, though some are entirely closed in the same way as St. Lachtin's.

The Fiocail Phadraig, or shrine of St. Patrick's tooth—fourteenth century—is inscribed in Lombardic capitals "Corp Naomh," the Holy Body. It has small plates

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Illustration: Plate III Shrine of St. Lachtin's arm.

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with filigree whorls of twisted wire fastened on the spaces between the figures representing the Crucifixion.

A finger shrine, which was in the possession of the Hon. Robert Curzon, is of the form and size of a finger. It is of silver gilt, and stands erect on an embattled base, around which is inscribed "—OS @ DIGITVS : S : THEODERI." The finger-bone is seen through openings pierced like little windows, the extremity of the bone being gilt. the base rests on three feet formed of little branches, the entire height is four inches.

A finger-bone of St. Oswald, preserved in an ivory pyx, was among the shrines of St. Paul's Cathedral, and in the cathedral of St. Swithun at Winchester was a reliquary of St. Philip's foot, covered with plate of gold and decorated with precious stones.



Illustration: Reliquary arm.

This description of reliquary has led in recent times to many undeserved charges of fraud. That there should be numerous arms or heads of the same saint offers the opportunity for the uninitiated to make such charges, for which occasionally there may be some foundation ; but when it is understood that an "arm of St. Oswald" or a "head of St. Thomas" has from long custom applied to a reliquary fashioned to that form, and containing, it may be, the merest fragment of a bone from that part of the saint's body, and with no fraudulent intent called "the arm" or "the head" of Saint So-and-so, there need by no surprise at a saint possessing arms or heads in many different localities.

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The usual form of Celtic reliquary, at one time so numerous in Ireland, is a quadrangular metal box with the sides inclined inwards and with a cover like a gabled roof, under which shape the Temple of Jerusalem is represented in the Book of Kells. These coffers were decorated with enameling and chasing, exhibiting a great degree of art, barbaric perhaps, but in a spirit unsurpassed in later times.

Dr. Petrie concludes from the number of references to shrines in the Irish annals that, previously to the irruption of the Northmen in the eighth and ninth centuries, there were few, if any, of the distinguished churches in Ireland which were not possessed of costly shines. At the same time it must be borne in mind that in Ireland these were not always made to contain the corporeal relics of the

saints, but were made for the preservation of such relics of holy people as their bells, books or the gospels, and things of personal use, such as the shoe of St. Bridget.

The museums of Denmark contain many spoils of Celtic workmanship which were seized by the Danish raiders who were for ages the scourge of our coasts.

A few of these Celtic shrines are happily left to us—the Breac Moedog, or shrine of St. Moedoc of Ferns (see page 81) ; and of St. Manchan in the chapel of Boher, Lemanaghan, King's County (page 84). One which was found in the river Shannon is now in the museum of antiquities in Edinburgh ; another is preserved in Monymusk House in Aberdeenshire ; and another in the Royal Irish Academy.

An Irish reliquary found in Norway, and now in the museum at Copenhagen, is inscribed in runes.

Similar little caskets of brass, of English make, may be seen in the English museums, but the workmanship is much inferior to those of Ireland.

Coffers of similar form and beautifully decorated with Limoges enamels were at one time fairly common

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RELIQUARY IN THE MUSEUM AT COPENHAGEN
6¼ INCHES IN LENGTH
From Dr. Anderson's "Scotland in Early Christian Times"

Illustration: Plate IV Reliquaries

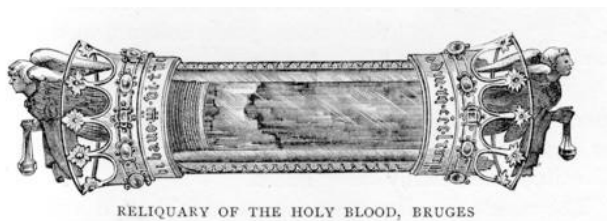
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throughout England ; examples still exist at Hereford and in the museum of the Society of Antiquaries. These are of Romanesque character ; but in the Middle Ages reliquaries assumed architectural forms ; imitations of churches in miniature, which old inventories reveal, were numerous throughout this country. All English examples, however, of this character seem to be totally lost. But it was the earlier form of casket shrine which was generally used—though greatly elaborated—in the feretories of the great continental shrines. One of the most beautiful of these portable shrines made for a British saint is the ch^âsse of St. Ursula, preserved in the Hospital of St. John at Bruges, in which the chief beauty is not of gold or silver or gems, but the exquisite miniature paintings of Hans Memling (Plates XIV and XV).

