



The contribution of Relics and Paintings of Santa Sanctorum to Religious practices in the 13th century, Basilical of Saint John lateran church, Rome.

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ABSTRACT

The Contribution of Relics and Paintings of Sancta Sanctorum to Religious Practices in the 13th Century, Basilica of Saint John Lateran Church, Rome.

This thesis primarily focuses on relics and paintings and their effect to the 13th century Christian believers. The saint cult and the veneration of relics dates back to the third-century. It developed and became a fully-fledged culture among the early followers of Jesus. Generally, relics had gained a high profile among the believing community because of the supernatural influences they were believed to have for and in the life of a believer who possessed and kind of relics. These relics were classified in mainly three groups though other researchers mention of four. They became powerful objects drawing Christian to their beliefs that these objects possessed a divine power that many witnessed and gave accounts of testimonies. They gained a higher level of veneration. The hunt for relics during the period under discussion also increased so much that discussing the growth of Christianity and its day to day practices would be incomplete if the contributions relics and paintings were to be ignored. This thesis intends to find, review, discuss, and present the findings on: “The Contribution of Relics and Paintings of Sancta Sanctorum to Religious Practices in the 13th Century, Basilica of Saint John Lateran Church, Rome.”

The research has developed through literature review and vigorous textual analysis. The conclusion is that: both relics and paintings gave out almost the same functions, though to some extent, those who possessed them viewed them with equity gap(s). They were and still remained instrument in follower’s lives and drawing them to a divine power to meet their desires.

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CHAPTER 1: RELICS AND PAINTINGS OF SANCTA SANCTORUM

1.1 Introduction and Thesis Motivation

The topic of relics still remains an important matter for discussion among a great number of scholars. This is because of its importance to some religions such as Buddhism and Christianity. Its impact on the faith of the followers in some Christian denominations is also huge. In this research, I will discuss relics on a narrower part of this wider subject as I continue and get in depth on this subject. My area of focus shall narrow down to relics and paintings in the 13th century. A special attention will be paid to **The Contribution of Relics and Paintings of Sancta Sanctorum to Religious Practices in the 13th Century, Basilica of Saint John Lateran Church, Rome**. Though relics and some religious paintings may have no single words inscribed on them, yet their contribution to the faith of both individual and the church is so significant that relics and paintings have continued to be preserved for centuries as they speak volumes to the faith.

This thesis primarily focuses on Relics and paintings and their effect to the 13th century Christian believers. Generally, relics had gained a high profile among the believing community because of the supernatural influences they were believed to have for and in the life of a believer who possessed and kind of relics. The hunt for relics during the period under discussion had risen so much that discussing the growth of Christianity and its day to day practices would be incomplete if the contributions relics and paintings were to be eliminated. This thesis analyses “**The Contribution of Relics and Paintings of Sancta Sanctorum to Religious Practices in the 13th Century, Basilica of Saint John Lateran Church, Rome,**” play a very important roles in the lives of the early Christians then and also gives us a picture for understanding and evaluating how relics play a role in the life of the church as well as individuals. Before and since then, relics have been very fundamental in in shaping the Church’s and life of faith.

1.2 Research Question / Research Problem

From the above discussions, this research seeks to answer the problem of how relics and paintings contributed to the faith of the 13th century Christians who worshipped at the Basilica of St. John Lateran Church in Rome. How did the relics in the Sancta Sanctorum affect their religious practices? How did these paintings and relics foster the belief of the early Christians? These shall be some of the many questions that shall be investigated as this study discusses how relics and painting of Sancta Santorum contributed to the religious practices in the 13th century, at the Basilica of St John Lateran Church in Italy, Rome.

1.3 Introduction to Relics

Early Christians started to gather and preserve the remains of holy men and women and this turned into a much broader culture of collecting bodily remains of people as much as material remains of things that could either claim direct physical contact with the body of Christ or were associated with events and places to his life, ministry, and death through the account of the Gospels.¹ Among a classification of relics the following would qualify to be called relics – whole body of a person, the head, hair, teeth, clothes, books, furniture, instruments used in the killing of the person, winding-sheets, coffins, ashes if body is cremated – they are believed to be credited with the grace that resided in the individual.²

The same thing applies to anything that the cult object touched while alive or, indeed, to anything that touches him after he is dead. All these inanimate containers of a supposedly animate force—whole bodies, bones, hair and teeth, clothes, books, furniture, instruments of martyrdom, winding-sheets, coffins and (if the body is cremated) the ashes that are left—are dignified by the name of “relics” and credited with the grace that once resided in their owners.

¹ Klein 2010, p.1

²

To keep on with the tradition, these relics were documented at the point of storage and an individual in possession of any relics also needed to have a thorough knowledge of that relic so as to pass on the correct information. This meant that in different places people venerated different figures who to them were taken as saints or were killed for their religious faith.

The reliquary, as an object contain power, over the years the reliquary has undergone specific changes to suit the changes within the Church, the environment, and context for relics to prove to be of use to the modern church of healing, performing wonders and representing the Church and the faithful ones.³

1.4 Queries surrounding relics

Distance in time and documentation have posed a challenge to the validation and authentication of some of the relics of the saints. Graveyards and engraved tombs have to some extent played a major role in the identification of some of the saints whose relics are venerated. My interest is to look at the relics of the then disciples of Christ.

For example, the relics of Peter and Paul – as early as in the third century, the Vatican claimed to have the bones of St Peter and Paul.⁴ Peter's wooden altar is shown in the Lateran, the Cathedral Church of Rome. Inside the Lateran are also the heads of Peter and Paul.⁵ Despite such documentations vigorously taken as authentic, Peter's skeleton was found and returned to his tomb, and pope Paul conducted the ceremony on 28 June, 1968.⁶

For example, the realness of the relics of St. Luke, the Gospel writer, have been questioned.⁷

³ Hahn, 2010 p. 290

⁴ Nickell, 2007, p. 33

⁵ Nickell, 2007, p. 33

⁶ Nickell, 2007, p. 33

⁷ Nickell, 2007, p. 54

Little is known about the disposition of his relics until about the year 1463 when Padua and Venice both claimed to have the body of the saint and vied with one another over the authenticity of their relics. The bones in each place were eventually exhumed and carefully examined. Those at Venice were found to be the bones of a young man; those at Padua were of a man who died at a venerable age. Since the skull of the body in Padua was missing, and since the head was then known to be in Rome, the relics in Padua were accepted as being those of St. Luke. The Venetians were so disappointed in having their relics pronounced invalid that they were vehement in their disapproval of the ecclesiastical pronouncement, so much so, that excommunication was threatened on all those who would continue to promote the relics in Venice as being valid. The relics have been enshrined in the Basilica of Santa Giustina above an altar in a side chapel. The tomb is of blue stone decorated with golden panels depicting portraits of angels, the saint and various symbols.⁸

Without convincing historical documentation, even that becomes questionable though the head could have been indeed cut and kept in Rome.

The authenticity of the relics of Mary Magdalene are also questionable. Not less than three churches are registered to have claimed to have her corpse. While three had her corpse, another church claimed to have her foot.⁹

There also have been various stories or myths surrounding some saints and their relics. St Peter, the brother of Andrew, whose bones are enshrined in Amalfi, Italy are said to produce “mysterious oil” every 28 January since their rediscovery in 1846. The “mysterious oil” is called *manna*. This is happened also in Greece and Turkey where the relic bones were at some time kept.¹⁰ Such stories need to be authenticated either through vigorous research or through independent scientific researches.

⁸ Ncikell, 2007, p. 54

⁹ Ncikell, 2007, p. 54

¹⁰ Ncikell, 2007, p. 34

With such controversies surrounding the relics and the zeal portrayed by the followers, this shows that relics do play a very important role in the individual lives of the followers. The people who were threatened with excommunication prove that relics veneration has a deeper meaning that a follower attaches greater importance to the name behind the relic.

1.5 Introduction to the Sancta Sanctorum

This is a small chapel which was a private chapel for the Pope. It still has the beautiful frescoes from the 13th century. This chapel is located at the Lateran Basilica, where you have the Holy Stairs and at the end of that is this Chapel, the Sancta Sanctorum.¹¹

The Sancta Sanctorum was built around 1280 AD for Pope Nicholas III who governed from 1277 to 1280.¹² The Chapel of Sancta Sanctorum also received some beautiful decorations. It only has six rich decorations painted on its walls. The essence of these decorations is to raise some awareness as well as continuing with the history of remembering those killed because of their faith in Christ, and among them are saints: Peter, Paul, Lawrence, Agnes, and Stephen.¹³ In the middle of the twelfth century, the Sancta Sanctorum gained a by-name “Holy of Holies.”¹⁴ The Sancta Sanctorum was originally dedicated to St Lawrence but it was also used as the pope’s personal oratory until in the renaissance era.¹⁵ Later, the Sancta Sanctorum became a place where relics were kept for safety and religious practices.¹⁶ The Santa Sanctorum became a symbol of faith in the sense that the popes recognised the religious role it played, however, among them all, pope Nicholas III gets the most credit as he commissioned it together with the frescoes painted in there between 1278 and 1380.¹⁷

¹¹ Online

¹² Hauknes, 2013, p. 1

¹³ Marius Bratsberg Hauknes, 2013, p. 1

¹⁴ Smith 2014, p. 181

¹⁵ Rollo-Koster 1980, p. 29

¹⁶ Rollo-Koster 1980, p. 20

¹⁷ Duchesne 1957, p. 26

1.6 Description

Description was restricted to what other scholars have observed in the relics and paintings in the Sancta Sanctorum. In practice, it was desirable to begin with the largest, most comprehensive observations and progress systematically to more particular details.¹⁸ The terminology was as accurate as possible could be presented by others researchers; technical terms were as long as they could be understood. The analyst however, continually guarded against the intrusion of either subjective assumptions or conclusions derived from other experience, especially that the study concentrated on a period of the far past.

This was a synchronic exercise; the physical object was read at a particular moment in time, in this case the 13th century. The object was almost certainly not identical to what it was when it was fabricated; time, weather, usage could all have taken their toll. At the stage no consideration was given to condition or to other features such as diachronic technological, iconographic, or stylistic influences.¹⁹

Next came a description of the materials: what they were, how extensively they were used, and the pattern of their distribution throughout the object. Finally, the ways in which the materials were put together in the fabrication of the object, the articulation was noted. For example, frescoes had an iconographic arrangement which caught the eye of the believer.²⁰

In this study, descriptions by other researchers were used as researcher could not be able too move into time without the work religiosity of other scholars and their evidence.

Substantial analysis was used as a descriptive physical inventory of the object. It was achieved with the assistance of whatever technical apparatus was appropriate and available in the 13th Century as described by other researchers. As extrapolated above, no

¹⁸ Kandler 2000, p. 5

¹⁹ Hutchings & McKenzie, 2016, p. 57

²⁰ Kimalu 1983, p. 19

measurements were made of the relics and paintings rather measurements by other investigators were used as authority, the rule of situational analysis.²¹

The next step in description was analysis of content. The investigator was concerned simply with subject matter. This was usually a factor only with works of art or other decorated objects. The procedure was iconography in its simplest sense, a reading of overt representations. In the case of a painting, this was as simply as represented, as if the work were a window on the world. Content included the relics and paintings in the Sancta Sanctorum and how they contributed to religious practice in the 13th century.

The particular encounter between an object with its history and an individual with his history shaped the deductions.²² Neither is what they were nor what they may become. Yet the event did not occur within a vacuum. The object was at least in some ways what it was or bore some recognizable relationship to what it was; the same, although less germane, was true of the investigator.²³ The object may not testify with complete accuracy about its culture, but it can divulge something. It was the analyst's task to find out what it could tell at the time and, perhaps, deduce what it could no longer tell.

Having progressed from the object itself in description to the interaction between object and perceiver in deduction, the analysis moved completely to the mind of the perceiver, to speculation. There were few rules or proscriptions at this stage. What was desired was as much creative imagining as possible, the free association of ideas and perceptions tempered only, and then not too quickly, by the analyst's common sense and judgment as to what was even vaguely plausible at the time the relics and paintings were used.

²¹ Kandler 2000, p. 9

²² Hutchings & McKenzie 2016

²³ Smear 2006, p. 6

This chapter gives a detailed discussion surrounding the subject of relics. In Chapter 1, the study has given a description and meaning as to what a relic is. However, in this chapter part of that may come into focus in order to closely keep up with the discussion. It will look at the importance of relics, the origins of relics, the classes of relics and other vital information necessary to this research.

However, to start with, it is important that this study also gives the meaning of the words “saint,” and “martyr.” This is because relics are always connected to saints or martyrs. Ginter states that a “saint” is a very religious or very pious or, simply, a very holy person.²⁴ Melissa Petruzzello’s definition in the Britannica encyclopaedia defines a saint as a holy person widely known for his or her “heroic sanctity” and who is believed to be in heaven.²⁵ While generally heaven is taken as a place where there is no any kind of pain or suffering and where God is entirely in control of everything. That also is a chief end of nearly all believers to dwell in such a place.

The same Encyclopaedia Britannica defines a martyr as:

Martyr, one who voluntarily suffers death rather than deny his religion by words or deeds; such action is afforded special, institutionalized recognition in most major religions of the world. The term may also refer to anyone who sacrifices his life or something of great value for the sake of principle.²⁶

Relics play an important role in religious practices among Christian denominations – both Catholic and Orthodox. However, nowadays relics are more displayed in the Catholic denomination. Wherever these objects may be, they are venerated at various degrees by

²⁴ Ginter 2010, p. 9

²⁵ Melissa Petruzzello

²⁶ Encyclopaedia Britannica, online

their followers. In the medieval period, these relics were regarded as of very high value more than that of precious minerals, more than gold and gems.²⁷

1.7 The Origin of Relics Among Christians

In the early centuries, Christians believed that the corpse or any bodies that had contact with the body had special qualities or powers that prompted them to venerate the individual. The basis of this notion was that:²⁸ They believed that [M]an's virtue, or holiness, or protective healing powers, still remain alive even after death of an individual – this view meant that there was eternity in the individual. Therefore, if someone body was mutilated in any possible at the time of dying, it is further believed that that the power within it still remains with its force and that any other part of little fragment will have an equal potential as a whole.²⁹ All relics were believed to be credited with the grace that resided in the martyrdom.³⁰

1.8 Relic, Definition and Classification

Reliquare is a Latin verb meaning to leave behind. Relictus means something or someone left behind, while reliquus is an adjective meaning surviving or remaining. A relic, therefore, is a physical object believed to contain the virtue of Christ or a saint. Relics fall in three grades: Grade 1 relics – these are body parts such as bone, hair, tooth, blood, nail, etc; Grade 2 relics – these are objects that were previously owned by the saint and they may include piece of clothing, tool and so on; Grade 3 relics – these are any objects which were in contact with a saint's grave.³¹ To mention here that some of the relics connected to clothing could be hats, capes, belts, smocks, shoes, and sandals; while personal property could be cups, spectacles, weapons, staves, bells, and headkerchiefs. Another category could be printed manuals, written texts, letters, scraps of paper bearing the signature or an

²⁷ Aavitsland 2016, p. 3

²⁸ Nickell 2007, p. 14

²⁹ Nickell 2007, p.14

³⁰ Nickell 2007, p. 15

³¹ Aavitsland 2016, p. 3

inscription by the person. Also included in this list is stones or rocks having an impression of a foot, limb or hand of a departed saint, martyr, deity or secular hero.³² Although it may not be clear on letters whether these are letters sent out by the very saint or letters received by the saint. However, either way, there is some kind of contact and possession as well.

However, the gathering of relics had its own disadvantages due to fierce opposition to relics in the Late Antiquity periods as well:

“The bodies of the martyrs, after having been exposed and insulted in every way for six days, and afterwards burned and turned to ashes, were swept by the wicked into the river Rhone which flows nearby, so that not even a relic of them might still appear upon the earth. And this they did as though they could conquer God and take away their rebirth in order, as they said, “that they might not even have any hope of resurrection.”³³

Some relics came from the burned organic matter such as lead canister of charred and others consisted of fragments of bones, chips of stones, ashes after cremation, dust and so on.³⁴

Although most scholars give only three grades of relics, Joe Nickell, gives a fourth grade of relics which he defines as anything that was deliberately touched with a view to forming a fourth-grade relic.³⁵

Grade 1 and Grade 2 relics were taken to be very special³⁶ and were mostly heavily secured by Christian leaders of the church. Grade 3 and Grade 4 relics were valued to some extent, but these could be also be given away or be sold to individuals³⁷ to raise funds.

³² Walsham 2010, p. 11

³³ Klein 2010, p. 1

³⁴ Smith 20... p. 147

³⁵ Nickell 2007, p. 19

³⁶ Nickell 2007, p. 19

³⁷ Nickell 2007, p. 19

1.9 Medieval Relics in the Sancta Sanctorum

The Sancta Sanctorum contained a special box whose main purpose was to house the reliquary. It contained some of the Grade 1 relics of the saints.³⁸ This reliquary box was engraved with these words “SCA SCO RV” and inside this box were some small relic boxes with bones and other types of relics which the Sancta Sanctorum accepted and regarded as sacred.³⁹

1.10 Importance of Relics and Paintings in the Sancta Sanctorum

Religious interest in relics originated from the Judaic beliefs where people could be healed by merely coming in touch with the remains of the prophets and holy men. Pagans also believed in relics and by inculcating relics to worship, it made easy for pagans to convert. So by collecting relics of saints, a building that stored them was sanctified and became the epitome of holiness here on earth. As a result, there was a race for relic hunting before the 13th Century. This argument is in tandem with Hahn who posited that relics were kept in order to bring the holy or venerated close to the believer thereby, making their abode a holy and more secure place.⁴⁰

Definitely, the above argument could not have been the main reason for the keeping of relics and the establishment of relics. Carroll proposed that use of relics became prominent because the Pope and cardinals wanted to an easy way of converting pagans to Christianity by allowing reverence to heroes and saints.⁴¹ If this is true, then religion before and during the 13th century lost its purity by combining pagan practices and those of the Christian. Kimulu found the use of relics in medieval period an affront to the Christian message against idol worship.⁴²

³⁸ Kimulu 1983, p. 29

³⁹ Smear 2006, p. 11

⁴⁰ Hahn 2011, p. 5

⁴¹ Carroll 1999, p. 7

⁴² Kimulu 1983, p. 2

According to Duchesne,⁴³ the veneration of relics is an ancient custom dating from the reverence shown at the graves of the martyrs even in the time of the apostles. Miracles have been worked by God in association with relics:

...not that some magical power existed in them, but just as God's work was done through the lives of holy people, so did His work continue after their deaths. Likewise, just as others were drawn closer to God through the lives of saints, so did they inspire others to draw closer even after their death?

This perspective provided the Church understanding of relics.

