CHAPTER ONE
WAYS OF DYING AND RITUALS OF DEATH

Medievalists always have to take the long view. The history of dealing with the dead and the dying in our period is one of ancient continuities, breaks, diversification and synthesis, especially in the period up to about the ninth century and the rise of the Carolingian Empire. In the previous chapter, some of the essential themes in this process were sketched out, in order to convey the absolutely peculiar, yet rigorous, attitudes of Christianity to death. But anthropology reminds us too that many death rituals consist of certain basic structural practices, many of which were informed by ordinary biological necessity, but also by cultural relativities. Rites of this type concern processes of individual transformation, whereby social and cultural norms are symbolized and reconfirmed. Typically, such rites, as rites of passage, have a tripartite structure, an insight which we owe to Arnold van Gennep. Van Gennep argued that many rites of transition have, quite simply, a beginning, a middle and an end. In the case of death these transformations were tied in closely with attitudes to impurity, of the type that have been discussed by Mary Douglas; though Christianity oiled the wheels of social intercourse between the quick and the dead, it was historically situated in a world in which views of the dead as ritually impure were deeply rooted. The broadly tripartite rites of passage of the dead reflected these taboos.

At the heart of van Gennep's theory is the idea of transition itself, which centres on the idea of 'liminality' (from the Latin *limen*, 'threshold'). The first rites – threshold, or 'preliminal', rites – were, so far as the dying and dead were concerned, rites of purification and separation: anointing and washing (bodily or spiritual) of the dead, and the cleansing and reconciliation of personal and communal relations amongst the living. In Christian terms this meant the administration of unction and the elements of the Mass to the dead, and ensuring that the dead died in a state of spiritual grace. Anointing was the most final ritual statement: the anointing or unction of the dying (like that of a king at a coronation) was a ritually transformative act from which there was no return. Those who were anointed and yet lived were latter-day Lazaruses, walking corpses. Hence anointing was the most fearful of all the death rituals.

The dead, their neighbours and God having been reconciled, it was possible to inaugurate the liminal rites of the threshold at the actual burial of the body; hence, perhaps, the frequency of doorway and portal motifs on ancient sarcophagi and medieval tombs. By such rites the dead and living were finally separ-

ated, and the bereaved further distinguished from the world, at least for the period of mourning. There followed the 'postliminal' rites of reincorporation, whereby the dead were successfully installed into the afterlife and the mourners resited in temporal society, and so 'normality' was restored. In medieval practice this involved the conventional acts of restoration: proper and elaborate funeral offices and Masses, and the final appeasement of the hierarchy of the body and soul.

Christian death was thus a sacral process. But though it acknowledged the facts of finality, the preliminary rites of separation were always closely bound up with a natural hope: that the dying should not in fact die at all. Death rituals were founded at least in part on the idea of recovery, and hence owed much to other rituals of the sick and suffering. In a double sense, death rituals were about healing – healing the sick and, failing that, healing the soul. The quasi-medical, or 'thaumaturgical', character of medieval death rituals owed much to the heritage of Greco-Roman medicine; Christianity inherited practices and structures from the ancient world, but imposed upon them its own ethical system. Ritualized care for the sick provided the basis of death rituals in the Roman Church, including prayers and feasts for recovery and ritual anointing or healing by oil. These foreshadowed funeral Masses and the anointing of the dying, or extreme unction. As already noted, the Christian perspective saw the body as a sign of the soul; in curing the soul of sin the body too was cured. The early Christian thinker Cassian had developed the idea of the pastor as a spiritual doctor, and as one early Celtic penitential, or rule-book of sin, put it, 'different sins call for different penances, just as doctors prescribe different medicines for different illnesses'. Early Christian catacomb painters frequently depict Christ as a doctor, *Christus Medicus*, bearing a healer's switch at his miracles, like the Raising of Lazarus. In the New Testament, in Acts and in James 5:14–15, the sick were to be healed with oil. The link between sin and death was profound; and it was disclosed as much at the healing shrines of the saints as in the anointing rituals of monarchs who, in the Middle Ages, were possessed of the saints' thaumaturgical powers.

Rituals of the sick and dying thus served to overcome the old anxieties in the Roman and Judaic worlds about the impurity of the dead. They formed the basis of the later *Ordo visitandi*, the service of visiting the sick by the priest. They also served, by ritual reversal, to reinforce the Christian sense of the individual in time. States of transition resemble one another symbolically: we leave the world as we enter it, naked, needy and vulnerable, and so the rites of departure can resemble the rites of entry. Thus as we are washed and cleansed in death, so we are baptized at birth. This reminds us of the dual function of the Early Christian mausoleum-baptistery. The catacombs contain images which stood as types for baptism: Moses and Pharoah crossing the Red Sea, for example. It was also necessary that such rituals should speed passage, and offer protection on the



A medieval notification of death: the Mortuary Roll (1458) of Elizabeth Sconincx, Abbess of Forêt, a Benedictine nunnery in the diocese of Cambrai. Measuring over 42 feet long, the roll is headed with illustrations of Elizabeth's death and presence before the Virgin Mary with St Benedict. After the images comes the 'brief', a document setting out the names of those for whom prayers are asked. It is followed by the titles of the many monastic houses to which the roll was taken for presentation. The itinerary is dated at each stage of its journey, the roll having been taken to 383 institutions by 1459.

journey. The basic death rituals of the medieval Church thus involved confession, extreme unction and communion, the last being known as the *viaticum* (literally, 'one for the road'). The *viaticum* may echo the Greco-Roman practice of giving the dead travelling money for Charon, in order to cross the River Styx. Coins inserted into the mouth of the dying by pagans were thus transmuted into the Flesh and Blood of Christ as nourishment and shield for their journey into the afterlife.