Sometimes the emblem of a saint was made as a reliquary for the relics of that saint, as that of St. Ursula in the church of St. Antonio at Padua, which is a model of a perfectly rigged ship, in allusion to her emigration.

In addition to those already mentioned were numerous smaller reliquaries of various designs, which became common during the latter Medieval and Renaissance



RELIQUARY OF THE HOLY BLOOD, BRUGES

Illustration: Reliquary of the Holy Blood, Bruges

Ages, such as phylacteries, ampulles, tabernacles, images, chests, caskets, glass-domed roundels, crystal cylinders, and others similar to a monstrance or ostensorium, each of which were mounted or supported in metal work according to their individual requirements.

For extant examples of these reliquaries we must look

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in the museums at home and the churches abroad ; but the Lincoln inventories contain vivid descriptions of many of those which formerly existed in that cathedral church.

“Item, one phylatorye of Cristall standing upon iiij feet in playne sole sylver and gylte having a pinnacle in the hegth contenyng the toth of saynt hugh, weying with the contents ij unces.”

“Item, one Ampulle of crystal with a foot and covering of silver partly gilt, containing the relics of St. Edmund the Archbishop.”

These small reliquaries were frequently arranged in a Reliquary Table, or Tabernacle, the doors of which were opened for their exposition ; and in Henry the Eighth’s injunctions for the destruction of shrines these tables are often mentioned.



Illustration: Reliquary of the Holy thorn, Arras

Lincoln possessed a tabernacle of silver standing on four lions with various images in colours, surmounted by the holy rood and attendant figures, elaborately jeweled, besides many made of wood. One of the latter opened with two leaves of doors, and contained the breastbone of St. Thomas de Cantilupe and many other relics.

The chests of relics were decorated with gold and silver, enamels and jewels, paintings, cloth of gold, and embroidery.

“Item, one fayre Chyste peynted and gylded w^t Armes precyouse stones and knottes of glas bordered w^t Corall many of them wanting and peynted w^t yn like sylver contenyng diverse Relikes.”³

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Illustration: Plate V Monstrance Reliquary of the finger of St. Mary Magdalen.

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A foreign example must again illustrate the lost treasures of England. The thirteenth-century chest containing the hair-cloths of St. Louis is of wood, covered with metal and painted with heraldic designs and allegorical subjects.



Illustration: Table of Relics, Mons

The use of these chests will be understood if it be borne in mind that many of the reliquaries were put away, only to be exposed on certain festivals ; while others, which were daily exhibited and were small enough to be removed, were nightly placed in the chests for safety. This would be necessary in a church possessing a great number of reliquaries—*e.g.* the cathedral of Canterbury, of which Erasmus said that the exhibitions of relics seemed likely to last for ever, they were so numerous ; and his testimony is borne out by the inventory contained in one of the cartularies of Christchurch,⁴ which enumerates no fewer than four hundred items. It commences with a list of twelve bodies of saints—Sts. Thomas, Elphege, Dunstan, Odo, Wilfrid, Anslem, Aelfric, Blosi, Audoeni, Selvi, Wulgan, and Swithun. Eleven arms in jeweled silver-gilt shrines—Sts. Simeon, Blase, Bartholemew, George

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Wulfstan, Richard, Roman, Gregory the Pope, Hugh, Mildred, and Edburga. And three heads—

“The head of St. Blasé in a silver head gilded,
The head of St. Furse in a silver head gilded and enamelled,
The head of St. Austroberta in a silver head enamelled and gilded,”

which were kept in the great relic chest near the high altar.

In addition to these are enumerated a multitude of others, which are not included in the title of this work.