In the 13th Century and before, a relic mainly consisted of physical or personal remains of a saint which were then venerated as a tangible memorial.⁴⁴ The relics in this case, took the role of the saint and the abilities they possessed once alive. For the religious believer in that period, the assumption was that by keeping the relics, the powers associated with the saints could be invoked at will by touching the relic or keeping it within a room.⁴⁵ Based on this assumption, the church in Rome could have been collecting relics for the very purpose of creating a place full of holy artefacts which would transform a room into a holy place as happened to the Sancta Sanctorum. By using the rule of cause of effect, a collection of sanctified relics and paintings, the room into which they were stored became sanctified in turn.

It was believed that the human person is both body and soul, and one could not be considered without the other.⁴⁶ In other words, there was a synergy between the body and soul. This is well illustrated in the example by Carroll (1999), A man or woman leading a holy life does something spiritual, but it cannot be spiritual alone. The body must also take part in the ascetic struggle, and so the body, too, becomes holy. Likened to the struggle of an athlete, such an ascetic struggle is routine and continuous. The god-like quality of saints

⁴³ Duchesne 1957, p. 10

⁴⁴ Rollo-Koster 1980, p. 15

⁴⁵ Valerie & Phelan 2014, p. 5

⁴⁶ Sampton 1989, p. 4

made their bodies holy things because the connection between the body and the soul works a lasting effect on the physical body, something which lasts even past death.⁴⁷

The relics need an audience, saying that “An audience is essential. Its attention authenticates the relic.⁴⁸ It is in the often highly curated space of devotion, that, a saint’s cult is able to authenticate the virtues of the saint.⁴⁹ In Hahn’s understanding there is a kind of mutual constitution between the relic as a holy and powerful object and the supplicants as devotees. In this way the synergistic coaction of the material and immaterial connect the two extremes as continuations of each other. In fact, the coaction of material is not limited to the physical body. The coaction of spiritual and the physical could have necessitated the preservation of relics in the Sancta Sanctorum.

Further, the 13th century Lateran Church had some traces of paganism and the converts related more to relic abilities than faith in the unseen. Therefore, critical emphasis on the use of relics made it easy for the converts to relate. Shrines were common in the 13th Century and creation of a religious shrine purported to be sanctified elevated the idea of shrines in Lateran Church.⁵⁰ The construction of various rituals in which prayers and other practices were based denoted the active acceptance of Sancta Sanctorum.

Rollo-Koster suggested that the rush for relics and paintings of saints in 13th century was the motivation for Nicholas III to create a secluded place where relics could be preserved for future use in rituals and worship. The establishment of the Sancta Sanctorum also shows the interest the Popes had in preserving relics of saints and preventing them from being acquired by pagans who would misuse the relic abilities.⁵¹

Further, the church in Rome did not want to associate itself with other religions or be undermined by the authority of those religions.⁵² As a well-organized bureaucracy the

⁴⁷ Carroll 1999, p. 16

⁴⁸ Kimulu 1983, p. 91

⁴⁹ Hahn 2011, p. 21

⁵⁰ Smear 2006, p. 9

⁵¹ Rollo-Koster 1980, p. 45

⁵² Valerie & Phelan 2014, p. 55

church did not want to be subject to the holy places of Judaism and had to invent another holy place in Rome. For this reason, almost every remaining relic that related to the holy place in Jerusalem or the saints were moved from Israel to Rome and kept away from the public eye in the Sancta Sanctorum. While the Judaic religion emphasized the holy of holies as a point of contact between God and the high priest, the Sancta Sanctorum became a replica where “holy things” communed. It is opined, since, every imaginable relic of the saints and paintings are kept in the Sancta Sanctorum and the existence of relics associated with saint brings the associated holiness, the Sancta Sanctorum successfully moved the “holy of holies” from Israel to Rome.

1.11 Conclusion

The Chapter has discussed an introduction to the whole thesis and pertaining to objects of the Sancta Sanctorum, relics, painting and some definitions to some terms have been established to help with the textual flow of the thesis. In the next few Chapters the subjects shall be discussed at a much detailed level.

2 : LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The Contribution of Relics and Paintings of Sancta Sanctorum to Religious Practices in the 13th Century, Basilica of Saint John Lateran Church, Rome is the main subject of this research. The topic has been chosen as it is an on-going discussion among scholars, especially in the field of social science, and in particular historians. In contributing to the discussion, the researcher's data is gathered from materials that over the years have been published. A number of materials consulted came from different scholarly materials – monographs, published articles and books that vital to the subject of this discussion. The research intends to contribute to information of relics and paints specifically in the Sancta Sanctorum and how these contributed to the individual spiritual life of believers and of the church at that time.

2.2 Textual Analysis

Textual analysis of the subject was done through a thorough search of literature, such as research methodologies, books, peer reviewed materials and theses to develop an understanding of the subject. Other kinds of literature specifically relating to relics through the medieval period to present day were also consulted. The method reliably used to collect data for this research hinges on analyzing textual and material documents.

While this study discusses Relics and Paintings at a specific location and at a particular time, I recognise that this is a discussion of various scholarly thoughts that either focussed on relics or paintings alone or on both at different stages of the Catholic Church too. However, materials, specifically discussing the subject demanded a thorough understanding and critical review of the materials read.

In order to get a theoretical base of the research, this review describes, evaluates and clarifies the literature in question by enhancing another perspective on the subject through analyzing past studies on this subject. The key words focused on were: relics, paintings or frescoes, and Sancta Sanctorum as these the themes of the research.

Some scholars have exclusively focussed on relics of an individual person, while other scholars have focussed their studies on either a group of martyrs or saints belonging to a particular location and at a specified historical timeline. Given such individual preferences proliferates the subject surrounding relics with a sea of materials that may prove difficult to generally analyse.

Some of the materials consulted were exclusively on the relics of Jesus Christ. He published a book simply titled, “Relics of the Christ.” The author of the material, Joe Nickell, draws his primary sources from the four Gospels of the Bible.⁵³ He gives details of the “Palestinian rabbi from Nazareth named Yeshua (in Hebrew), today known as Jesus (from the Greek form of that name).”⁵⁴ In this book, a full description of relics related to Christ is discussed in brief but detailed. Relic veneration was practised in the East and West church.⁵⁵ Nickell points out that through investigations, today there are questions that cannot be answered about some relics of Jesus. He notes that there is an astonishing number of relics attributed to Jesus and that the relic of his foreskin is more than one, his shroud believed to be one but more than forty appear to be in Europe.⁵⁶ Whilst the existence of relics is real, he casts caution on how to represent the objects and information, as “others, more cynical, misrepresent the evidence, believing that the end justifies the means and that the most important objective is to promote their particular religious belief.”⁵⁷

Finally, despite all studies being done, not every researcher shall have the same conclusion but that care must be taken as the holiness of relics is being claimed.

Geary J Patrick has significantly contributed to the study of relics. In his book, *Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages* he extensively covers the subject of relic thefts from as early as 800CE to 1100CE⁵⁸ and delves into that period for proven details. Geary’s details surrounds, as the title suggests, theft of relics and opined that six elements

⁵³ Nickell 2007, p. 1

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ Nickell 2007, p. 13

⁵⁶ Nickell 2007, p. 191

⁵⁷ Nickell 2007, p. 191–192

⁵⁸ Geary 1990, p. 150–156

necessitated those acts, and the seventh element was for economic opportunistic gain as seen from Deusdona, and Felix.⁵⁹ The book gives the people's desire of how best possible they could be part of their own going history of relic veneration and all that beliefs that surrounded relics. That desire lead theft as one of the ways of acquiring relics. In some recipient communities, such thefts were accepted. Another book by Geary is: *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages*. This came as a vital resource to this study. Interestingly the book's introduction part deals with fears and other perceptions that the living have over the dead.⁶⁰ It reminds me of issues related to some of the African tradition, concerning the dead, who pose a lot of fears.

Another scholar, Ginter, looked at saints and relics, while even studies belonging to iconography are still valuable to this study of relics and paintings. Books, such as "Matter of Faith: An Interdisciplinary Study of Relics and Relic Veneration in the Medieval Period" containing thoughts of experts about relics, or Peter Brown's title "*The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*" are also a valuable resource for the continued discussion of relics in this study. From gathering the data exposed in the volume, I was inspired to read for a deeper meaning.

Other study materials of interest to the researcher discuss, what is known about the Sancta Sanctorum; what kind of relics were associated with the Sancta Sanctorum; the value of holy relics; faith and relics; all these shall be critically synthesised as this study continues. Other important sources of resources to refer to for this discussion are material on the websites, journals and individual articles posted on peer-reviewed online sources.

Among the online resources, one handy material was was Bradley A. Hostetler's work, a doctoral thesis entitled, "*The Function of Text: Byzantine Reliquaries with Epigrams, 843–1204*," in which I found subjects related to this research – saints, relics, and reliquaries – described in detail. I found his chapter 2 and chapter 4 very interesting as they focused on relics and reliquaries and access to relics respectively. In Chapter 2 of his research,

⁵⁹ Geary 1990, p. 129

⁶⁰ Geary 1994, p. 1–5

Hostetler disagrees with the traditional way of grouping relics as, primary, secondary, and tertiary. This type of grouping lacks historical evidence from the Byzantines way of viewing relics, and such classification is misleading.⁶¹ Further on his disagreement is that other forms of venerated object are not accurately catered or are completely sidelined in that classification, such as holy oil and the *acheiropoieta*.⁶² Based on research, Hostetler proposed another way of classifying relics in three groups as suggested:

I propose a different grouping system for relics that—while also a modern construct—more accurately reflects the Byzantine sources. My grouping is hierarchical and based on the identities of the holy figures with whom the relics are associated. While the Byzantines did not explicitly describe or categorize their relics by this or any other method, the emperor's and/or the patriarch's relative control over certain relics suggests that there was such a hierarchy. The first group thus includes relics of Christ. Such relics were primarily kept in the Great Palace, and access to them required a connection to the emperor. The second group consists of relics of the Theotokos, which were also housed in imperial churches, but outside of the Great Palace complex. The third group includes relics of any other holy figure (e.g. apostles, saints, and martyrs). Such relics were the most variable in terms of who possessed them and where they were housed.⁶³

On this proposal, I argue, taking into account of relic movements, that nearly all kinds of relics circulated and from the proposal it appears that indeed first group relics never succumbed to theft because they were tightly secured and were more to do with the political authority and power rather than on religious beliefs. These circulations through thefts are as old as the beginnings of circulations. It leads to a conclusion that third group relics were the ones most susceptible to thefts as they were less secured.

⁶¹ Hostetler 2016, p. 29

⁶² Hostetler 2016, p. 29; see also on p. 31 that the *acheiropoieta* was both a relic and an icon.

⁶³ Hostetler 2016, p. 30

In his chapter 4, he gives a detailed scholarly debate on accessibility of relics to the people. A conclusion based on the arguments is that some inscriptions on the reliquaries were meant to interact with the viewers at the spot, and undoubtedly relics were displayed for people to see, touch or kiss.⁶⁴

Other pieces of information came from the *Studia Patristica, Vol. LXXI*, an article by Robin M Jensen entitled, “*Saints’ Relics and the Consecration of Church Buildings in Rome.*” Where from the article I got more information of how relics functioned in the consecration of church building in Rome.⁶⁵ Relics placed under or in the altar generally represented ideas of collection union of saints, which is attached to Scriptural reading of Revelation 6:9⁶⁶ “souls under the altar.”⁶⁷

In the article, “*Emblematic Narratives in the Sancta Sanctorum,*” Marius Bratsberg Hauknes touched some important details described in this thesis pertaining to paintings or frescoes that are in the Sancta Sanctorum. The discussion centers on the martyrs in the Christian history – Peter, Paul, Lawrence, Agnes, and Stephen, then added is a so-called “donor image,” a scene depicted from the life of St. Nicholas.⁶⁸ On the subject of Sancta Sanctorum, the work of Hauknes has been greatly used in this research. She gives detailed account of the frescoes in the Sancta Sanctorum. The account given is in sequential with details of comparisons in some cases.⁶⁹ Another resource was an article, “*Opening the Holy of Holies: Early Twentieth-Century Explorations of the Sancta Sanctorum (Rome),*” by Kirstin Noreen. It is one of the few studies that exclusively deal with the Sancta Sanctorum. The article includes substantial amount on the scholarship and the Church’s strides to open up the Sancta Sanctorum to the academia world for academic research and documentation.

⁶⁴ Hostetlier 2016, p. 78–106

⁶⁵ Jensen 2014, p. 153–170; see also Cynthia Hahn “*What Do Reliquaries Do for Relics?*” pp. 284–316

⁶⁶ “When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained” (Revelation 6:9).

⁶⁷ Hahn, 2010, p. 297

⁶⁸ Hauknes 2013, p. 1

⁶⁹ Hauknes 2013, p. 1–49

Also important to this research are articles published in publications such as the “*Saints and Sacred Matter*” *The Cult of Relics in Byzantium and Beyond*. This catalogue, by different contributors more information on the subject was gathered and used. The volume entitled, “*Matter of Faith: An Interdisciplinary Study of Relics and Relic Veneration in the Medieval Period*,” published in 2014, in London by the British Museum is a great resource on the subject of relics and saints but had two contributors⁷⁰ briefly discussing relics in the Sancta Sanctorum – Vibeke Olson, discussing in detail the milk relic, and Lucy Donkin on the the 6th-century *Sancta Sanctorum* reliquary box. Many of the contributions discuss the relic and reliquaries in much detail.

2.3 Scholarships

Development of literature also started early in the first few centuries. Christians need to commemorate the happening and they had to records the dates:

A quite different kind of literature also grew up in the second century. This literature was a kind of memory bank produced by early Christian communities to keep the recollection of those who suffered alive.⁵ The earliest strata of that literature are the so-called *Acta* of the judicial processes by which the Christians were tried and condemned. We possess, for example, the main part of the process which condemned Justin Martyr and six other Christians. The text consists of a brief interrogation which determined that the seven were Christians and would not sacrifice to the gods. The sentence was brief and to the point: “Let those who will not sacrifice to the gods and yield to the command of the emperor [i.e. Marcus Aurelius the famous Stoic] be scourged and led away to be beheaded in accordance with the law.”⁷¹

As for the modern historians, the review of the information into such is a late account as noticed that it was not until in the 19th century that the quest started.

⁷⁰ Luch Donkin (Chapter 4, pp. 22–31); Vibeke Osolson (Chapter 14, pp. 151–158)

⁷¹ Cunningham 2005, p. 13

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Vatican positioned itself between promoting scholarly inquiry and controlling the vast material, literary and artistic resources of ecclesiastical history. Studies in archaeology and the early Christian and medieval history of the Church were facilitated by popes like Leo XIII who contributed to a critical investigation of the past through the opening of the Vatican Archives in 1881. Scholars affiliated with new centers for historical research in Rome not only utilized the vast wealth of documentation found in the archives but also explored the material sources for the Christian past found throughout the city. The papacy additionally encouraged archaeological research, such as the catacomb exploration of Giovanni de Rossi (1822–1894), as a means of documenting the origins of early Christianity.⁷²

In about 1965, scholars started to search more into the mediaeval religious life. They started with more interests to look into the life of saints through the religious texts that already existed, hagiographies received their own attention. Questions generated different angles of how to look at the cult of the saints among scholars of various disciplines. New approaches to the study of saints emerged.⁷³

The work that gave the greatest impetus to the functionalist tradition of hagiographic research in the English-speaking world, however, was Peter Brown's "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," which appeared in 1971. By placing at the very center of late antique life figures whom political and social historians had long dismissed as "marginal," by connecting their "religious" meaning to issues recognizable to the most secular twentieth-century intellectual, Brown, not only invented "the world of the late antiquity" as fashionable area of research and inspired studies of

⁷² Noreen 2011, p. 520–521

⁷³ Geary 1994, p. 9

holy men around the world, but he made hagiography respectable to a generation of historians trained in the traditions of the social sciences.⁷⁴

This entailed that the history of the cult of saints could be approached and be studied with more confidence and emphasis in the scholarly world.

From 1903 to 1908, the Sancta Sanctorum received immense scholarly attention following investigations that were going on about its inventory. Twenty books or articles related to the chapel and its contents were published to help give a clear understanding of the chapel that was also known as the Holy of the Holies.⁷⁵

2.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have briefly given details of the literature that has been consulted in order to help research this paper and bring it up to the level where it can be used as a scholarly material. There are some materials that I have mentioned but that does not mean that it is an exhaustive list. Many of the materials consulted have also not been mentioned for obvious reasons of space and limitations.

The publication by Peter Brown, “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity,” was a turning point for history. It opened up new enquires into the past and since then there has been a more discussions going on in scholarly world pertaining to History in the Middle Ages. However, without the Vatican opening up, a lot of enquiries would not have the desired results. When the Vatican decided to open up to promote the scholarly inquiry and to continue controlling its written materials, relics and painting, during the turn of the nineteenth century, that marked a turning point in in studying the history of the cult of saints.⁷⁶ It is proven already that the quest for information from the Sancta Sanctorum, had already started years back as other historians made attempts but

⁷⁴ Geary 1994, p. 13

⁷⁵ Noreen 2011, p. 520-546

⁷⁶ Noreen 2011, p. 520–521

were not successful. However, even when they started the research in the Sancta Sanctorum there appeared some hurdles that they needed to overcome. Hagiographers were a very valuable source of information in the study of the cult of saints. In the third century there was already a systematic way of preserving information among the early Christians.

CHAPTER 3 : RELICS

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter the study gives details on the subject of relic. The study shall discuss relics in the previous centuries before the thirteenth century so as to give a concrete background and help shape this discussion to flow smoothly. The topic shall be briefly discussed under specific subtopics of interest to this paper. The study shall among other important things look at; the definitions as employed in the modern day scholarly understanding; the origins; and the importance of relics. Both the Eastern Greek Orthodox and the Western Latin speaking Catholic Church had a tradition of relics. A slight difference was that the body-part relics in the Western Catholic church were kept in closed reliquaries⁷⁷ making it difficult to be viewed clearly where as in the Eastern Orthodox church such relics were wrapped with precious materials and were vividly visible, emphasising on the visible presence of the saint.⁷⁸ Hostetler, writing to the contrary about relics in the Byzantine argues that relics were available for the faithful to see and touch.⁷⁹ The cardinal point of relics was for the believers to see and touch as that also solidified their belief in the immediate divine powers of the relics. Therefore, I observe that the function of relics was to appeal to the human senses and produce divine connection between themselves and heaven. One may ask, when relics changed possession from the eastern owners to the western, did they appeal to the audience as they did in the previous community? Geary J Patrick points out the need for reconstruction value on the object.⁸⁰

3.2 Definition

The nature of the subject demands that once a definition is provided, classification should also be discussed so as to provide a clear picture of understanding the topic of relics. Relics are generally considered as remains of the dead holy person. A holy person after life can be declared as a saint. In general, “the word “saint” in the common vernacular has

⁷⁷ Barrow 2006, p. 136 – reliquaries were mainly boxes, usually shaped like small houses, containing saints’ relics, though they also took other shapes.

⁷⁸ Popović p. 80 col. 2

⁷⁹ Hostetler 2016, p. 81

⁸⁰ Geary 1994, 213

connotations of forbearance, self-abnegation, and service to others out of love.”⁸¹ However, at the level of discussion in this study a saint is described as a “holy person.”⁸²

Given the above definition, it is of great importance in understanding of how the term is used in current, twenty-first-century scholarship. Going by a selection of the authoritative reference works, there is concrete information on which to delve into this subject. For instance, in the 2005 edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, relics are defined as, “the venerated remains of venerable persons.”⁸³ However, for a Christian definition, the following may be palatable, from the *Encyclopaedia of Christian Theology*, the renowned Dominican liturgist, Pierre-Marie Gy (1922-2004) is of the view that the term relics “refers primarily to the bodily remains of saints and martyrs, and secondly to objects that are directly associated with the life of Christ (the Cross, for instance) or of a saint’s or again objects which have touched the saint’s body.”⁸⁴ As for Cynthia Hahn, an Art historian describes a relic as: “a physical object that is understood to carry the *virtus* of a saint or Christ, literally the virtue but more accurately the power of the holy person.”⁸⁵

Relics fall in three grades: Grade 1 relics – these are body parts such as bone, hair, tooth, blood, nail, etc; Grade 2 relics – these are objects that were previously owned by the saint and they may include piece of clothing, tool and so on; Grade 3 relics – these are any objects which were in contact with a saint’s grave.⁸⁶

Finally, I want to add an observation that Alexandra Walsham extends the definition from a holy person to a deity or a secular hero⁸⁷ (male or female).

⁸¹ Cunningham 2005, p. 8

⁸² Cunningham 2005, p. 8

⁸³ Smith 2015, p.43

⁸⁴ Smith 2015, p.43

⁸⁵ Hahn 2010, p. 290; see also Carroll 2016, p. 190

⁸⁶ Aavitsland 2016, p. 3

⁸⁷ Walsham 2010, p. 11 – “Typically, it is the body or fragment of the body of a deceased person, but it can also be connected to living people who have acquired fame, recognition, and a popular following. Alongside these corporeal relics (skulls, bones, blood, teeth, hair, fingernails, and assorted lumps of flesh) are non-corporeal items that were possessed by or came into direct contact with the individual in question. These may be articles of clothing (hats, girdles, capes, smocks, shoes, and sandals) or pieces of personal property (cups, spectacles, handkerchiefs, weapons, staves, and bells). They can be printed books, written texts, letters, and scraps of paper bearing an autograph

3.3 Relic Classification, Collection and Documentation

All saints are regarded and or revered examples of having led a good life for their community, however, what makes them attain that sainthood is dependent on the culture in which they lived and therefore is subjective.⁸⁸

The idea that relics did not only comprise of remains, but also anything that came into contact with a saint while alive or after death dates back to the times of Jesus Christ.⁸⁹ The writer of the Gospel of Matthew says:

³⁴ When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret. ³⁵ And when the men of that place recognized Jesus, they sent word to all the surrounding country. People brought all their sick to him ³⁶and begged him to let the sick just touch the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.⁹⁰

My view is that such a biblical passage despite what the intended intention and meaning of the writer was, the readers had their own interpretation and meaning of the interpreters linked that to relics. Practically, some acts towards relics publicly manifested among these Christians. In Klein's view:

Early Christian attempts to gather and preserve the remains of holy men and women were not an isolated phenomenon. Indeed, they formed part of a much broader culture of collecting that focused on bodily remains of *people* as much as on material remains of *things* that could either claim direct physical contact with the body of Christ or were associated with events and places related to his life, ministry, and death through the account of the Gospels.⁹¹

signature or graphic inscription. Or they might be rocks or stones upon which the impression of a foot, hand or limb has been left as an enduring testimony of the presence of a departed saint, martyr, deity, or secular hero.”

⁸⁸ Welch 2016, p. 2

⁸⁹ Welch 2016, p. 3

⁹⁰ Matthew 14:34–36

⁹¹ Klein 2010, p. 56

Among a classification of relics the following would qualify to be called relics – whole body of a person, the head, hair, teeth, clothes, books, furniture, instruments used in the killing of the person, winding-sheets, coffins, ashes if body is cremated – they are believed to be credited with the grace that resided in the individual.⁹² Sometimes, the bodies of the executed faithful ones, or their remnants were bought from the judges or executioners and given a decent burial by the Christians. The day of the martyr's death was written in the register of his church to commemorate the day on its anniversary.⁹³

To keep on with the tradition, these relics were documented at the point of storage and an individual in possession of any relics also needed to have a thorough knowledge of that relic so as to pass on the correct information. This meant that in different places people venerated different figures who to them were killed for their religious faith and then considered as saints.

In the Western churches, the the commemoration of the day of the death of the martyr became to be known, in Latin, as *dies natalis*—'day of birth into everlasting life'.⁹⁴ Some of these days are very prevalent to date especially in the secularised Western countries, such as 14 February which is celebrated as St Valentine's Day.⁹⁵

3.3.1 Quest for Relics over the Ages

The quest for relics began in earnest as early as the 3rd and 4th centuries.⁹⁶ In 325 AD, Constantine ordered the building of churches in strategic sites⁹⁷ – at Christ's nativity; at Golgotha, where he was crucified; where he ascended into heaven at Jerusalem and at Mount Olive.⁹⁸

⁹² Klein 2010, p. 56

⁹³ Calvin 1561, p. 3

⁹⁴ Welch 2016, p. 2

⁹⁵ Welch 2016, p. 2

⁹⁶ Humphries 2006, p. 40

⁹⁷ Or holy sites of historical importance to Christianity

⁹⁸ Humphries 2006, p. 40

Historical sources of relic veneration among Christians date back to the second century following the Martyrdom of Polycarp in about 155-160 CE. The persecutors tried to prevent the faithful believers from getting parts of the “holy flesh” but in the end the charred bones were taken and buried in a place where they could return to commemorate the day of his death on the anniversary.⁹⁹

Fierce opposition mounted the gathering of relics, so as to stop Christians from venerating and worshiping them like Christ. Polycarp’s body was burned in a stadium at Smyrna between 155 CE and 156CE.¹⁰⁰ Prudentius’s description of St Hippolytus’ death remains gruesome - his body was torn in pieces and scattered by wild horses.¹⁰¹ Klein notes that:

[B]oth narratives also stress how the martyrs’ disciples eagerly collected the bones and body parts of their masters. While St. Polycarp’s companions “took up his bones which are more valuable than precious stones and finer than refined gold, and laid them in a suitable place,” the disciples of Hippolytus, “stunned with sorrow, went along with searching eyes, and in their garments’ folds gathered his mangled flesh.”¹⁰²

There are few instances recorded whereby a man declared as a “holy person” with a potential of being a relic after death resulted. Sainthood would be bestowed on someone perceived as holy during his lifetime, because of the signs and wonders performed whilst alive, and signs that may accompany him on deathbed – prophecy, clairvoyance, his facial transfiguration with heavenly light. Any of such immediately transformed and confirmed the body into a relic.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Jensen 2014, p. 155

¹⁰⁰ Klein 2010, p. 55

¹⁰¹ Klein 2010, p. 55

¹⁰² Klein 2010, p. 55

¹⁰³ Talbot 2010, p. 218

In Europe, the bodies of the saints and their relics became, in the West, the focal point of religious devotion. In the communities in which they lived, the presumably ‘saints-to-be’ were venerated after their deaths.¹⁰⁴ There was a growing desire to hunt for relics—either fresh ones or not.

The relics of Simeon Stylites and Francis of Assisi were sought after when they were still alive. Fears lingered that someone could plan a kidnapping or the worst – murder of an aging holy man to have his relics or steal his body as soon as he was dead.¹⁰⁵ While scholars cite this text, they do not cite or give alternative as to how the aging holy men protected themselves from unscrupulous people. Arguably, saints are known before they die, because in the New Testament, “the ‘saint’ is one who merits the name even during life. The ‘saint’ is close to God and those who are not saints (the impious) are not close to God.”¹⁰⁶

However, all his body parts became legitimate relics and efforts by the flock and colleagues, and relic traders to have his relics – whole body or body parts – teeth, hair, arm, tongue, bones, ashes, clothes, were intensified at that stage. As would be the case, the most sought relic would be the most venerated or the most profitable and this posed a greater challenge to acquire. Possible ways of acquiring relics included: negotiations, buying, violent take over, or theft as the market had flourished – churches, monasteries, and the elite who owned churches also needed relics. This may be one of the reason as to why some graves of the saints were not marked and exhuming the remains at a future stage caused some difficult.

3.3.2 Helena

One of the first few relic-gatherers, the Empress Helena, mother of Emperor Constantine the Great of Constantinople is accredited to have gathered large pieces of the Cross of Jesus. Helena was also known as St Helena who had a passion for

¹⁰⁴ Geary 1994, p. 166

¹⁰⁵ Geary 1994, p. 203.

¹⁰⁶ Cunningham, 2005 p. 9; see also (1 Pet. 1: 15–16, quoting Lev. 11: 44–5).

collecting relics.¹⁰⁷ There are several versions¹⁰⁸ of legend of how Helena discovered the cross but that is not for this discussion for now. The most important part of this is that in about 326-328¹⁰⁹ Common Era (CE), she made her first journey to the Holy Land—looking for places of historical significance for her Christian life.¹¹⁰ I must point out on this point that there is no scholarly agreement on the date of her journey.¹¹¹ During the expedition, she discovered the Cross of Jesus, where he was crucified.¹¹² Following her visit to Palestine, her influence in the land grew exceedingly, by identifying biblical sites and building churches and shaping the thinking of Eusebius (c. 260–339).¹¹³ To back up that view, Welch adds that Helena is accredited with the founding of the Church of Nativity in Bethlehem and the church on Mount of Olives where Christ was born and ascended to heaven from respectively.¹¹⁴ The discovery of the Cross of Jesus resulted on another development at the site – the construction of a pilgrimage shrine at Golgotha. Another development was that there was the tradition of veneration of relics went further to the veneration of fragments of the cross from in the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and eventually led also to the spread of cross-relics across Europe.¹¹⁵ The True Cross, though a secondary relic, it was the most revered to the Byzantines.¹¹⁶ Not only was the Cross of divine important to the Byzantines only, but even today, the cross on which Jesus was crucified remains as the most powerful of all elements

¹⁰⁷ Brazinski & Fryxell 2013, p. 4

¹⁰⁸ Nickell 2007 p. 77-83

¹⁰⁹ Jensen is of the view that the Cross was discovered in the year 326CE (see page 150 of publication: Jensen (R.M.), 2000. *Understanding Early Christian Art*. London & New York: Routledge; and also Nickell (J.), 2007. *Relics of the Christ*. page 57)

¹¹⁰ Welch 2016, p. 3

¹¹¹ Bralewski p. 30 see his notes (There is no scholarly consensus regarding the date of her journey to Jerusalem. Cf. H.A. Pohlsander, *Helena...*, p. 84–85. Some scholars date it to 324–325 (S. Borgehammar, *How the Holy Cross...*, p. 137–140), others to the spring of 327 AD (E.D. Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire AD 312–360*, Oxford 1982, p. 28–49; J.W. Drijvers, *Helena Augusta...*, p. 55–72).)

¹¹² Jensen 200, p. 150

¹¹³ Dyas 2014, p.3

¹¹⁴ Welch 2016, p. 3

¹¹⁵ Jensen 2000, p. 150

¹¹⁶ Hostetler 2016, p. 5

and relics in Christianity.¹¹⁷ The tabled where Pilate wrote the words: "...KING OF THE JEWS"¹¹⁸ was also found together with the True Cross.¹¹⁹

Despite several accounts of how the True Cross was discovered, the details of the excavation reveal the discovery of three crosses and then the puzzle of who was truly on which cross of the three people who were hang there. There are a number of versions of how the True Cross came to be identified and verified as the one with divine power among the three crosses. Some of the legends state that:

Helena, the mother of Constantine, a woman of outstanding faith and deep piety, and also of exceptional munificence, whose offspring indeed one would expect to be such a man as Constantine, was advised by divinely-sent visions to go to Jerusalem. There she was to make an enquiry among the inhabitants to find out the place where the sacred body of Christ had hung on the Cross. The spot was difficult to find, because the persecutors of old had set a statue of Venus over it, so that if any Christian wanted to worship Christ in that place, he seemed to be worshipping Venus. For this reason, the place was not much frequented and had all but been forgotten.

Rufinus refers to a pagan temple, Aelia Capitolina, which the Emperor Hadrian had built on the site of the Holy Sepulchre.

But when, as we related above, the pious lady hastened to the spot pointed out to her by a heavenly sign, she tore down all that was profane and polluted there. Deep beneath the rubble she found three crosses lying in disorder. But the joy of finding this treasure was marred by difficulty of distinguishing to whom each cross belonged.

¹¹⁷ Nickell 2007, p.77

¹¹⁸ "Above his head they placed the written charge against him: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS" (Mat. 27:37); "Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS" (John 19:19).

¹¹⁹ Socrates, p. 54 (0380-0440–Socrates Scolasticus–Historia Ecclesiastica)

The board was there, it is true, on which Pilate had placed an inscription written in Greek, Latin and Hebrew characters. But not even this provided sufficient evidence to identify the Lord's Cross. In such an ambiguous case uncertainty requires divine proof. It happened that in that same city, a certain prominent lady of that place lay mortally ill with a serious disease. Macarius was at that time bishop of the Church there. When he saw the doubts of the queen and all present, he said: "Bring all three crosses which have been found and God will now reveal to us which is the cross which bore Christ."

After a prayer by Bishop Macarius, the "wood of salvation" was brought near the woman, and she was miraculously healed.

When the queen saw that her wish had been answered by such a clear sign, she built a marvellous church of royal magnificence over the place where she had discovered the Cross. The nails, too, which had attached the Lord's body to the Cross, she sent to her son. From some of these he had a horse's bridle made, for use in battle, while he used the others to add strength to a helmet, equally with a view to using it in battle. Part of the redeeming wood she sent to her son, but she also left part of it there preserved in silver chests. This part is commemorated by regular veneration to this very day. (quoted in Thiede and d'Ancona 2002, 20–22)¹²⁰

Over time, a worship attributed to Helena developed in the Western Latin and Eastern Greek speaking church and consequently she was declared a saint in both the Catholic Church and Eastern Orthodox Church.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Nickell 2007, p. 81

¹²¹ Bralewski, 2017, p. 27

3.4 Movement and Transfer of Relics

The transfer and movement of relics came as a result of the growing desire to possess certain relics for religious duties fame or other reasons. This act grew out of a tradition that demanded such, that is opened doors for even illegal trade of relics.

Constantinople had developed considerably and before the conquest in 1204, one of the victors commented:

Many of our men, I may say, went to visit Constantinople, to gaze at its many splendid palaces and tall churches, and view all the marvellous wealth of a city richer than any other since the beginning of Time. As for the relics, these were beyond all description; for there were at that time as many in Constantinople as in all the rest of the world.¹²²

During this period, Constantinople had an official number of approximately 3,600 relics that came from 476 different saints accommodated in Constantinople alone, making the city a major attraction site for pilgrims from all over the world.¹²³

Relics also dispersed through war. Some sources¹²⁴ record that in 1204CE Constantinople, in the Byzantine Empire was looted by the armies of the Fourth Crusade, taking with them Christian artefacts as they made their way west, and other sources confirm that the same year, 1204CE, Rome became a city with an influx of relics.¹²⁵ The result of war on Constantinople was also the dispersal of some of the most revered relics and objects. There

¹²² Power 2006, p. 17

¹²³ Gaggi 2015:2; Krueger, Derek. "The Religion of Relics in Late Antiquity and Byzantium." *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe*. Ed. Martina Bagnoli, et al. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010. 5 – 17. Print.

¹²⁴ Humphries 2006, p. 48; Nickell 2007, p. 118 write, "In 1204 the crusaders launched a determined attack on Constantinople. The Byzantines' resistance was soon overcome, the walls were breached near the Blachernae church area, and crusaders streamed into the city. Sacred items were trampled, treasures looted, and wine cellars broken into, whereupon drunken Christian crusaders perpetrated further outrages in the name of religion,..." Hostetler 2016, p. 13 reechoed the same sentiments, "1204 is when Constantinople was sacked by the Latin armies of the Fourth Crusade, and was looted of its treasures and relics."

¹²⁵ Brazinski and Fryxell 2013, p. 4 says, By 1204 AD, the city was the world leader in relic-collecting, boasting a hoard so impressive that some scholars even suggest that the fourth crusade was conceived as a means to loot it.

are no clear scholarly sources that can at that time could allege or confirm that some of these looted relics ended up in the Sancta Sanctorum in Rome although Rome and its churches were the destination of most of these collected relics. However, some sources¹²⁶ mention of a wider geographical area where some of the relics came from.

In 385/86, Bishop Ambrose of Milan was thus inspired to dig in front of the chancel screen of the Basilica of Sts. Felix and Nabor outside Milan, where he promptly discovered the intact bodies of the previously unknown martyrs Sts. Gervasius and Protasius. Despite long-standing prohibitions against disturbing the dead and the enactment, in February 386, of a law stipulating that “no person shall transfer a buried body to another place . . . sell the relics of a martyr . . . or traffic in them, Ambrose moved the remains of the martyrs to the Basilica of Fausta and on the following day transferred them to his new basilica, commonly known as the Basilica Ambrosiana, where he laid them to rest under the altar. It was not the last time that local martyrs would call Ambrose to action. Less than ten years later, in 395, Ambrose discovered the bodies of Sts. Nazarius and Celsus in a garden outside Milan and transferred them to the Basilica of the Holy Apostles.¹²⁷

In the above case, and in this separate case the movement of a relic was necessitated by a cause of recognition someone as a ‘holy saint’ or canonization of saints. This involved the exhumation of the saint’s body from its original or current place of burial to a site near an altar, and this was, the ‘elevation’ of a saint.¹²⁸ Geary J Patrick points out that identification of the tomb, reliquary and their accompanying documents called *authenticae*, and description of the burial were necessary. Local bishops carried out these examinations and

¹²⁶ See p. 36 of Manfred Luchterhandt article: The popes and the loca sancta of Jerusalem: relic practice and relic diplomacy in the Eastern Mediterranean after the Muslim Conquest. “When the medieval relic shrine of Leo III in the papal palace chapel Sancta Sanctorum.... was reopened in 1903 after 400 years, its compartments were found to contain a unique ensemble of twenty-seven reliquaries, boxes, cases, and glass containers whose provenance from Byzantium, Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Sicily documents the extensive cultural relations of the various popes

¹²⁷ Klein 2010, p. 56

¹²⁸ Barrow 2006, p. 124

confirmed the authenticity of the relic, then followed the public ritual of ‘elevation’ for the public to venerate the relics.¹²⁹

In my view, the transfer of relics from one community to another, either through looting or theft, bred double problems at the same time. While it disturbed the pattern of the community’s veneration life with the relics, on the other new community, a relic had to be made or be forced to gain the meaning and function probably similar to that of the previous locality. This resulted in either loss of the relic’s symbolic value or it lost its community-based identity (cbi).