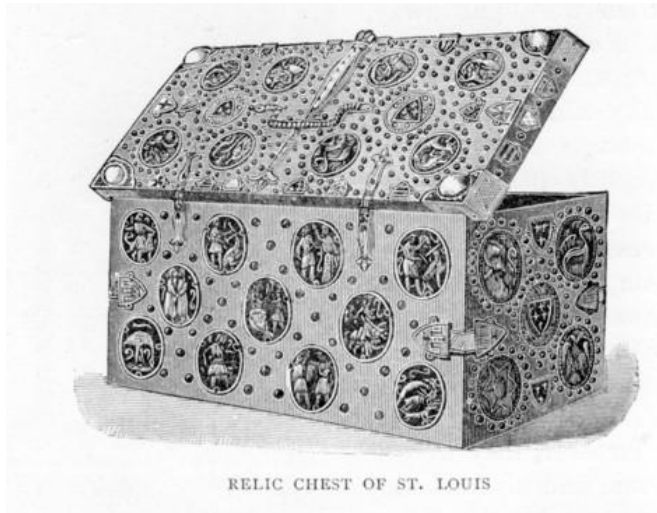


Illustration: Relic Chest of St. Louis

Some of the movable feretra also contained an accumulation the relics of many saints. The most memorable instances are to be found in the Canterbury inventories.⁵ One such example will suffice :—

In a chest of ivory with a crucifix
some bones of Cosmas and Damian, martyrs.
Item, a bone of St. Wandregesilus, abbot and confessor.
bones of St. Augustine, bishop, confessor, and great doctor.



Illustration: Plate VI English Reliquary

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- Item*, a bone of blessed Leo, pope and confessor.
a bone of St. Sampson, bishop, with one tooth of the same.
some dust of St. Discipulus.
a bone of St. Honoratus.
some bones of SS. Remigius and Germanus, bishops.
some bones of SS. Machutus, Wulfran, and Martinian.
some bones of St. Anastasius, martyr.
some bones of St. Margaret, virgin.
a bone of St. Opportuna, virgin.
a bone of St. Amalburga, virgin.
a bone of St. Satildis, queen.
a bone of Keyneburga, virgin.
some of the hairs of St. Alburga, virgin, abbess of Barking Church.
some hairs of St. Barbara, virgin.
pieces of clothes of St. Aldegunda, virgin.
three fingers and two teeth of St. Alban, the Protomartyr of
England.
some bones of St. Cyriacus, priest and martyr, with three teeth.
some bones of SS. Gervasius and Protasius, martyr.

some dust of St. Pancras, martyr.
 some bones of St. Adrian, martyr.
 some bones of St. Christopher, martyr.
 some dust of SS. Crispin and Crispinian, martyrs.
 a bone of St. Pantaleon.
 some dust and vestments of St. Lambert, martyr.
 a bone of St. Sixtus, pope.
 some of the beard and vestments of St Cuthbert, bishop and
 confessor.
 some dust of St. Appollinarius, martyr.
 some bones of St. Gregory, pope, with one tooth of the same.
 some bones of St. Stephen, pope.
 some bones of St. Wyngunaloc, abbot and confessor.
 some dust of St. Sebastian, martyr.

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Item, a rib of the blessed Appollinaris, martyr, with one tooth of the same.
 a bone of St. Firmin, martyr and bishop.
 a bone of St. Quintin, martyr.
 a piece of the Lord's sepulchre.
 a piece of the manger of the Lord.
 part of the column to which our Lord was bound when He was
 scourged.
 piece of the stone upon which the angel sat upon the tomb.
 piece of the stone upon which Christ stood when He ascended into
 heaven.
 a piece of Moses' rod which budded.
 part of the stone upon which the Lord stood in Galilee.
 from Gethsemane. [this may be a misprint?]
 piece of the table at which the Lord ate the supper with an olive
 branch.
 a piece of the prison from which the angel of the lord delivered the
 blessed apostle Peter.
 some of the clothes made by St. Mary, the mother of our Lord.
 a piece of the pall which is over the Lord's sepulchre.
 some of the hair and clothes of St. Anne, the mother of St. Mary.
 of the clothes of St. Elias, St. Mary, and Martha her sister and St.
 Saphie, the virgin.
 some of the dust of St. Benedicta.