McGregor demonstrates the difficulties and fortunes of the trade surrounding relics as follows:

Acquiring prime relics required much time and money, so competition between sacred sites drove many churches to extreme, even inexplicable, lengths. Fragments of saints were trafficked around Europe, but far too often supply simply fell behind demand, resulting in an underground economy of trades, surreptitious purchases and even theft. Although high-ranking churchmen could technically place orders, churches often could not afford to pay the astronomical prices of the most prized choices. And so, they turned to a group of relic fixers. Perhaps the most famous of these professional ‘merchants’ was a 9th-century Roman deacon named Deusdona, who lived near the basilica of St Peter in Chains, aided by his brothers, Lunisus and Theodorus, he gained an unenviable notoriety for selling at least five saints to the Benedictine monastery at Fulda.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Geary 1994, p. 204

¹³⁰ McGregor 2019, p. 40; See also Geary 1994, p.212, who point out that Deusdona was the most highly independent relic merchant.

As relic trade boomed in the central Middle Ages, the number of thefts also increased, and were rarely encountered in translation unless evil acted on their plans.¹³¹ And McGregor demonstrates a moment of business practically went wrong:

In AD 828, two Venetian merchants questioned the appropriateness of the body of St Mark remaining in the then Muslim-occupied city of Alexandria. After stealing it, they cloaked the body in joints of pork to deter Muslims from searching their ship. Other notorious merchants included Deusdona's direct competitor, Felix, who was often recorded as selling the same relics and saints as his rival. Both men openly admitted to stealing said relics but were protected by their clerical customers, who aided their escape from the pursuing monastic communities from which the relics had been purloined.¹³²

Not all thefts of relics were condemned, some of these theft acts received some praise from other communities and one such example similar to the above incident's results is the Bèze community who praised their community for stealing relics.¹³³ However, in an isolated incident of theft of a reliquary resulted in death sentence.¹³⁴

Geary pointed out that circulation of relics was through gifts, theft, or commerce.¹³⁵ Madeleine Gray critiques that and adds that there are instances which do not neatly fall under theft and gives the following:

[T]he removal of the relics of Dyfrig and Winefride could rather be seen as cultural aggression and expropriation. While not exactly relic theft, it could certainly be described as forcible translation in spite of the superficial appearance of consent. We could perhaps compare the political pressures on Bishop David with those on successive popes which resulted in their giving

¹³¹ Geary 1990, p. 55

¹³² McGregor 2019, p. 41

¹³³ Geary 1990, p. xii

¹³⁴ *Boehm* 2014, p. 78, records of a case in the 18th century, where a goldsmith of Saint-Flour charged with the theft of a reliquary from the cathedral, was sentenced and put to death.

¹³⁵ Geary 1994, p. 208–213

reluctant approval for the removal of relics from the Roman catacombs and their eventual dispersal through northern Europe. Descriptions of the early removal of relics from Rome include scenes of hostile crowds and the jostling of those carrying the relics away.¹³⁶

Loud G A, introduces another point that at times theft of relics, especially whole bodies or a larger part of the body were counter thefts.¹³⁷ Considering the points raised above by Geary, Boehm, and Loud it is most likely that some of the thefts were sophisticated and could have involved a syndicate.

3.5 Function of Relics

Since the start of venerating martyrs, Christians cared for their graves and by second-half of the 3rd century, they were already soliciting intercession.¹³⁸ But there is no date suggesting that bodies and or body parts of the saints were a source of divine power.¹³⁹

According to the study of Robert Wiśniewski, who quotes early sources, notes that relics regardless of the class and their geographical position, they shared among others these two common functions – expel demons; give out healing.¹⁴⁰ To this point, I add that by giving out healing power, relics functioned to protect individual people and the protection was extended to groups or territories as in times of wars.

However, two things validated the relics: thus, their story; and their container they carried the relics in.¹⁴¹ Both of these elements deal with an audience.

¹³⁶ Gray, 2014, p. 167

¹³⁷ Loud 2007, p. 376; see details in the Chapter about the Sancta Sanctorum.

¹³⁸ Wiśniewski 2017, p. 1

¹³⁹ Ibid

¹⁴⁰ Wiśniewski 2017, p. 8-9 and quotes, “The earliest evidence of the tombs of saints as sources of power able to heal the sick, expel demons and predict the future: Gregory of Nazianzus, *C. Const.* 1.69.”

¹⁴¹ Hahn 2010, p. 296

Art historian, Cynthia Hahn notes that a relic needs an audience.¹⁴² That is correct. I agree with that and

I have to add on that a relic does not operate in a vacuum, it will always need a matter on which the virtue can be exercised. Its effect has to be felt and experienced in any way that can be deemed as miraculous. For that reason, even if it crossed social, cultural or religious boundaries, it still retained its meaning and transformed its whole list of function(s).

A relic had its own impact in its own natural environment and community. The way in which the saint operated and touched the immediate population and how the saint was revered would possibly not be at the same level once his or her relics translated to another community either by purchase, gift or theft. It seems there was considerable difficulty to transfer the same function and the same meaning as in its own natural and original community.¹⁴³ However, probably what was then most important was, once in that new locality, the relic had to produce the desired results of the congregants – economic results (it had to bring in some money in one way or the other); divine results (the sick to find the desired effect in it and some connection with the divine God), sinners had to believe through it, they will have their sins blotted out; and those who wanted miracles also had to be convinced that the relic as a medium will do the trick. One needed to know the saint's background and a list of miracles that the relic was capable of producing.

A relic presented to another community as a relic would assume its own value as a relic once the new community accepts it as such.¹⁴⁴ Thunø clearly observes that:

To give the relic an identity it needs an "extraneous sign" such as an oral tradition, a document, a reliquary or a picture to confirm its authenticity. In the event of translations or of any other break from the former cultural context, such signs might be lost or disassociated from the relic. Hence, "in order for an object to be venerated as a relic, a new symbolic function had to

¹⁴² Hahn 2010, p. 291

¹⁴³ Geary 1994, p. 208

¹⁴⁴ Geary 1994, p. 215

be as-signed — a function that had its origin in the fabric of the society in which it was to be venerated. Thus the symbolic value of a new or rediscovered relic was only a reflection of the values assigned by the society that honoured it...in its new location it became an important symbol only if that society made it one, and this symbolism was necessarily a product of that society".¹⁴⁵

Without giving it a new phenomenon, which clearly met the potential needs of the community in which it was to be venerated. The community had to attest the relics potential to be venerated such as its divine power, its capability to produce miraculous wonders; meaningfulness to both individuals and the community at large. Once part of that was achievable, the relic was accepted to be part of the community. However, there may be some difference as to how relics that that had found their way to this community either as stolen items or plundered items from somewhere were treated.

My perception is that relics connected both the poor and the rich to a divine life, hope, and expectation despite their different desires and different function a relic performed. Holger A Klein points out, that it was the possession of these relics that linked the emperor's to the divine powers and gave out positive results in battle, made him a prestige in his political and religious office, that made other to envy to have the same relics so that they could also achieve the same status and or office.¹⁴⁶

Relics were mostly sought objects over the ages, yet once divorced from its milieu, a relic is without significance—a mere bone or a bit of dust¹⁴⁷—“highly priced and truly priceless objects,”¹⁴⁸ with possible sets of shared beliefs¹⁴⁹ that could be passed on orally and be kept in hearts for use.

¹⁴⁵ Thunø 2002, p. 15

¹⁴⁶ Klein 2004, p. 284

¹⁴⁷ Geary 1990, p. 5

¹⁴⁸ Klein 2004, p. 288; see also Walsham 2010, p. 14, “religious tradition designates and venerates as a relic is liable to be dismissed by another as distasteful and dirty bodily waste or the useless detritus of daily existence.”

¹⁴⁹ Geary 1994, p. 200

3.6 Veneration of Relics and Some Biblical Perspectives

Veneration of relics is an old tradition with the Eastern Greek, and Western Latin speaking churches. Arguably, it has its roots in the biblical passages.

3.6.1 Sainly Life: Old Testament Perspectives

Through a study of the OT, one can vividly point out that there are some references to relic veneration in the Old Testament of the Christian Bible. Nickell points out that the saintly life of some biblical characters is acknowledged and the following is an example:

“¹⁹ So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem).
²⁰ Over her tomb Jacob set up a pillar, and to this day that pillar marks Rachel’s tomb” (Genesis 35:19–20).¹⁵⁰

Other passages also give reference to Joseph’s relics:

²⁵ And Joseph made the Israelites swear an oath and said, “God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place.” ²⁶ So Joseph died at the age of a hundred and ten. And after they embalmed him, he was placed in a coffin in Egypt - (Genesis 50:25–26).¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Nickell 2007, p. 15. Note that in the New Testament Joseph’s instruction is recorded, and that covered a period of almost 200 years before he was buried in his preferred place – Canaan. “By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions concerning the burial of his bones” (Hebrews 11:22).

¹⁵¹ Ibid. He points out that the desire for one to keep a relic for someone simply starts as a respect for the beloved person. In circa 483 B.C., the bones of the cremated Buddha were saved by some Indian Monks. A few pieces were discovered in China under a temple in 1987. See also Exodus 13:19.

What transpires afterwards was that the bones of Joseph were ceremoniously buried on a purchased land.¹⁵² According to Scripture, even pieces of the human body deserve a decent burial: the bones of Jezebel after the dogs had feasted on her on Jezreel deserved a burial (2 Kings 9:35); and the head of Ish-bosheth (1 Samuel 4:12).¹⁵³ Through these two passages cited, Wortley suggests that every part of the body is supposed to be buried in the environment where the dead are buried.

In another Scripture, when Elisha got the mantle of Elijah, the mantle was used to separate the waters so that he can go through on dry land.

“¹³ Elisha then picked up Elijah’s cloak that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. ¹⁴ He took the cloak that had fallen from Elijah and struck the water with it. “Where now is the LORD, the God of Elijah?” he asked. When he struck the water, it divided to the right and to the left, and he crossed over. ¹⁵ The company of the prophets from Jericho, who were watching, said, “The spirit of Elijah is resting on Elisha.” And they went to meet him and bowed to the ground before him.”¹⁵⁴

In the account above, I contend that when Elisha took the mantle up, it is not stated that he took it up as a sacred relic to be venerated or as an important garment to be worn, and not just to be merely worn but to use it to perform some rituals.

Commenting further on the OT biblical passage, Wortley observes that there are two commentaries on the passage which both originate in the mid-fourth century. One is the Syrian and the other the Palestinian. The Syrian, is structured to defeat the traditional Jewish teachings that make one defiled for having come in contact with a dead body, and therefore rituals must be performed to purify the person.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² Joshua 24:32 “And Joseph’s bones, which the Israelites had brought up from Egypt, were buried at Shechem in the tract of land that Jacob bought for a hundred pieces of silver from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem. This became the inheritance of Joseph’s descendants.”

¹⁵³ Wortley 2004, p. 165

¹⁵⁴ 2 Kings 2:13–15

¹⁵⁵ Wortley 2004, p. 169 (See also Numbers 19:11-12; Leviticus 5:2; 21:11)

The writer adds that Christians are encouraged to gather at tombs of the saints with a view to offering prayers, hymns, celebrating Eucharist, and so on. In advancing this view, some scriptures are quoted: “Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his faithful servants (Psalm 116:15).”¹⁵⁶

Wortley reviews the commentary on the passage as follows:

The mortal remains [] of those who lived with God are not to be held in dishonour. For the Prophet Elisha, after he had died, raised up a dead man who had been murdered by Syrian brigands. When this man’s corpse came into contact with the bones of Elisha he rose up and lived. This would not have happened if the body of Elisha had not been holy.¹⁵⁷

Cyril of Jerusalem (ca 315–386) speaking on this same passage in the Catechetical lectures which he delivered ca 350, goes considerably further:

[Consider] Elisha who twice raised somebody up: once when he was alive, again after his death. While he was alive he brought about a resurrection by means of his own soul. But lest the souls alone of the righteous be held in honour and that it might be believed that power...resides in the bodies of the righteous, when a dead man was thrown into the tomb of Elisha and came into contact with the dead body of the Prophet, it was vivified. The dead body of the Prophet performed a task of the soul. That which lay dead conferred life on the expired while that which conferred life remained dead. Why was this so? So that, since Elisha did not revive, the deed would not be attributed solely to his soul; also to show that, in the absence of the soul, a kind of power... resides within the bodies of the saints by virtue of the righteous soul which

¹⁵⁶ Wortley 2004, p. 170

¹⁵⁷ Wortley 2004, p. 170

[formerly] dwelt within them for so many years and at whose service they were.¹⁵⁸

For the Church, this remains as one of the important Scriptural basis on which the church based its practice of veneration of primary relics.¹⁵⁹

3.6.2 Sainly Life: New Testament Perspectives

As for the veneration of the secondary relics, a couple of Scriptures are cited. Some other verses used in support of secondary relics are from the New Testament:

When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, “If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.” Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering – (Mark 5:27-29).¹⁶⁰

Another passage follows the wonders of the Apostles in the book of Acts:

As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter’s shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits, and all of them were healed – (Acts 5:15-16).

Wortley quotes Cyril of Jerusalem commenting on the below passage saying:

¹⁵⁸ Wortley 2004, p. 170-171

¹⁵⁹ Wortley 2004, p. 171

¹⁶⁰ See also Mt 9:18-26; Lk 8:41-56

So great was the spiritual grace upon [Paul] that not only did he heal by touch but even handkerchiefs and aprons brought away from his flesh healed the sick, giving them relief from spirits of the evil one.¹⁶¹

For if handkerchiefs and aprons, things exterior to the body, raised up the sick when applied to the patient, how much more then would the body of the prophet itself raise up the dead?

In this last quote, Cyril is not only confidently displaying convincing evidence of wonders displayed by the characters but also confirming the miraculous potentials of the relics. What can be probed further is how these relics convincingly met the other needs of the community. In the cited verses, the relics are seen as dealing with one aspect of physical life, thus, ailments.

Other studies give details of how relics functioned to cleanse and sanctify formerly polluted places and such an act demanded performance of a ritual. Jensen documents of a church that was cleansed from some evil spirit as a pig shovelled its way in the crammed church building as congregants were praying. Another incident documented the noise of the Devil leaving the consecrated church building.¹⁶²

Calvin in his consideration and cautioning sentiments he is of the view that:

Several of these stories are not altogether without foundation, because there are many cases where imagination affects the human body in such a powerful manner as to cause or cure various diseases. It was therefore to be expected that individuals suffering from such diseases should be at least temporarily relieved from their ailings by a strong belief in the miraculous powers of the relic. Cases of this kind are

¹⁶¹ Wortley 2004, p. 172

¹⁶² Jensen 2014, p. 154-155

always noticed, whilst all those of ineffectual pilgrimage are never mentioned.¹⁶³

3.7 Effects of Relics on Matter

However, when it comes to the function and effect of the relics on the lives of the dead and the living, the following passage demonstrates how the relics of the Elisha worked wonders. First, the people who were burying the dead man saw what transpired at the grave when the dead man rose after coming in contact with Elisha's bones. Secondly, when the dead man contacted the bones of Elisha in the grave, he gained life, breathed again and lived again. "And it came to pass, as they were burying a man, that, behold, they spied a band of men; and they cast the man into the sepulchre of Elisha: and when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet" (2 Kings 13:21).¹⁶⁴

Before getting deeper into this discussion, I have to mention that the "relics" cited in the above passages have a higher percentage of being made except for the Genesis 50:25-26 and 2 Kings 13:21.

Wortley contributes that primary relics which are body parts of some humans are, in a sense, handiwork of God, whereas secondary relics such as clothing, tools, instruments of torture, the True Cross where Jesus was crucified are the works of human hands.¹⁶⁵

3.8 Place of Relics in the Church

At that time the Latin "Doctors of the Church," in their consecutive order were Saints Ambrose, Jerome, and August. Gregory was the fourth. He reigned as Pope Gregory I or Gregory the Great (590-604AD), in one of his letters he sent out to some priests in 601

¹⁶³ Calvin 1561, p. vi – this is from a digitalised edition of Google, see <http://books.google.com>. See footnote on p. 3 in the Project Gutenberg EBook, released in 2010 online on <http://www.gutenberg.org/license>

¹⁶⁴ 2 Kings 13:21

¹⁶⁵ Wortley 2004, p. 163

AD, he emphasized on the need for relics to be placed in the altar.¹⁶⁶ The formal ceremonial insertion of relics into the altar when dedicating and consecrating churches is also found written in the letters of Gregory the Great.¹⁶⁷ Backman evidently quotes:

I have decided that the peoples' temples to their false gods should not be destroyed, not on any account. The idols within them should be destroyed, but the temples themselves you should simply purify with holy water; moreover, you should set up [Christian] altars in them and place sacred relics in them. If the temples are solidly built, they should be purified from demon-worship and re-dedicated to the service of the true God.¹⁶⁸

Within the church building, the altar sheltered the reliquary or relics¹⁶⁹ and so it was the center of focus worship and activities pertaining to relics. Holy relics are like elements of the altar that are essential in the divine service. They are consecrated and are supported by Scripture and church tradition. Holy relics are like elements of Eucharist in which after consecration, mystery is conferred.¹⁷⁰ They [relics] took on the life of a saint and became an essential element, as 'the living dead among a living community' and performed supernatural functions. Every church altar was then required to contain relics of at least a saint.¹⁷¹ Relics became central in the divine service of the church and so that meant that they [relics] too became central in the life of the worshippers.

3.9 Identification, and Trade of Relics

With relics, the most excruciating issue, especially at the time the black market for relics took center stage, was the identification of: (a) the true grave of a saint; and (b) the identification of the original bones of the saint, when the buyer had not even seen the

¹⁶⁶ Backman 2003, p. 65

¹⁶⁷ Jensen 2014, p. 153

¹⁶⁸ Backman 2003, p. 65-66

¹⁶⁹ Marinis & Ousterhout 2015, p. 154

¹⁷⁰ Appleby 1992, p. 335

¹⁷¹ Geary 1994, p. 201

grave.¹⁷² Despite those issues, churches, the wealth members of the church, and other business minded people encouraged the trade through the purchases.

The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, resolved to ban¹⁷³ the sale or purchase of relics, and new relics could only be venerated with the approval from the pope.¹⁷⁴ This was the only council to be a universal one genuine universal Church council since Chalcedon in 451. Innocent III took measures to make Rome the New Jerusalem and took steps to make it a universal pilgrimage site; he rebranded Rome and remodelled on catacombs of saints in Rome.¹⁷⁵ Innocent III came up and enforced laws that protected pilgrims, suppressed banditry, thereby making it conducive for travels to and from Rome.¹⁷⁶ In my view the increasing trade in relics despite the ban depended on the less punishment that was given to those found in abrogation of the law and/or relics had become so profitable than the risks that surrounded the trade.

From the 12th century onwards, it was the local bishops', and the pope's responsibility to recognise the feast of a holy person and include it on the official feasts of the Church.¹⁷⁷ And with that, it shows that at that time relics had been firmly grounded as a central feature mediaeval religion. Another point for that was to regulate the flow of relics in the churches which seemed that even with some control in place relics still flooded the markets.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the subject of relics in detail. It has highlighted issues from both the positive and negative side of the subject of relics. Some questions posed have also been answered and some challenges have resulted from the discussion. Some of the points that summarise the chapter are tabulated below:

¹⁷² Geary 1994, p. 203

¹⁷³ As early as in February, 386, the church had been trying to curb the tradition of exhuming bodies for relics, selling them, or trafficking in relics - Klein 2010, p. 56

¹⁷⁴ Barro, McCleary, & McQuoid 2010, p. 6;

¹⁷⁵ Perry 2011, p. 112

¹⁷⁶ Perry 2011, p. 112

¹⁷⁷ Geary 1994, p. 202

Relics are remains of the dead, thus, whole body or body parts. By extension relics include objects owned by the dead saint. They are classified as primary and secondary relics and graded from grade 1 to grade 3. The beginning of relic-gathering, and preservation, eventually led to relic veneration. Both the rich and the poor desired relics and they matched their expectations. They became objects that needed to be well-documented and stored in secure places. Relics enhanced the faith of the followers especially that their different functions helped the followers in various desired ways. Those who sought for healing told stories of being healed and those who sought for protection also give their narratives. They became a bone of contention between those who did not want relics to be venerated and those who venerated them. They also became a symbol of community unity.

In trade, they became the most popular and profitable commodity of the time making churches, monasteries, and others vie for the most valuable relics. The more recognition of the saint tallied with recognition of the church or city, so the more the saint was perceived, then the more powerful the church or city was too.¹⁷⁸ Various ways were used to fetch them – negotiations, buying, seizing, swindling, or stealing – the end justified the means! The movement of relics for canonization purpose required *translatio*. In biblical passages, body parts of the dead were to be given a decent burial.

Relics as sacred objects were for consecration and were mainly housed in reliquaries and kept under the altar. The community validated the relic's significance. Relics were also seen like objects for economic gain. For a long time in history, they were banned from the market, yet that ban was ineffectual. From as early as 386CE to about 1215CE there was still documentation of councils banning the supply of relics. However, the church tried to regulate the supply of relics through other means but could not completely end the trade. One of the infamous traders was Deusdona.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ Cassandra 2012, p. 17

¹⁷⁹ McGregor 2019, p. 40; See also Geary 1994, p.212

The discovery of the True Cross was key to the Christian history although, there is not much information about Helena, who is said to have discovered it¹⁸⁰ together with the tablet where Pilate wrote – “...KING OF THE JEWS.” The Fourth Crusade on Constantinople, which was then a popular destination for pilgrims, resulted in a loss and gain of relics from Constantinople to Rome. Throughout the 13th century Rome had many relics than ever before.

Finally, the relic tradition grew out of respect for the departed saints and on the other side through the appeal of either the sense of hearing, or seeing, or feeling, – or a combination of these – to connect with the divine power and manifest in some experienced form.

CHAPTER 4 : PAINTINGS / FRESCOES

4.1 Introduction

¹⁸⁰ Bralewski 2017, p. 28

This Chapter primarily discusses icons in relation to the main subject of this research. Icons are images that natural or can be made by humans.

There are quite a number of images that are used to venerate the saints in the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. These images include but not limited to the following list: medals, vestments, stained glass, statues, mosaics, pictures, and paintings.¹⁸¹ However, in this section of study, my particular attention is solely focused on images that are in the form of paintings, sometimes known as frescoes.

4.2 Definition

The word ‘fresco’ in the online English by Oxford Dictionaries is entered as: “A painting done rapidly in watercolour on wet plaster on a wall or ceiling, so that the colours penetrate the plaster and become fixed as it dries.” The second entry: “The method of painting frescoes, used in Roman times and by the great masters of the Italian Renaissance including Giotto, Raphael, and Michelangelo.”¹⁸² This second entry gives hints to the discussion of this chapter. The online Collins English dictionary defines a fresco as: “A fresco is a picture that is painted on a plastered wall when the plaster is still wet.”¹⁸³ The Cambridge English dictionary gives this as meaning of frescoe: “(a picture made by) painting on wet plaster on a wall or ceiling.”¹⁸⁴ Some kind of plastered wall is necessary for these murals to be displayed on, in a position where they can be vividly displayed – walls or ceiling.

4.3 Image / Icons

What are icons? The word “icon” is comes from the Greek “εικων”.¹⁸⁵ Icons or images are religious pictures, portraits or images, mainly painted in Orthodox Churches, mainly depicting God’s image, Jesus Christ, Angels, Saints and happenings in biblical and

¹⁸¹ Ginter 2014, p. 37

¹⁸² Online: <https://www.lexico.com/definition/fresco>

¹⁸³ Online: <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/fresco>

¹⁸⁴ Online: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/fresco>

¹⁸⁵ Nicolaidis 2104, p.78

church's timeline.¹⁸⁶ I add that Icons are sacred objects in Christianity, and are widely believed to be connected to spiritual life of the living church and to lives of individuals, especially through the practice of meditation or prayer.

Church buildings to date remain as special buildings built in their own symbolic shapes as houses for prayers where the sacred images dwell. Their interior may also be decorated with various images which cast special religious meaning on what the attendees believe and participate in once they are inside. However, between the Western Latin church and the Eastern Greek church, instead images brought great controversies. In 726 CE, two groups imaged, the *iconodules* or *iconophile* and the iconoclasts thus those who were for images and those who were against images respectively.¹⁸⁷ Emperor Leo III (726-741) is thought to have caused a great rift between the Eastern and Western church. He classified the veneration of images in the churches as a “craft of idolatry” as it was a violation of the second commandment¹⁸⁸ and following that edict was bloodshed.¹⁸⁹

The major problem of pictures or images lies in that they may not deliver a single clear message to the mind. Without written words on them, the meaning of images stands to be open-ended. The significance of these images is mainly depends on the viewer's extent of appreciation.¹⁹⁰

During the period, icons, like, relics had also contributed to both the Church's growth and individual's faith in the following way: (a) the Churches became centres of pilgrimage because of relics and graves of the saints; and (b) the pilgrims believed in asking the saints to intercede for them before God or for them to touch the relics for healing and

¹⁸⁶ Nicolaides 2104, p.77

¹⁸⁷ Ramzy p. 1

¹⁸⁸ The inscription of the second commandment reads: ⁴“You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. ⁵You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments (Exodus 20:4-6; Deuteronomy 5:8-10).

¹⁸⁹ Ramzy p. 2

¹⁹⁰ Jensen 2000, p. 8

forgiveness.¹⁹¹ The icons of the saints helped the pilgrims to also cement their faith. Later, there arose reservations on how icons should be honoured or venerated within the church.

The subject of Christian art generally can be classified in four groups for one to gain an understanding of Christian art from the early Christian period to the Medieval period.¹⁹²

In gaining understanding of the Christian art from the early Christian period to the Medieval period, (1) borrowings from the pagan religious world that were adapted to serve the Christian teachings; (2) religiously neutral images based on traditional decorative motifs, but which may have been given particular Christian symbolic significance; (3) narrative-based images drawn from favourite biblical stories; and (4) portraits of Christ and the saints.¹⁹³

The problem of veneration of images began. Two groups arose, the *iconodules* or *iconophile*, supporting the icons and the iconoclasts, who were against icons. In demonstrating this, I would like to point out that Ginter argues that in the Old Testament God permitted to the making of images that had a symbolic meaning toward salvation. One such example is the making of the bronze serpent by Aaron in Numbers 21:4-9; and another is the ark of the covenant in Exodus 25:10-22; and the last one in this example is the cherubim recorded in 1 Kings 6:23-28.¹⁹⁴

From the above examples, it can also be argued that the serpent made by Aaron is questionable if it was inspired by God himself, out of leadership pressure, the sojourners suggested to him they wanted that icon. As for the Ark of the Covenant, God is involved as cited below:

Have them make an ark of acacia wood—two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high. ¹¹ Overlay it with pure gold, both inside and

¹⁹¹ Fanning 2009, p. 4

¹⁹² Jensen 2000, p. 10

¹⁹³ Jensen 2000, p. 10

¹⁹⁴ Ginter 2014, p. 38

out, and make a gold molding around it. ¹² Cast four gold rings for it and fasten them to its four feet, with two rings on one side and two rings on the other. ¹³ Then make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. ¹⁴ Insert the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark to carry it. ¹⁵ The poles are to remain in the rings of this ark; they are not to be removed. ¹⁶ Then put in the ark the tablets of the covenant law, which I will give you... ²² There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the covenant law, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites.¹⁹⁵

The second example, 1 Kings 6:23-28, king Solomon is building the temple with all the requirements prescribed for him by God.

With the above examples, it may be clear that the Church had its own reasons for explaining and advancing the veneration of images and the notable ones being:

God made man in his own image (icon in Greek or imago in Latin). This image is divine, and it is also visible. Since it is divine, it deserves to be respected as if one is respecting God. Hence to make an image that God has already made, and it naturally existed is in itself not idolatry or violation of God's law.¹⁹⁶

The second understanding of the Church is that in John 1:14, God himself became a visible image through the incarnate Jesus Christ. Through his image, humans see an incentive into advancing towards salvation, therefore, to create or paint an image of Jesus as a means to adore God is better than no image at all.¹⁹⁷

The third understanding of the Church on images is that:

¹⁹⁵ Exodus 25:10-22 NIV

¹⁹⁶ Ginter 2014, p. 38

¹⁹⁷ Ibid

These saints who the Bible calls temples, are friends of God, therefore, to make and to honour these friends of God is to give honour to their Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier.¹⁹⁸ However, the other side of that was that unlike relics, images have no share in the resurrection; hence, greater veneration was reserved for relics as images might have shortcomings on the way they represent the image.¹⁹⁹ In Byzantine and modern Orthodox cultures, icons function as the same way as relics. In the western Christian tradition...some images transition from signifier to sacred objects, especially pictures that bleed, sweat or shed tears.²⁰⁰

A renowned Orthodox theologian Timothy Ware states:

An icon is not simply a religious picture designed to arouse appropriate emotions in the beholder; it is one of the ways whereby God is revealed to us. Through icons the Orthodox Christian receives a vision of the spiritual world.²⁰¹

Icons have deep undelaying theological significances and they are in nature theological, expected to bring about the fellowship between God and man. Icons can be viewed as a tool for helping to understand Christianity.²⁰²

As Orthodox Christians, we render worship to God alone, but we venerate the sacred icons because the veneration given to the image is transferred to the person represented in that image. Since the icons represent Christ, who is God, and the saints who are imbued with God's grace, then the Lord himself is venerated in each and every icon we kiss and pay homage too; much like the sacred relics of the saints. The fact that the Lord and his saints (the latter by his grace) are at work through the icons is made clear by the countless

¹⁹⁸ Ginter 2014, p. 39

¹⁹⁹ Geary 1990, p. 37

²⁰⁰ Walsham 2010, p. 12

²⁰¹ Ware 1979, p. 31

²⁰² Nicolaidis 2104, p. 90

testimonies of miraculous icons that have been venerated in the Church's history.²⁰³

In support of that Nicolaidēs points out that,

Icons play a very important role in the life and worship of the Orthodox Church. The word is found in the Septuagint (Greek Bible), where we read: "Then God said, let us make man in our image ... so God created man in His own image, in the image of God he created" (Gen. 1:26-27). In the New Testament, in the Epistle of St. Paul to the Colossians, we read: "He is the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15). Icons are theology in colour; they represent the gospel in colour, and reflect images of holy and heroic Christians. Together with the Holy Bible, iconography and prayer are the gateway into the mystery of Orthodox Christian spirituality. In Orthodox tradition, it is accepted that icons are a living memorial to the Divine energy (St. John Damascene, P.G. 94:1248CD) and a means of receiving healing and grace. Through the Incarnation of the Logos, man atoned with God and was restored to his earlier glory. In Christ is realised a second creation of man – Jesus is the new Adam. In this sense, the concealed image of God was renovated for the benefit of humanity – and so it is with icons.²⁰⁴

A view worthy understanding is what surrounds the image of the True Cross, this is how the Canon puts it, as to how it should be venerated:

Canon LXXIII.

Since the life-giving cross has shewn to us Salvation, we should be careful that we render due honour to that by which we were saved from the ancient fall. Wherefore, in mind, in word, in feeling giving veneration (*προσκύνησιν*)

²⁰³ Baghos 2018, p. 4

²⁰⁴ Nicolaidēs 2104, p.78

to it, we command that the figure of the cross, which some have placed on the floor, be entirely removed therefrom, lest the trophy of the victory won for us be desecrated by the trampling under foot of those who walk over it. Therefore those who from this present represent on the pavement the sign of the cross, we decree are to be cut off.

If there is a cross upon a pavement it must be removed.

This canon defines that to the image of the cross is to be “given veneration (προσκύνησις) of the intellect, of the words, and of the sense,” i.e., the cross is to be venerated with the interior cultus of the soul, is to be venerated with the exterior culture of praise, and also with sensible acts, such as kissings, bowings, etc.²⁰⁵

In my view that definition was such a decisive one and it broke the boundaries of culture in the most unquestionable way.

In a culture where such objects were viewed as sacred, like relics, images too were the bestowers of healing, authority, power, sanctity, and social and sacred distinction²⁰⁶.

The Mandylion, whose tradition was the most ancient, served as the protector of Constantinople from the tenth century till the sack in 1204, when it was lost. Shortly thereafter, the Veronica made its appearance in Rome, becoming the most famous image-relic of the West.²⁰⁷

From about the 11th century, long-distance movements increased, so too the pilgrimages to Jerusalem.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵ Schaff, ... p. 765, Canon LXXIII,

²⁰⁶ Elsner ... p. 17

²⁰⁷ Thunø, 2002, p. 15

²⁰⁸ Berend 2006, p. 206

“A little later, at the other extremity of the Christian world, Eusebius of Cesarea, the father of Church History, is explaining to Constantine's sister that he cannot send her the image of Christ for which she asks since the Scriptures forbid the making of images. He adds that, having recently found one of the faithful with what passed for pictures of Our Lord and St. Paul in her possession, he had confiscated them, lest the practice should spread, and Christians, like the idolaters, should come to think they could carry God round in a picture.”²⁰⁹

In the East, there was a desire to have images but also the church was trying to prevent these from circulating as to what Eusebius of Cesarea, noted.

Considered against the wider tradition of wall painting in the churches and chapels of medieval Rome; the frescoes in the Sancta Sanctorum called for a reconsideration of the conventional categorization of painting. The paintings could be grouped into two main types of medieval pictures: images and stories, but this could be for another study.

Images as well as relics circulated in almost the same way, either by purchase, donation, or theft. One advantage of images over relics was that images could be replicated and be disseminated within and outside the church while access to first class relics (that were at particular sites) was controlled by the church.²¹⁰ Another advantage of images over was that those painted on walls could not be stolen as they were fixed.

4.4 The Holy Stairs of Sancta Sanctorum

Finally, the Holy stairs, as part of the Sancta Sanctorum are important to mention in details as Father Candido Amantini points out:

²⁰⁹ Hughes 1993, p. 121

²¹⁰ Thunø p. 16

After climbing the last step, the pilgrim finds himself in front of the iron grating which protects the Sancta Sanctorum. According to medieval historians, this was “the most venerated sanctuary in Rome” and was, until the Renaissance, the private oratory of the Popes. Today it remains a testament to the splendour of the ancient Patriarchium and to a thousand years of papal history. The founder of the chapel remains unknown; however it was originally dedicated to St. Lawrence, and in the IX century it was called the Sancta Sanctorum, due to the numerous important relics housed within. The first mention of the chapel is found in the Liber Pontificalis, written in the time of Pope Stephen III (772). More testimonies began to appear from the year 1000 onwards, particularly as regards the Holy week liturgy and the possession of the Lateran. Gregory IV (844) had a private apartment built near the chapel to allow him to pray there and preside over the clerics of the Curia more easily. The Popes including Leo III (816), Innocent III (1216), Honorius III (1227), Nicholas III (1280) and Callistus III (1458) competed with each other to adorn and restore the Sancta Sanctorum. The latter two were particularly important in this process, and it is to them that we owe the present form of the chapel. Under the supervision of Nicolas III, frescos attributed to the school of Cavallini, Cimabue and others were created, as was the mosaic above the altar and the Cosmati floor. Callistus III (1458) later built the reinforcing wall at the back of the chapel. The Chapel sustained no serious damage during the sack of Rome in 1527 and the later building and work of Sixtus V preserved the main features of the Sancta Sanctorum. After climbing the last step, the pilgrim finds himself in front of the iron grating which protects the Sancta Sanctorum. According to medieval historians, this was “the most venerated sanctuary in Rome” and was, until the Renaissance, the private oratory of the Popes. Today it remains a testament to the splendour of the ancient Patriarchium and to a thousand years of papal history. The founder of the chapel remains unknown; however it was originally dedicated to St. Lawrence, and in the IX century it was called the Sancta Sanctorum, due to the numerous important relics housed within. The first mention of the

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4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have briefly discussed paintings or frescoes. In relation to that, I have also discussed icons and images. Icons sometimes took the form of painted images, although they were not only displayed in that form, and these were connected to the life of the church and the individual life of a believer. They were sometimes painted on church walls, mostly in the interior. The most cardinal thing for this study is how these elements were accepted in the life of an individual and how the church accepted and used these paintings. Although, the Church fathers debated on the matter, they came up with substantiated views and contributions that validated the use of these icons. However, icons do not have equally the same consideration as in both the Eastern, and Western Church traditions. A good example worthy noting is the significance of the Cross and how it is to

²¹¹ Amantini 2019, online: <https://www.scala-santa.com/en/sancta-sanctorum-en/>

be venerated. The worship of images prevailed both in the East and West churches but on different scales. This practice dates back to the fourth and fifth centuries.²¹²

CHAPTER 5 : SANCTA SANCTORUM

5.1 Introduction

²¹² Krasinski, 1870, p. 80 (John Calvin – A Treatise on Relics)

As before the 13th century and of course during this period under discussion, the Roman Catholic Church expanded its influence in the lives of the people – many people wanted to own relics, or to go on pilgrims. The churches were endowed with magnificent images that explained biblical stories or other happenings within the church. The Sancta Sanctorum also attests to this major development. This chapter introduces the Santa Sanctorum.

We start this study with a great quote on the chapel from Zeri, a renowned historian. The paintings in Santa Sanctorum, cannot be better appreciated than in the words of the Italian, critic, art historian Federico Zeri (1921 – 1998), in his appreciation of the Sancta Santorum as: “the greatest artistic discoveries of the 1900s,” and in a public meeting in 1995, Zeri declared, “I doubt there will ever be another revelation of this magnitude, as no other monument exists, in Rome or elsewhere, that is as important as this one and yet waits to be restored.”²¹³

The Sancta Sanctorum, a chapel, and one of the very few accessed places during the Middle Ages. It is endowed with magnificent paintings and objects which are venerated and give a historical background of events and objects in time. The major objects are reliquaries and relics, and paintings. With so many of the most popular relics of the major followers of Christ, it gained its fame. However, access to it was much restricted. The paintings are mostly of the early Christian martyrdoms which are magnificently painted on its walls telling visual stories of their deaths. The chapter elaborates details of the visual paintings in words to convey their stories. The painter is unknown.²¹⁴ I shall also elaborate more on the story of Nicholas III as he is featured among these martyrdom frescoes.