Pendant or pectoral reliquaries were in use at an early period throughout
 Christendom. Some were made to contain the consecrated Host, but others
 enclosed relics of the saints, and were worn as amulets. A cross was the usual
 form of these pectoral shrines ; and the late Cavalier di Rossi found such a one on

the breast of a corpse in St. Lorenzo, outside Rome, and two others of the Fifth century he

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Illustration: Plate VII Ampulla, or Phial Reliquary

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describes as of silver, chased and jewelled, divided into compartments and inscribed with names. These, however, did not always contain relics of the body, but some times a fragment of some object associated with the saint.

One of the reliquaries mentioned in the will of Perpetuus, Bishop of Tours,⁶ was of this type :—

“To thee, most dear Euphronius, brother and bishop, I give and bequeath my silver reliquary. I mean that which I have been accustomed to carry upon my person, for the reliquary of gold, which is in my

treasury, another two golden chalices, and cross of gold, made by Mabuinus, do I give and bequeath to my church.”

A pendant reliquary—a small silver skull—was found in 1829, whilst ploughing a field, which was formerly part of the ground of the abbey of Abingdon ; and another of silver, suspended on a silver chain round the neck of a skeleton, was found in the churchyard of St. Dunstan’s, Fleet Street, London, during the demolition of the old church in 1831. It is figured in the *Archaeological Journal*, vol v. where its dimensions are given as 2 ¼ inches in diameter and half an inch thick. On one side is represented St. George, and on the other the British St. Helen. At the top is a small aperture, through which to pass the relic, and which is closed by a movable shutter of the same metal.

In Battle Abbey there was a superb reliquary shaped like an altar, given by William I., which had been used by him for military Mass in the field, and which had accompanied his troops in their conquest of England. Possibly this was one of the two shrines represented in the Bayeux tapestry whereon Harold, when William’s prisoner in Normandy, was compelled to take an oath to support the duke’s pretensions to the English throne before he could regain his liberty.

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One of them is a portable feretrum, with the poles by which it was carried, placed on a draped pedestal ; while the other appears to form part of a vested altar, and is probably that which was given to Battle Abbey.

Few names have been left to us of those who designed and fashioned these shrines and precious feretories of gold and silver. One such artist, Anketill, had been brought up as a goldsmith. He had passed seven years in superintending the royal mint in Denmark and in making curious articles for the Danish king, but returning

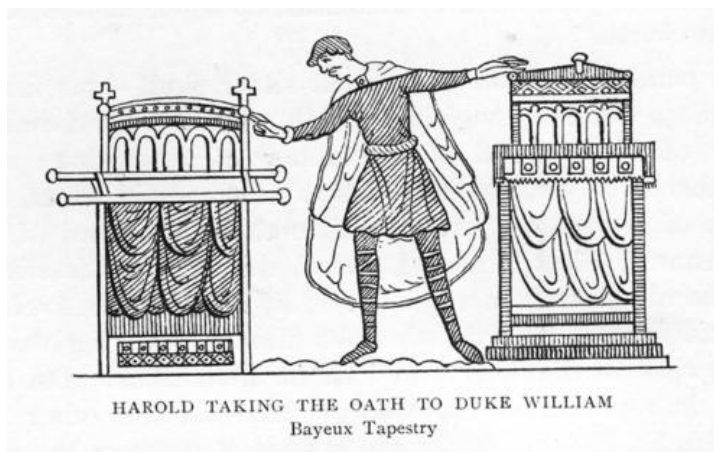


Illustration: Harold taking the oath

to England he became a professed brother in the monastery at St. Albans. There he made the feretrum of St. Alban, shrines for the relics of Sts. Bartholomew,

Ignatius, Laurence, and Nigasius, and many articles of church furniture—thuribles, navets, and elaborate candlesticks.

Another from the same abbey undertook a similar work at Canterbury, not only as a worker in metals, but also as a designer, for we are told that the shrine of St. Thomas was the work of that incomparable official Walter de Colchester, sacrist of St. Albans, assisted by Elias de Dereham, canon of Salisbury.

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Illustration: Plate VIII Casket Shrine

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1. Canon 83, *Codex Can. Eccl. Afric.* A.D. in Brun's *Canones*, i. 176
2. Dugdale's *Monasticon*, vol. ii.
3. *Lincoln Inventory*.
4. *Cotton. MS.*, Galba, E., iv.

5. *Inventories of Christchurch, Canterbury*, by J. Wickham Legg and W. H. St. John Hope.
6. *Circa 477*.