5.2 Nicholas III

Briefly I add the background of the pope who is largely associated with the development of the Lateran chapel, the Sancta Sanctorum, despite being in office for a short time. He is key to the discussion on the Sancta Sanctorum in this chapter. Prior of his descending to

²¹³ Quattrucci 2014, online, <https://www.italianways.com/sancta-sanctorum-romes-true-colors/>

²¹⁴ Hauknes 2013, p. 6

power as pope, in a period of 18 months, saw three popes ascending into the papacy office, and then followed a vacuum period of six months before Nicholas III from the influential Orsini family became pope.²¹⁵

He was born in Rome, in about 1216, and named Giovanni Gaetano Orsini, later Pope Nicholas III. He died on 22 August 1280. He was the 188th Pope and his tenure of office was only 33 months. He ordered for the renovation of the Lateran Palace and the Vatican between 1277 and 1278 built a fortress around the pre-existing tower-palace, known in modern days as Orsini Castle.²¹⁶ It is likely that Nicholas had some active role in planning (with regards to the Sancta Sanctorum) although it is not known as to what his major role was.²¹⁷

5.3 Origins of the Name

Before the second half of the 13th century, the sacellum was referred to as the *Oratorium Sancti Laurentii de Palatio* – referring to a number of other oratories that were used for keeping relics. Mediaval sources are clear that the name Sancta Sanctorum was as a result of the public omitting title Laurentian oratory *de palatio*,²¹⁸ resulting into it to be officially known as *Sancta Sanctorum*.

The term has a biblical connotation and emphasis is place on understanding the term Sancta Sanctorum: the term “extremely holy site” in connection with the most sacred Temple in Jerusalem. The Holy of the Holies in the Temple in Jerusalem, only the highest priest accessed²¹⁹ the place to offer sacrifice rituals pertaining to the Day of Atonement (forgiveness of sins), hence, in the Lateran Palace chapel only the Pope accessed the place to perform celebrations of the Holy Week.²²⁰ Onori, connects that naming a Roman

²¹⁵ Logan 2002, p. 256 – (1). Innocent V (21 January to 22 June 1276); (2). Hadrian V (elected 11 July but died 18 August 1276) and; (3). John XXI (8 September 1276 to 20 May 1277).”

²¹⁶ Onori 2013, p. 59 - 60

²¹⁷ Hauknes 2013, p. 6

²¹⁸ Onori 2013, p. 59

²¹⁹ Entry into the Holy of Holies was highly regulated by God, and failure to adhere to that resulted in instant death (Lev. 16)

²²⁰ Onori 2013, p. 59

building as such, “Holy of Holies” was very important because Rome boasted of the title “New Jerusalem” over the “ancient” Palestine at the time.²²¹ In to the researcher’s view, the Sancta Sanctorum, (“Holy of Holies”) is a copycat of the Tabernacle’s Most Holy Place where God appeared, but it emits very good symbolic values. People were restricted entry into Sancta Sanctorum just as it was in the Temple in Jerusalem,²²² and for many years²²³, the Sancta Sanctorum was not open to the public.

5.4 The Outside Appearance of the Sancta Sanctorum

In sight, the building displays its ancient architectural works. Elena Onori describes the outside physical appearance in a more appealing and visualized manner as follows:

[T]he outer walls present Romanesque masonry, covered with a screen of reused bricks that were bound with gray, black grain mortar, featuring a series of relieving arches in the midst of which are narrow lancet windows with marble framed pointed arches. A frieze with protruding bricks and small marble consoles runs under the roof; the chapel is accessed from the southern side, on the side of Saint Lawrence’s Chapel through a small corridor that probably served as a vestibule, given the private nature of the building.²²⁴

5.5 An Introduction into the Sancta Sanctorum

Hauknes, elaborately gives the following glimpse of the interior of the Sancta Sanctorum:

Built²²⁵ and decorated around 1280 for Pope Nicholas III (1277–80), the small oratory features amongst its rich decoration six painted narrative

²²¹ Onori 2013, p. 59

²²² See Lev. 16:1-2

²²³ See p. 36 of Manfred Luchterhandt article: The popes and the *loca sancta* of Jerusalem: relic practice and relic diplomacy in the Eastern Mediterranean after the Muslim Conquest.

²²⁴ Onori 2013, p. 60

²²⁵ It existed centuries before but following the damage because of the earthquake, it was replace – Noreen 2011, p. 524.

scenes on the upper sections of the chapel's four walls, elevated more than seven meters from the ground. This elaborate fresco program depicts the martyrdoms of the most important early Christian saints: Peter, Paul, Lawrence, Agnes, and Stephen. Added to these is a scene from the life of St. Nicholas and a so-called "donor image"... While the iconographies of these frescoes are relatively conventional, their narrative structure is quite unexpected. Separated by a slender central window and surrounded by a lavish painted framework, the hagiographical scenes are juxtaposed in pairs on the interior lunettes. In contrast to the conventional layout of pictorial narrative in Rome's medieval churches, there is no chronology or prescribed order of viewing at the Sancta Sanctorum. Each episode appears to have been lifted out of its larger hagiographical context and transposed onto the walls of this small, cubic space.²²⁶

The description is detailed and in my own view, Hauknes is also introducing a hierarchy of saints and their importance.²²⁷ Though that is very important but it deserves its own research.

5.6 Access to the Sancta Sanctorum

The Sancta Sanctorum was one of the famed chapels in Rome and the study by the German Jesuit Hartmann Grisar gave new information to the inventory in the Sancta Sanctorum too. Others who explored the Sancta Sanctorum object were Florian Jabaru, Phillippe Lauer, and Josef Wilpert. The work came as a result of the papal permission for them to conduct a scientific examination and cataloguing of the chapel.²²⁸ Much of the details of what was contained in the Sancta Sanctorum were revealed between 1903 and 1908 when explorations were underway, and this uplifted the image of the Sancta Sanctorum in regard to its treasure of reliquaries, relics, and icons.²²⁹ The Sancta Sanctorum contained a

²²⁶ Hauknes, 2013, p. 1

²²⁷ Hauknes says, "*This elaborate fresco program depicts the martyrdoms of the most important early Christian saints: Peter, Paul, Lawrence, Agnes, and Stephen.*" The researcher contends that the mentioned saints were probably the most well-known, well-documented and were widely venerated among Christian communities.

²²⁸ Noreen 2011, p. 520-546

²²⁹ Noreen 2011, p. 520-546

miraculous icon of Jesus Christ, as a result, access to this chapel was highly regulated making the publication of its almost all objects highly impossible. In 1899 and 1900, who was at that time writing history of the Lateran palace failed to get access into the Sancta Sanctorum.²³⁰

5.7 Objects in the Sancta Sanctorum

To systematically discuss further this topic, it is important that some objects that were housed in the Sancta Sanctorum be described as to when they became associated with the Sancta Sanctorum.

The Sancta Sanctorum's objects were commissioned by Paschal I. It thus, consisted of an enamelled reliquary gold cross and two silver caskets. One of these was in rectangular form while the other was a cruciform.²³¹ The knowledge about these objects became clearer in 1905 when Pope Pius X gave authority to the German Jesuit Hartmann Grisar to open the cypress wood chest. The chest was commissioned by Pope Leo III who himself was in power from 795 to 816.²³² Thus the content of this cypress chest was made known to the general public after hundreds of years of not being seen. From the thirteenth century to date, this chest still lies within the confines of the Sancta Sanctorum chapel which was built during the pontificate of Pope Nicholas III (1277 – 1280) and it was part of the Lateran palace.²³³ However, before this, the chest was dedicated to St Lawrence, the forerunner of the 13th century Sancta Sanctorum.²³⁴

And in the same holy palace is the oratory of St. Lawrence in which there are three very holy altars. In the first, a cypress wood container commissioned by Leo III, are three caskets. In one of them there is a cross of pure gold adorned with gems and precious stones, i.e. hyacinths, and emeralds, and green

²³⁰ Noreen 2011, p. 531

²³¹ Thunø 2002, p. 17

²³² Thunø 2002, p. 17

²³³ Thunø 2002, p. 17

²³⁴ Thunø 2002, p. 17

gemstones; and in the middle of the cross is the navel of the Lord and his foreskin; and above it is anointed with balm and each year this balm is renewed when the pope with the cardinals makes the procession of the Exaltation of the Cross from the same church of St. Lawrence to the church of St. John. And in the other silver casket, gilded and adorned with scenes, is a cross of enamel, and within it is the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.²³⁵

In the Sancta Sanctorum was also Mary's milk, a relic that restored many of the sick to health.²³⁶ On the quantity of the milk relic itself, Calvin laments that:

With regard to the milk, there is not perhaps a town, a convent, or nunnery, where it is not shown in large or small quantities. Indeed, had the Virgin been a wet-nurse her whole life, or a dairy, she could not have produced more than is shown as hers in various parts. How they obtained all this milk they do not say.²³⁷

Calvin questions²³⁸ the church of claims of 'holy' milk from the Virgin Mary as it was found in many Catholic churches. The question would be, why milk. Scholars do not have same answers to this question. Milk symbolises wisdom, knowledge and mercy and so Mary's breast became both the signifier and signified physical body and her humility, contributes Katherine Raymer.²³⁹ Barbara Lane, a researcher, propagates an understanding of connecting Mary's milk with Eucharist in a sense that it symbolizes Christ's blood. Caroline Walker Bynum, points out that the direct connection to the historical Christ, boosted the popularity of the cult of Mary's milk. Vibeke Olson argues that Mary's milk was something that could be partaken of, or miraculously produced as an imagine or

²³⁵ Thunø 2002, p. 17

²³⁶ Olson 2014, p. 154

²³⁷ Krasinski 1854, p. 185

²³⁸ "Vials filled with such milk were shown in several churches at Rome, at Venice in the church of St Mark, at Aix in Provence, in the church of the Celestins at Avignon, in that of St Anthony at Padua, &c. &c., and many absurd stories are related about the miracles performed with these relics."

²³⁹ Raymer 2019, p. 21

visionary experience. Olson acknowledges it was not only a powerful visible devotional object, but it also helped to concretise her physical manifestation.²⁴⁰

“Both images and relics were valued as effective mediators of the sacred and thus circulated in much the same way, that is, by purchase, donation or theft. One important difference, however, was in their accessibility. While the image could be easily reproduced and the copies be widely disseminated both within and without the confines of the Church, access to relics was limited to particular sites under the jurisdiction of the Church, and was thus far easier to control.”²⁴¹ Another point that needs to be noted is that some images, such as mural painting within the church walls became immobile, making the church have its distinctiveness from the other church and giving it a distinction of a difference. Much of these paintings are Christological narratives which are not hard for most of the people to interpret as soon as they see the paintings. Unlike mosaic, painting was easier and cheaper to execute and maintain, and, it was more common.²⁴²

5. 8 Paintings or Frescoes

Alexander Nagel asserts “As relics were demoted, works of art were raised to relic-status. In the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries, in part due to the importation of precious images with hoary Eastern provenances, it became increasingly common to treat works of sacred art with the same reverence as relics.”²⁴³ Icons that were widely believed to have been made by the hand of St. Luke received the same treatment as his contact relics.²⁴⁴

Although there is a conventional layout, the way of viewing the pictorial scenes in the Sancta Sanctorum like in other Rome’s Mediaeval churches is not restricted. The episodes give a brief detail out of the major hagiographical context.²⁴⁵

²⁴⁰ Olson 2014, p. 152

²⁴¹ Thunø 2002, p. 15

²⁴² Kiilerich 2015, p. 107

²⁴³ Nagel 2010, p. 214

²⁴⁴ Nagel 2010, p. 214

²⁴⁵ Hauknes 2013, p. 6

A closer look at the background of these frescoes also gives geographical and architectural background claiming the places where the deaths took place. The deaths of Agnes, Peter, Paul and Lawrence took place in Rome as can be evidenced with the environmental and architectural facts.²⁴⁶ Hauknes observes that:

The choice of subject matter for these scenes is directly related to the presence of relics in the chapel. The Sancta Sanctorum's altar contained the stones of Stephen, the grate of Lawrence, and the skulls of Peter, Paul, and Agnes. It is interesting to note that the frescoes not only commemorate the historical events of which these relics are the only material remains but they also seem to make direct reference to the actual objects. In all the scenes the "relics"—i.e., the tonsured heads of Peter and Paul, Stephen's stones, the gridiron of Lawrence—are carefully placed in the foreground of each composition. With these visual references, the paintings serve to authenticate the bones and other sacred objects enclosed in the altar by providing a visual confirmation of their historical origins. At the same time, and in reverse logic, the presence of the actual relics in the altar serves to substantiate the painting's subject matter by confirming the historical reality of the event depicted.²⁴⁷

As expressed by Cunningham, through the time of early Christians, saints emerged and the church noted that:

"From the earliest times, then, some Christians have been called upon – and some will always be called upon – to give this supreme testimony of love for all people, but especially to persecutors. The church, therefore, considers martyrdom as an exceptional gift and as the highest proof of love..."²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶ Hauknes 2013, p. 7

²⁴⁷ Hauknes 2013, p.7

²⁴⁸ Cunningham 2005, p. 10

Figure 1: Figure 1 View of the east wall from the southwest²⁴⁹

²⁴⁹ https://www.wga.hu/html_m/m/master/xunk_it/xunk_it1/index.html



Source: https://www.wga.hu/html_m/m/master/xunk_it/xunk_it1/index.html

In the first image are the paintings of the top to bottom of the wall inside front as viewed from the south-west. Frescoes are painted above and are vivid.

inscription on top of the altar, "Non est in toto sanctior orbe locus," translated in English as "There is no holier place in the world than this".²⁵⁰

²⁵⁰ Online: <https://www.italianways.com/sancta-sanctorum-romes-true-colors/>

Figure 2: a close-up of the Altar in Sancta Sanctorum



Source: https://www.wga.hu/html_m/m/master/xunk_it/xunk_it1/index.html

The Altar in the Sancta Sanctorum, showing the *Acheiropoieta* icon of Christ

Description of the Image: the Altar in the Sancta Sanctorum.

The *Acheiropoieta* , painted on a wooden panel, is most ancient venerated icon in the Sancta Sanctorum is the. It has been venerated for over a 1000 years and remains one of the very important relics. This image of the Saviour Christ, is kept above the altar and can be vividly seen. It depicts Christ sitting on a throne, holding the Gospel in his left hand while blessing with the right hand. To-date, its origins are unknown. Already in the 8th century it was a subject of veneration, and according to Liber Pontificalis, Stephen II, carried it on his shoulders in a march in order to quench the invading danger of the Langobards (735).²⁵¹

It was symbolic of the former glory of the Judaic altar in Jerusalem. The altar was made of white marble representing purity and covered by a barrel vault with gold-ground mosaic showing a blessing Christ in a circular rainbow glory held by angels.²⁵² In addition, a collection of liturgical instruments were placed on the altar.

Source: https://www.wga.hu/html_m/m/master/xunk_it/xunk_it1/index.html

Source: https://www.wga.hu/html_m/m/master/xunk_it/xunk_it1/index.html

²⁵¹ Amantini 2019, online: <https://www.scala-santa.com/en/sancta-sanctorum-en/>

²⁵² Hauknes 2008, p.35



Source:

Figure 3: Pope Nicholas III Presented to Christ by Sts Peter and Paul (east wall, left)

https://www.wga.hu/html_m/m/master/xunk_it/xunk_it1/index.html

Description of the mural: Pope Nicholas III presented to Christ by Sts Peter and Paul

In the frame above on the right below is Christ painted seated on a purple cushion. His right hand is in motion depicted accepting a gift, while his right hand holds a jeweled cross and then there are two angels on his left and right side above his shoulders – a reference to Imperial Guard, an element, which the culture of the Pope knew so much.²⁵³

The east wall painting showed Pope Nicholas III being presented to Jesus Christ by St. Peter and Paul (*Figure 3*). The picture showed the upper zone of the east wall. The representation is divided into two fields which were unusual, but it could be because of the window which was at the center of the wall.²⁵⁴

As a result, St. Peter, St. Paul and Pope Nicholas III appeared on the left side of the painting while the Christ was on the right side.

²⁵³ Onori 2013, p. 62

²⁵⁴ Duchesne 1957, p. 35

Figure 4: Crucifixion of St Peter (south wall, left)



Source: https://www.wga.hu/html_m/m/master/xunk_it/xunk_it1/index.html

Description of the mural: The Crucifixion of St Peter.

In the south wall left of the Sancta Sanctorum was the crucifixion of St. Peter, depicted in this painting (*figure 4*). In the scene of the execution of Peter, there are a number of known buildings. Peter, the symbol of the Church's authority is pictured hanged on a Cross. The background shows on the left of the Cross a pyramid of Meta Ramuli and to the right is Sant'Angelo to the right, and a hill and the Tower of the Capitoline Hill, the Vatican Palaces and the basilica with wide opened door that recalls the classic Neronian building. Close to the cross on the left are two nimbus soldiers and on the right a group of mourners – all women.²⁵⁵

Legend told that St. Peter was crucified upside down because he refused to receive the fate equal to his master, Jesus, who was crucified upwards. This showed the special regard St. Peter held of the master.

Miller writes that:

Wherever and whenever the deed took place, the sources are agreed that Peter chose to be crucified upside down, thereby avoiding the sin of pride (to a Christian, even if the crucifix would not become a religious emblem for some time, the cross was inevitably associated with Christ, and Peter must not have wanted to imitate his leader too closely). It may also be that this notoriously agonising death (the word excruciating comes from *crux*, cross) could be accelerated, or at least eased, by letting the victim's blood flow down into the brain.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁵ Onori 2013, p. 62; see also Hauknes 2013, p. 7 (The two prominent structures are thought to be the Castel Sant'Angelo and the Terebinth of Nero. On the left in the background is the Capitoline hill with the senatorial palace.²⁵⁵)

²⁵⁶ Miller 2007, p. 36

Following this tradition, all images of his crucifixion show him on an inverted cross. Later images may show him either nailed or tied to the cross or both nailed and tied.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁷ Online: Saint Peter: The Iconography, <https://www.christianiconography.info/peter.html>

Figure 5 Beheading of St Paul (South Wall, Right)



Source: https://www.wga.hu/html_m/m/master/xunk_it/xunk_it1/index.html

Figure 5: Beheading of St Paul (South Wall, Right)

Description of mural: The Beheading of St. Paul- Frescoed in the right of the south wall of the chapel was a depiction of the beheading of St. Paul.²⁵⁸ Onori named the chapel on the scene as the basilica of Ostia,²⁵⁹ while Valerie & Phelan in this description name the chapel as the basilica of San Paolo.

In the fresco showing the death of St Paul, the background shows the San Paolo fuori le Mura basilica, and its presence testifies to the location of the scene of execution.²⁶⁰ The other details geographical details of the scene on the fresco of the beheading of St Paul consisted of a mountain landscape composed of individual clearly outlined rock formations. Before the landscape stood the executioner and the Roman centurion, whose gesture was clearly intended for Paul's two companions. A church building flanked by two towers was meant to represent the basilica of San Paolo that loomed directly behind the elevation on the right (Valerie & Phelan, 2014).²⁶¹ The executioner froze with shock to see Paul's head bounce three times on the ground and some fissure opened and came out blood, milk, and water from the three springs.²⁶²

²⁵⁸ Valerie & Phelan, 2014.

²⁵⁹ Onori 2013, p. 63

²⁶⁰ Hauknes 2013, p. 7

²⁶¹ Valerie & Phelan, 2014.

²⁶² Onori 2013, p. 63

Martyrdom of St Stephen and Martyrdom of St Lawrence (west wall)



Source: https://www.wga.hu/html_m/m/master/xunk_it/xunk_it1/index.html

Description of the mural: Martyrdom of St Stephen and Martyrdom of St Lawrence (west wall)

St Lawrence and Stephen were venerated throughout Rome and the popes accorded them particular honour due to their stance on faith. Their martyrdoms were frescoed in the private papal chapel on the west wall of the Sanctum Sanctorum.²⁶³

²⁶³ Hauknes 2013, p. 7

Figure 7 Stoning of St Stephen (west wall, left)



The stoning to death of St. Stephen (*Figure 7*).

Source: https://www.wga.hu/html_m/m/master/xunk_it/xunk_it1/index.html

Description of the mural: Martyrdom of St Stephen

In the left of the west wall was a fresco depicting the stoning to death of St. Stephen (*Figure 7*). As a martyr St. Stephen suffered persecution and death for advocating, renouncing, refusing to renounce, or refusing to advocate a belief or cause as demanded by those who opposed the faith of the Christ.²⁶⁴

The biblical narrative states that Stephen was a Hellenist, a Greek-speaking Jew residing in the diaspora. He was one of the first deacons of the Church in Jerusalem and was appointed by the Apostles. He also was the first person to be put to death by stoning because of being a staunch witness of Christ.²⁶⁵ The Jewish court, the Sanhedrin, heard his case and charged him with blasphemy and condemned him to death.

Saul of Tarsus witnessed the stoning to death of Stephen. St Stephen's emblem is a stone, as a sign of his martyrdom. He is celebrated on 26 December in the Western Church; and on 27 December in the Eastern Church. He is believed to have died c.35AD.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁴ Smear 2006, p. 10

²⁶⁵ Acts 6:5-8:2 gives more details of this and how the people close to him were affected by his death.

²⁶⁶ Online, St. Stephen <https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/philosophy-and-religion/saints/saint-stephen>

Figure 8: Martyrdom of St Lawrence (west wall, right)



Figure 8 Martyrdom of St Lawrence (west wall, right)

Source: https://www.wga.hu/html_m/m/master/xunk_it/xunk_it1/index.html

Description of the mural: Martyrdom of St Lawrence

Like in the scenes of the martyrdom of St Peter and St Paul, the interiors in the frescoes of St Lawrence and St Nicholas did not develop into real depictions of space. The extremely foreshortened buildings suggested the location only in a very rudimentary way, even if they were provided with a number of decorative details. St Lawrence depicted on the gridiron²⁶⁷

The scene of St Lawrence's death shows him on a blazing gridiron being roasted and his body with wounds of torture. The background depicts the Basilica of Maxentius. The Roman emperor in the picture is identified as Decius as on the inscription.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁷ Onori 2013, p. 63

²⁶⁸ Hauknes 2013, p. 7

Figure 9: Martyrdom of St Agnes (north wall, left)



Source: https://www.wga.hu/html_m/m/master/xunk_it/xunk_it1/index.html

Description of the mural: Beheading of St. Agnes

The scene portrays a judgment. The judge is depicted on the left hand side passing a stern warning and ending in a pronouncement for an immediate execution. An executioner, dressed in his gear and a headgear with a sharp double edged short knife grabs her by the shoulder and a knife gets to the left side of her neck. She lifts up her left arm just above her shoulder as in giving supplication to God. Above, an angel descends from heaven to receive her, while on the right side as you look the fresco, a group of onlookers are amazed and shocked with terror at the judgement and murder. After her death, her relics were in the Sancta Sanctorum till 1903.²⁶⁹

St. Agnes is believed to have lived for a short period of time (c. 292–c. 304). Her life was cut short for refusing to be married. She refused to marry the son of a Roman official, insisting that she was committed to Christ. During that time, Christianity was still taken to be of potential threat to the authorities, and so it was still an underground religion. She was martyred at the age of 12. She is one of the first women venerated in the Roman Catholic Church's hierarchy of saints.²⁷⁰

It is believed that Agnes' body was not thrown into the river as was common at that time and following an intervention; she was buried on a family land cemetery. One week after her burial, they went to pray at the grave, at her tomb to be precise, and according to church history, the congregants saw a vision of her surrounded by other virgins with a lamb at her side.²⁷¹ In the decades after her death, Agnes's tomb became a place of pilgrimage.²⁷²

²⁶⁹ Onori 2013, p. 63

²⁷⁰ Online: St. Agnes, encyclopedia.com (<https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/philosophy-and-religion/saints/saint-agnes>)

²⁷¹ Online: St. Agnes, encyclopedia.com (<https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/philosophy-and-religion/saints/saint-agnes>) On this side, there it is believed she refused to get married to a man from an influential family, replied that she was married to Christ. This did not go down well. She was drugged from her parents home by the Roman soldiers and was later killed. There are also various version of her she was killed, one version records she was burned on stake while another says she was killed with a knife.

²⁷² Online: St. Agnes, encyclopedia.com (<https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/philosophy-and-religion/saints/saint-agnes>)

Agnes' day is remembered and celebrated on January 21, on this day, she is widely believed to have been executed because of publicly confessing her Christian faith in Christ.²⁷³ On this day of commemoration, two lambs are blessed in the Church of St. Agnese in Rome, and from these sheep wool the pallia and sent by the pope to archbishops as a token of jurisdiction²⁷⁴

“Church histories note that Agnes refused to renounce her religion before the judges, and as punishment she may have been sentenced to serve as a virgin sacrifice to pagan deities. The Roman goddess Minerva has been mentioned in some reports of the martyrdom of Agnes, and the ceremonial fire from Minerva's temple, located on the Aventine Hill, may have been brought to the forum where Agnes was being tried, or she may have been taken there. The official church story asserts that while on trial, Agnes repeatedly appealed to Christ, which angered the tribunal. One judge reportedly asked the crowd that had gathered to watch the trial whether anyone among them wished to marry her, and that some young men came forward, hoping to spare Agnes's life. Most sources also note that one spectator who looked at her with lust instead was blinded, but this detail is also found in the reports of her being taken to a brothel. According to André-Delastre's translation of the Ambrose account, Agnes told the judges, "It is wrong for the bride to keep the bridegroom waiting. He who chose me first shall be the only one to have me. What are you waiting for, executioner? Destroy this body, for unwanted eyes may desire it."²⁷⁵

It is thought that a young Roman, also the son of high-ranking official, wanted to marry Agnes. This may have been a son of either the prefect Maximum Herculeus or the prefect Sempronius. The preteen reportedly replied, "The one to whom I am betrothed is Christ whom the angels serve," according to *Three Ways of Love*, by Frances Parkinson Keyes.²⁷⁶

²⁷³ Online: St. Agnes, encyclopedia.com (<https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/philosophy-and-religion/saints/saint-agnes>)

²⁷⁴ Online: St. Agnes, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Agnes>

²⁷⁵ Online: St. Agnes, encyclopedia.com (<https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/philosophy-and-religion/saints/saint-agnes>)

²⁷⁶ Online: St. Agnes, encyclopedia.com (<https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/philosophy-and-religion/saints/saint-agnes>)

Figure 10: St Nicholas Providing the Dowry (north wall, right)



Description of the mural: St Nicholas giving dowry

The focal point of this mural where St Nicholas is giving dowry is summarized by Onori that: “as the man gave a dowry to his daughters, so the Pope fed and cared for the people of Rome.”²⁷⁷

St Nicholas was born in circa 270 CE and died on 6 December 343CE in Patara, in Anatolia (modern day Turkey). In 317 CE, he was ordained as the bishop of Myra, a coastal town located in south-western Anatolia. Nicholas is believed to have attended the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 325 CE.²⁷⁸ During his translation, his remains were accompanied by 62 sailors²⁷⁹

Frescoed in the right of the north wall was Nicholas providing the dowry (*Figure 10*) which was a typical form of respect for the father to the girls. The pictorial presentation includes both an exterior view of the house and a view into its interior, showing the bedchamber where the father, visibly worried, and his three peacefully slumbering daughters lie in their beds, and where the

²⁷⁷ Onori 2013, p. 63

²⁷⁸ Lowinger 2013, p. 1

²⁷⁹ Loud 2007, p. 377. See details: “When Bishop William III of Troia dedicated the church of St Vincent in that city in 1169, he gave it relics of no fewer than four saints, two local (Eleutherius and Secundinus), and two major Christian saints (Nicholas and Catherine), the latter presumably only very small portions. The Norman chronicler Orderic Vitalis claimed that ‘God allowed many churches to secure some of the holy relics of the saintly bishop [Nicholas].’ However, the body of Saint Nicholas, or at least the major portion thereof, was of course buried in Bari, whence it had been transported from Myra in Asia Minor in 1087. It became the focus for probably the most important civic cult in southern Italy. The church that was built over the tomb, the crypt of which was dedicated by Urban II in 1089, became both a centre for the religious devotion of the city, more so indeed than the cathedral, and also a centre of pilgrimage, attracting visitors from northern Europe as well as simply the region... The 62 sailors who had brought the stolen relics to Bari in 1087 were granted special privileges at the church of St Nicholas: they had the right to a burial place next to the church, and to erect a sarcophagus over their tomb, to a seat (*sedile*) within the church, to be received as clerics if they so wished, without further gift or payment, and to charitable assistance if they fell into poverty” (pp. 376 – 377).

See also; Wood, 2006, p.654 “Even the seamen’s gild of St Nicholas at Bari, formed in 1087, was essentially a consortium of private founders—forty-one of the sixty-two raiders whose three ships had brought back the saint’s relics—each of whose descendants had a share in the church as a private property-right (though the people of Bari much later thought of it as communal);” and Geary 1990, p. 88 – Soon after their successful mission, the group that was involved in bringing the relics of St Nicholas became known as *Societas Sancti Nicolai*. Later, they claimed the social, political and religious control of the town.

saint appears in a window higher up and throws down a bag containing the gold coins intended as a dowry for the girls.²⁸⁰

The painting illustrates how important dowry was in this culture Ancient Near East, Greek and Rome. Dowry was very cardinal in features relating to marriage customs in both ancient Greece and Rome.²⁸¹

The legend of this image: St Nicholas was paying dowry to three beautiful virgins who were so poor and without the dowry, they would have been sold off as prostitutes. After they received the dowry, several pieces of gold each, they all got married and led a godly life in their individual family lives.²⁸²

5.7 Conclusion

The chapter focussed on descriptive discussion of the Sancta Sanctorum, “Holy of Holies” from the outside to its interior. At that time naming it as “Holy of Holies” was important as Rome was becoming more like the “New Jerusalem.” It was only accessed by the pope once a year to perform Holy Week celebrations. The Sancta Sanctorum housed some of the most treasured relics in the Western Catholic Church: the *Acheiropoieta*, a special relic that replicates²⁸³ itself, the milk of Mary, precious reliquaries that contained relics. Entrance into the Sancta Sanctorum was very limited and this helped to keep these relics in their more original form. The chapel was renovated and it continued to house the relics though still at that point access was limited. Nicholas III was instrumental in the changes that happened to the chapel during the time of his papacy reign. The scenes of frescoes depicted speak of the martyrdom stories of the saints featured. One painting of an act of mercy in the life of Nicholas III is well frescoed on the wall as well.

²⁸⁰ See also similarity with Onori’s description: “The second panel depicts the *Gift of St. Nicholas with the three girls*: the scene, celebrating the pontiff, does not show martyrdom but rather a gift. On the left is an old man, his face worn and contrite, meeting St. Nicholas and telling him that due to his poverty, he cannot provide his three daughters with a dowry, who will therefore be forced to follow the path of prostitution. Next to the first scene there is a second where Nicholas throws a bag of gold into the house of the poor man, as he sleeps along with the three girls, never imagining that he may soon be able to provide his daughters with a dowry thanks to the Saint’s charitable intervention.”

²⁸¹ Botticini & Siow 2002, p. 6

²⁸² Lowinger 2013, p. 2

²⁸³ Carr 2002, p. 76

The frescoes also portray important details in the background, which gives a bigger picture of the historical events of the time. For example, the geographical, and architectural background portray the scene of death and surrounding as a glimpse of the bigger account detail.

The role of these frescoes cut through the life of the faithful devotees, presenting to them healing or relief for their lives in different ways. As such they are not just mere images providing an account of history, but as relics they too are link between the devotee and the divine source of power through prayer and meditation.

CHAPTER 6 : CONTRIBUTIONS OF RELICS AND PAINTINGS TO RELIGIOUS PRACTICES IN THE 13TH CENTURY

6.1 Introduction

In the chapters prior to chapter 6, I have laboured to give as much details as possible on relics, paintings and or frescoes and in the previous chapter I discussed the two elements in relation to the chapel, Sancta Sanctorum, Holy of Holies. I advance the discussion in this chapter of the contribution of relics and paintings of Sancta Sanctorum to religious practices in the 13th century, Basilica of St John Lateran Church, Rome. The introductory background to this chapter has been discussed in the previous chapters.

6.2 Contributions

To single out contributions brought about relics and frescoes of the Sancta Sanctorum on individual peoples' lives would be difficult as to a large extent that is not proven or not authoritative.

In a culture with limited literacy and few available texts, public pictorial narrative was an essential tool for the church and the papacy. Giving visual form to the contents of Scripture, the cycles in Rome's churches could, allegedly, function as a substitute for the relatively inaccessible texts. At the same time, as Herbert Kessler has pointed out, the earliest monumental cycles were designed to also offer deeper levels of meaning.²⁸⁴ Like texts, the visual scripture of the apostolic basilicas could also be read allegorically and typologically.

The large-scale cycles of Old St. Peter's and San Paolo were composed as spatial hermeneutical systems that evoked God's historical plan visually, connecting events across the church space through arrangement, patterning, and formal rhyme.²⁸⁵ However, the most

²⁸⁴ Kessler & Johanna 2000, p. 27

²⁸⁵ Duchesne 1957.

intricate and sophisticated configurations and layering of meaning might have been accessible to the average viewer. Therefore, the medieval use of relics was largely to create a physical presence of the spiritual.

Kimulu argued that the main thrust of the pictorial narratives of Rome's basilicas remained on the level of the literal.²⁸⁶ The regular, unobtrusive frames and the great horizontal surge of the monumental cycles seemed to favour an uninterrupted scanning of the census literalis, the temporal succession of historical events leading up to the more symbolically charged events taking place in the sanctuary.²⁸⁷ By contrast, the Sancta Sanctorum's frescoes are displayed as a non-sequential collection of singular stories, free of any such teleological framework. This showed that paintings were used to bring to life stories that were associated with saints. These pictorial stories were intended to illustrate events to the believers and help elicit the actual supposed pain or feelings of sorrow associated with an event.²⁸⁸ As a result of this importance, paintings were a part of religious practice and pictures expressing an event that related to the religious ritual were always hung around.

Whereas the regular grid composition of the narratives leads the eye of the viewer smoothly from episode to episode deliberate accentuation of the single episode. In the older cycles especially, the medieval period the predictability of the geometrical pattern makes the framework appear to recede into the background, whereas in the papal chapel attention is drawn to the essential framedness (Sampton, 1989).

The anthropologist João de Pina-Cabral, discussing Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's term "participation" as akin to "copresence," observes how this phenomenon may exist with other persons, with collectives, with supernatural forces, and even with material aspects of their world (things).²⁸⁹ Similarly, geographer and historian David Lowenthal, pointed out that throughout history and especially in the church in Rome in medieval times a relic

²⁸⁶ Kimulu 1983, p. 34

²⁸⁷ Giovanni, 1747, p. 45

²⁸⁸ Kessler & Johanna, 2000: 34

²⁸⁹ Pina-Cabral 2013, p. 266

from the past was seen as “*ipso facto real*”²⁹⁰ and as such allowed “participation”, becoming conduits of prayer and devotion in the expression of religious devotion and supplicatory appeal. Therefore, the connection of and with the saint spiritually through the materiality of the relic and the role of prayer required an expanded view of the relic as a participant in the liturgy of Orthodox prayer.²⁹¹ Hence, the religious prominence of relics and paintings to religious practice.

Religious belief in medieval times was further amplified by the wonder working powers of remnants of the saints and as such ownership of any relic of a saint, was believed, made the owner closer to the saint and hold authority over the enchantments of the relic object.²⁹²

Victor Buchili paints a clearer picture of the position of relics and paintings in medieval religious practices “In the same way that the finger of St John the Forerunner is sufficient to impart presence to the entirety of St John, the tertiary relic of blessed cotton ribbon is spoken of as the belt. It takes on a sort of holographic relationship, such that the whole is present in each part. The ribbon is a relic of the relic, but in no way is that considered to diminish the potential wonder-working capacity.”²⁹³

This line is taken from Buchili’s work on prototypicality in the context of early Christian use of ikons. He argued that the distinction between original and copy is hard to make, and as such, one may venerate the cotton ribbon as one would the camel-hair original.²⁹⁴ Further, the superiority of such objects did not inhibit the affective power; rather the flexible, soft, manipulability of the fabric heightened the effectiveness.²⁹⁵ Whereas solid relics required boxes or wall mountings, fabric could be wound, tied, folded around a body or into a pocket. Thus, the indexical qualities of the material fostered a more overt

²⁹⁰ Lowenthal 1985, p. 244

²⁹¹ Pina-Cabral 2013, p. 21

²⁹² Hutchings & McKenzie, 2016.

²⁹³ Buchili 1990, p. 23

²⁹⁴ Buchili 1990, p. 24

²⁹⁵ Smear 2006, p. 7

synergistic coaction of the small, mutable relic with the body.²⁹⁶ This synergistic coaction made relics and paintings a prominent feature of religious ritual.

It has been argued that “seeing is believing”. While there is no proven evidence as to the extent that viewing relics and paintings raised one’s belief. It has been argued by Hahn that touching, tasting, smelling, and hearing are a signet to believing too. Insofar as belief and intellection required the concrete medieval believers used objects to focus their minds an ritualistically manipulated objects to demonstrate belief and attention.²⁹⁷ The above argument shows that it is important to examine the role our senses play in informing our relationship with objects. It is what we sense in and through objects that creates their significance and power. Therefore, it is a province of this study to assume that medieval religious practices were performed with specially selected relics to ensure that the believer realized that significance of the ritual by merely looking at a religiously inclined story or touching a relic that was owned by a saint.

As Proust’s madeleine demonstrates, smell and taste play on memory more vividly than the other senses.²⁹⁸ Proust attempted to demonstrate that “the culture of relics both preserved a moment in time and brought it into the consciousness of a crowd; distilling the world into a concoction of identifying fragrances as in the case of incense”.²⁹⁹ Playing with the biological link between the sense of smell and memory, the fragrance becomes a universal olfactory relic of time and place, attempting to allow us to commune with what is absent.³⁰⁰ Therefore, a small reliquary sarcophagus wafted a haunting and beautiful smell when its lid was removed, recalling the many libations to the saint that were poured into the tiny hole along the upper ridge of its lid and connecting us to believers of the past.³⁰¹

²⁹⁶ Buchili 1990, p. 29

²⁹⁷ Hahn 2011, p. 20

²⁹⁸ Proust 2001, p. 34

²⁹⁹ Proust 2001, p. 35

³⁰⁰ Proust 2001, p. 36

³⁰¹ Hahn 2011, p. 4

But despite the assumed power of the “lower senses,” vision remains the queen of the senses, ruling over the others. Vision, along with hearing, is the primary means we use to process thought and nourish our intellect. Vision operates by means of light and light whether in medieval Dionysian metaphysics or in Olafur Eliasson’s *Eye See Eye* is presented as a potential avenue to truths that lie beyond the senses.³⁰² The relics and paintings therefore, were used by the church in Rome as a way lighting religious lessons and beliefs into the inner senses.

The ultimate truth of “*Eye See Eye*” was driven by the expressive gestures of the emanating light and its shadows, and by personal sensory engagement with shadow play. Light, brilliant to subdued, is often used metaphorically in art and literature to personify God or ultimate divinity.³⁰³ For the medieval scholar and scientist Witelo, “Corporeal light... confers specific form upon matter in a process fully reflective of the downward effluence of Divine Light.”³⁰⁴ Thus, the medieval eye of the viewer and the eye in “*Eye See Eye*” encountered each other in the space where the corporeal spectator met the spiritual and the intellectual. Again, seeing is a significant aspect of belief; it makes corporeally present that which is absent or unintelligible. Seeing is an avenue through which the divine can be made physically present to us for petition and intellectual contemplation.³⁰⁵ Therefore, the use of relics and paintings in religious practices was specially introduced to appeal to the senses and enhance believe in God and strict observance of religious rituals.

But it is important to note that vision is highly mutable and conditioned by personal and cultural paradigms. It is not a given but rather an act of choice. We choose not only what we look at, but also how we choose to see it. To this end, when we think of vision, we must also think of visually that is, the constructed understanding of what it means to see. The visual practices or forms of engagement with the world that constituted vision in medieval times and what vision means in modern times are different. In medieval religious

³⁰² Kimulu, 1983, p. 12

³⁰³ Abber 1990, p. 34

³⁰⁴ Rutledge 1995, p. 160

³⁰⁵ Pina-Cabral 2013, p. 34

belief, the use of a relic or an antique associated with some hero or saint brought the aura of the revered individual's presence.³⁰⁶ The papacy by establishing the *sancta sanctorum* and keeping all the key relics and paintings in there, attracted more converts with a view of being close to the heroes and saints and have a share of the superfluous powers by association.

Medieval thought hierarchically distinguished between three types of vision: corporeal, spiritual, and intellectual. Ranked lowest was corporeal vision, the physical sense of sight, while the highest was intellectual vision, that which lies beyond the physical senses and is understood only in the mind.³⁰⁷ Yet, it was actually and finally through corporeal vision, like corporeal light, that divine truths had to be ultimately revealed, since it was corporeal vision that worked to turn the mind's eye the intellect toward the divine. Again, by using these relics and paintings faith in God was enhanced as believers beheld the remains of gallant men of God, learnt of their gallant actions and learnt from the pictorial stories about the saints. We cannot state for sure if the establishment of the *Sancta Sanctorum* ultimately moved the holies of holies from Jerusalem to Rome except by rules of association that have been expounded above.

Further, in medieval understanding of vision, it is not what we see or its physical presence, but rather, the contemplation of the object that is important what the object signifies or what we believe the object to signify. So believer who beheld relics and paintings and was convinced of their powerful coaction in the life of the saint and the hero gave interpretations dependent on what they already believed.

By virtue of most of these converts already believing in "hero worshipping", they found it easy to worship the depicted Christian heroes as a substitute of their pagan ones.³⁰⁸ Thereby, making it a requirement for relics and paintings to always be there during religious rituals and this was extended by the church in Rome to planting relics of the

³⁰⁶ Luwenthal 1985, p. 6

³⁰⁷ Proust 2001, p. 6

³⁰⁸ Buchili 1990, p. 4.

saints at every site where a chapel was to be built. This argument shows the centrality of relics and paintings in religious practices and the resulting religious hegemony in Rome.

Ultimately, meaning is not a matter of inherent worth; relics contain only as much meaning as we ascribe to them. Similarly, visual theorist David Morgan discussed a subtly different modern “social life of images” and proposes the existence of certain kinds of “contracts” that control how we see, ranging from the mimetic to the allegorical to the deconstructive.³⁰⁹ For example, the viewing of photography calls upon the “mimetic contract,” putting forward the notion of a precise imagery that guaranteed viewers reliability. Inherent in the narrative of the work is the uncertainty regarding the origin of the objects. We are, nonetheless, inclined to buy in the idea of pictorial contracts as used in religious practice were as usual “seeing is believing”.

Lastly, relics and paintings played a central role in religious practices in medieval period as observed by Kondula³¹⁰ who argued that the centrality of relics and paintings in medieval religion invoked the “relic cult rush” which had to be controlled by the Pope through ordinances that guided the verification of relics before being venerated.³¹¹ The rising importance of relic use resulted in fake relics on the market and this had to be stopped by regulation. The pagan beliefs of converts also played an important role in raising the importance of relics in religious practice.

Among the Christians, relics and painting came in with another understanding as people wanted to reduce the gap between themselves and the point of contact with the divine or holy persons. Religious pilgrimages were more popular during this period, despite the known dangers. Mediaeval Christians wanted to see and feel the holy place and holy spaces that were of significance in history and to their individual life and to the life of the church. Many of the pilgrims between eleventh and fifteenth century made journeys to the Holy

³⁰⁹ Morgan 1977, p. 56

³¹⁰ Buchili 1990, p. 45

³¹¹ Pina-Cabral 2013, p. 5

Land.³¹² Others visited Rome to get relieved from ailing health or to just strengthen their faith.

6.3 Pilgrimages

In the period prior to the beginning of the 13th century, the translations and dedication of some churches was marked with significant ecclesiastical presence. At the dedication of St Nicholas, Bari, in the year 1179, there were five archbishops and more than 28 bishops.³¹³ In my own view, such gatherings translate into unity within the church at that time between the general membership of the church leaders and their church leaders and also between the leaders themselves.

“What made a place holy, if not relics put there for the purpose, might be belief that there a saint lay buried or had been martyred...”³¹⁴

I agree further with Susan Wood that one thing important was that in their minds worshipper and pilgrims started to treat sites and places as holy. That in itself, in the minds of the worshippers and pilgrims generated within their consciousness boundaries of sites and space with a certain degree of sanctity. Certain points or spots of a sacred event or the place of the altar was treated with much awareness of sanctity than other places even within the same locality or building.

³¹²

³¹³ Loud 2007, p. 377

³¹⁴ Wood 2006, p. 106

Although taking part in these pilgrimages was dangerous,³¹⁵ those who took part believed in renewing their faith which was a cardinal point.³¹⁶

To the medieval pilgrim, it was worth the risk for the reward of forgiveness of sins and a renewed faith. Joseph Lynch, professor of medieval history at Ohio State University, writes this insight into the medieval faith that motivated much of the actions of the time:

Pilgrimage was rooted in the veneration of saints and their relics, or *relicta* (“things left behind”). Medieval Christians believed the barrier between this life and the next was porous: saints were not dead any more than Jesus was. Theologians taught that people could not only ask saints, God’s friends, to intercede for them, but could do so from any locale. But many medieval people believed that at the shrines, saints were present in a special way—St Peter at Rome, Saint James at Compostela, Saint Thomas Becket at Canterbury, and so on.

The bodily remains of saints were taken from their graves in solemn ceremony and placed in receptacles called *reliquaries*, which were often magnificent works of art. Since the demand for saint’s bodies outpaced the supply, the bodies were reverently dismembered, and the pieces received the same treatment as intact bodies. In addition, items associated with the saint – clothing, pieces of a cross or sword by which they were executed, and the like – were also revered.

Many medieval Christians found it deeply satisfying to go to the saint, kneel in his or her presence, touch his or her remains (if one was especially

³¹⁵ Fanning 2009, p. 4 during the period the mediaeval period, the pilgrims mostly had to travel long distances. Safety was not granted. If they survived a shipwreck, another fate waited for them, they could be attacked by robbers. Change of environment, was and still remains to be a natural changeling to health as others ended being diseased. Undertaking such a journey was a risk.

³¹⁶ Fanning 2009, p. 4

fortunate), and ask the saint to intercede with God. Pilgrims often expected miracles, especially healing from infirmities and disease, at these shrines.

Concern for the dead was another central figure of late medieval religion, and the doctrine of purgatory was very much alive. The official teaching was hazy at the edges, but the point was clear enough: some Christians who had died in God's grace were still burdened with unforgiven sins and unfulfilled penances. They needed to be cleansed.

People in purgatory could no longer help themselves, and they might remain in the purging fire for decades, centuries, or unimaginably long periods. Medieval Christians had a strong sense of solidarity, and they believed they could help one another even across the grave. One person's prayers, alms, or good deeds could literally be donated to another person, including those in purgatory. Those concerned about dead parents, spouses, children, or others prayed for them, asking God to be merciful and to shorten their time in purgation.

Anything that would quench or destroy these hopes for eternal life would be dealt with firmly and conclusively. Thus the provocations from the Muslims motivated several hundred years of costly crusades to attempt to secure these sacred sites for their pilgrimages.³¹⁷

An enthusiast embarked on a pilgrimage for personal reason especially for remission of one's sins to improve on their life after death. Others were ordered to go on pilgrimage in order to correct their behaviour. Rudolf of Greifenstein, was himself punished to go on a pilgrimage for murdering bishop Bertholdt von Chur in 1237.³¹⁸

³¹⁷ Fanning 2009, p. 4 & 5

³¹⁸ Mylod 2013, p. 48

6.4 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to investigate the contribution of relics and paintings of sancta sanctorum to religious practices in the 13th Century, Basilica of Saint John Lateran Church, Rome. The investigation gave insights on the extent to which relics and paintings were used in religious practice during medieval time. Despite the divided perception as regard to the subject matter, it has been observed that certain strides were made by the church in Rome to ensure that relics and paintings associated with saints and some other heroes were venerated and kept in the Sancta Sanctorum under key and lock. The relics and paintings were then used during worship rituals to invoke the presence of holy saints.

This study also showed that relic culture at the church in Rome could have been influenced by pagan rituals in which they paid reverence to heroes and even worshipped the heroes. The church in its cunning practice decided to include relics in worship so as to gradually erase hero worship among converts and replace it with saints and other anti-pagan reverence. The study established that the love and respect for relics that developed over time resulted into relic hunting which promoted the existence of fake relics.

In addition, religious leaders could effectively show prominence and authority by having in their storage some relics and paintings of saints. The higher the number of relics and paintings in the chapel the holier it became due to the rule of coaction. For this reason, the establishment of the Sancta Sanctorum was seen as the popes eminence as most of these holy artefacts ended up there. While the study does not explain at what time the pope became “the Holy Father” it is assumed that by keeping the holy relics and paintings in a secluded room “Sancta Sanctorum” he gained the authority from holy things and therefore, becoming the “holy father”.

Furthermore, the church emphasized the importance of appealing to the senses in promoting faith among the believers. It is thus, assumed in this study that the sense of touch and sight which are regarded as prime among all senses could be used to elicit adherence to religious doctrines through relics and paintings. As by beholding the

paintings and touching the relics the believers felt a bipolar existence with saints and stories told by the paintings. This made relics and paintings necessary in all religious practices of the medieval church in Rome.

The inadequate number of Bibles and other religious materials entailed that relics and paintings could carry the message. Therefore, it is strongly opined in the study that the sharp rise in relic cult could have been based on the believers desire to be close to the gospel message and in the event that little materials were available relics depicting scenes of saints and relics associated with saints filled the gap.

Lastly, the use of relics and paintings in medieval period were intended to show the power of Christianity among the other religions. The transfer of the “holy of holies” depicted the prominence of Christendom in Rome and the new authority attained. Relics and paintings in the Sancta Sanctorum helped remove the earlier belief of Jerusalem as a holy city and replacing it with Rome. The study acknowledges the divided perceptions of the use of relics and paintings in the Lateran church, but the overall agreement is that relics and paintings of various religious scenes were more common than the actual sharing of the message of Jesus.

Conclusions

The research, started with learning more of The Contribution of Relics and Paintings of Sancta Sanctorum to Religious Practices in the 13th Century, Basilica of Saint John Lateran Church, Rome. Derived from the subject, the study looked at four components before making a conclusion on the subject. In particular, the study went in details to look at (a) relics and saints; (b) Paintings and frescoes; and (c) the Sancta Sanctorum and its sacred objects. By conducting this research on: saints, relics, and the Sancta Sanctorum, though I have not met nearly all the authors whose views have influenced this study, as a researcher, I have gained a broader understanding on the veneration, saints, relics; the Sancta Sanctorum and its sacred objects; and the history of the Middle Ages. One of the most difficult thing was to transpose my minds into the Middle Ages times in

order to relate and get a gist of the religious practices of the time. The following are the conclusions that are drawn from this research:

The subject of the research is a popular discussion among scholars of history of social sciences, therefore, it is believed the contributions shall add on to the current discussions on the topic.

What started as a “passion” to gather and keep the remains of the holy men rapidly turned into a broader culture of collecting bodily remains of people as much as material remains of things that could either claim direct physical contact with the body of Christ or were associated with events and places to his life, ministry, and death through the account of the Gospels.³¹⁹ A saint may be known whilst living, and his relics can be sought after during the time of his earthly life. From the time the saints cult started, saints have played a recognisable role in the life history of the Church up to the present day.

Relics could be a whole body or fragments of it contact. There is a wider range of relics available. They have their own value and that is the reason for them being sought much in the Middle Ages

The images in the Sancta Sanctorum have been there for many centuries. They are still treated with the same honour and veneration from the faithful worshippers who feel connected to divine presence with their veneration of the sacred objects. Pope Nicholas III is a notable figure in the history of the Sancta Sanctorum.

Icons are also part of the objects which are venerated. Icons are religious pictures, portraits or images, mainly painted in Christian churches. They mostly depict the God’s image, Jesus Christ, angels, saints and events within the Bible. Although, the Church fathers debated much on iconography, they came up with substantiated views and contributions that validated or otherwise invalidated the use of these icons. However, icons do not have equally the same consideration as in both the Eastern, and Western Church traditions. To the life of faithful Christian devotees, frescoes presents to the not only a package of an image but a reflection of the life of the person in

³¹⁹ Klein 2010, p.1

the image and most importantly, healing, relief and power to courageously live life. As such they are not just mere images providing an account of history, but as relics they too are link between the devotee and the divine source of power through prayer and meditation.

The conclusions from the chapters three to six are details below:

The publication by Peter Brown, “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity,” was a turning point for history. It opened up new enquires into the past and since then there has been a more discussions going on in scholarly world pertaining to History in the Middle Ages. However, without the Vatican opening up, a lot of enquiries would not have the desired results. When the Vatican decided to open up to promote the scholarly inquiry and to continue controlling its written materials, relics and painting, during the turn of the nineteenth century, that marked a turning point in in studying the history of the cult of saints.³²⁰ It is proven already that the quest for information from the Sancta Sanctorum, had already started years back as other historians made attempts but were not successful. However, even when they started the research in the Sancta Sanctorum there appeared some hurdles that they needed to overcome. Hagiographers were a very valuable source of information in the study of the cult of saints. In the third century there was already a systematic way of preserving information among the early Christians.

In trade, they became the most popular and profitable commodity of the time making churches, monasteries, and others vie for the most valuable relics. The more recognition of the saint tallied with recognition of the church or city, so the more the saint was perceived, then the more powerful the church or city was too.³²¹ Various ways were used to fetch them – negotiations, buying, seizing, swindling, or stealing – the end justified the means! The movement of relics for canonization purpose required *translatio*. In biblical passages, body parts of the dead were to be given a decent burial.

³²⁰ Noreen 2011, p. 520–521

³²¹ Cassandra 2012, p. 17

Relics as sacred objects were for consecration and were mainly housed in reliquaries and kept under the altar. The community validated the relic's significance. Relics were also seen like objects for economic gain. For a long time in history, they were banned from the market, yet that ban was ineffectual. From as early as 386CE to about 1215CE there was still documentation of councils banning the supply of relics. However, the church tried to regulate the supply of relics through other means but could not completely end the trade. One of the infamous traders was Deusdona.³²²

The discovery of the True Cross was key to the Christian history although, there is not much information about Helena, who is said to have discovered it³²³ together with the tablet where Pilate wrote – "...KING OF THE JEWS." The Fourth Crusade on Constantinople, which was then a popular destination for pilgrims, resulted in a loss and gain of relics from Constantinople to Rome. Throughout the 13th century Rome had many relics than ever before.

Finally, the relic tradition grew out of respect for the departed saints and on the other side through the appeal of either the sense of hearing, or seeing, or feeling, – or a combination of these – to connect with the divine power and manifest in some experienced form.

At that time naming it as "Holy of Holies" was important as Rome was becoming more like the "New Jerusalem." It was only accessed by the pope once a year to perform Holy Week celebrations. The Sancta Sanctorum housed some of the most treasured relics in the Western Catholic Church: the *Acheiropoieta*, a special relic that replicates³²⁴ itself, the milk of Mary, precious reliquaries that contained relics. Entrance into the Sancta Sanctorum was very limited and this helped to keep these relics in their more original form. The chapel was renovated and it continued to house the relics though still at that point access was limited. Nicholas III was instrumental in the changes that happened to the chapel during the time of his papacy reign. The

³²² McGregor 2019, p. 40; See also Geary 1994, p.212

³²³ Bralewski 2017, p. 28

³²⁴ Carr 2002, p. 76

scenes of frescoes depicted speak of the martyrdom stories of the saints featured. One painting of an act of mercy in the life of Nicholas III is well frescoed on the wall as well.

The frescoes also portray important details in the background, which gives a bigger picture of the historical events of the time. For example, the geographical, and architectural background portray the scene of death and surrounding as a glimpse of the bigger account detail.

The role of these frescoes cut through the life of the faithful devotees, presenting to them healing or relief for their lives in different ways. As such they are not just mere images providing an account of history, but as relics they too are link between the devotee and the divine source of power through prayer and meditation.

The conclusions of this study on are not the final ones on the research and they do no mean that every detail given in this study is amenable to other.

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