Rites of this type form the earliest coherent Roman Catholic order of the dead, the fourth- or fifth-century *Ordo defunctorum*. Not surprisingly they have, in part, a judicial character: the Mass was regarded as an aid against the Last Judgement, and stood as a form of personal advocacy, a role later assumed by the intercessory power of the saints and especially the Virgin Mary. Though the developments in liturgy and ritual for the dead in early medieval Europe were extremely complex, texts like the *Ordo defunctorum* contain within them the seeds of formal ecclesiastical rituals for the dead in the Middle Ages. These were of two types, conforming to the basic liturgical norms of the medieval Church: the Requiem Mass and the Office of the Dead, a specialized form of vigil which did not include the Mass. We shall return to them shortly. Norms of this type were established in the period 500–900 by a long process of dialogue between the Roman Church and the Churches of north-west Europe, especially the Frankish Church, and they were consolidated under the Carolingian reformers; the formation of liturgy reflected the formation of power. As I have already noted, however, the contribution of monasticism to this process was vital. The death of a monk offered a model of communal solidarity – a monastery was a form of family – and so was an extension of the communal life. It reflected and adapted the monastic rituals of penance and the group vigil, in this case at the bedside of the ailing monk, together with chanting, the administration of unction and the *viaticum*, and the final rituals. Monasteries nurtured the memory of the dead by means of 'obits', or lists of the dead important to them, and anniversaries. When a significant member of a monastic house died, it became the practice to send out an obituary roll relating this fact to other monastic houses and requesting the support of prayers or Masses – perhaps as many as thirty Masses a day – for the dead. Monasteries in effect assumed society's role of caring for the dead and could offer to equally significant lay people, especially those who founded, built and patronized monastic houses, incomparable spiritual benefits. As the Middle Ages developed, the burdens of prayer and, especially, communal and private celebration of Mass for the dead, whether lay or religious, became vast: it is not for nothing that the medieval Church has been called (by G. G. Coulton) a 'Mass machine'.

In essence this clerical domination of the rituals of remembrance amounted to an appropriation of rites by a class of specialized technocrats of death, and

for the remainder of the Middle Ages this renunciation by society of rituals which formerly belonged within the family itself, to an impersonal group, remained normal. The modern lay alienation from death and its rituals stems in part from this development. But it also imposed stresses and strains upon a system premised upon cooperation between this special class of technocrats and the laity; those on the 'supply' side of theology and salvation, and the 'market'. Historically the solution to the burden of the dead carried by the monasteries and great churches was the privatisation of the Mass performance. The communal practices and obligations of death were paralleled, and eventually bypassed, by private practices which annexed the accomplishments of monastic religious culture in the interests of a privileged few. The communal rites of Mass and Office became the standard rites of the medieval Church in all its guises. But the details and habits of monastic devotion, especially as they developed up to the twelfth century, were also annexed by the laity. This meant the spread, from the thirteenth century onwards, of increasingly personal habits of religious thought and deed with specific devotional ends. It meant too that the growing sophistication of communal rituals of a preliminal type – the rituals of separation and purification – also spread to a much wider public. As the theology of sin, and the disciplines of confession and penance, matured in the High Middle Ages, so those rituals which concerned the agony of the dying, and their preparation in death for the afterlife, gained in complexity and system. In short, they became, if not an art, at least a craft: the craft of dying, or *Ars moriendi.* Before considering how the rites of the Mass and Office affected the ritual and visual culture of the Middle Ages, we must look next at the 'good death', how to do it, and how not to do it.

The Good Death

A good death could be the guarantor of the future in two senses: the material and social world of the deceased, their sphere of personal obligation and possessions, could be put in order by the due process of the will – an increasingly important and elaborate form of document – and the soul's future could be cared for. In this sense the good death could ensure satisfactory continuity. The will, as an instance of the growing reliance of medieval society upon written transactions, stands as an important source for ordinary social, as well as devotional, concerns. This is because wills performed two functions: like the ancient Roman will, the medieval will was a legal means of settling an estate; but it was also a religious document, the aim of which was to settle the soul. The will was thus a document of exchange in material and spiritual senses. Late-medieval wills frequently ask for *Diriges* (see below p. 53) and doles, or alms-giving to the poor, by way of good works, and also the saying of Masses.

Medieval wills are often bipartite for this reason, opening with pious clauses before getting on with the nitty-gritty of temporal possessions, whose value was legitimated by pious and charitable intent. The proper distribution of wealth at death defined (in part) what it meant to die well: to abjure the vice of avarice in a pre-capitalistic society in which capital tended to be hoarded rather than invested, and so could be passed on.

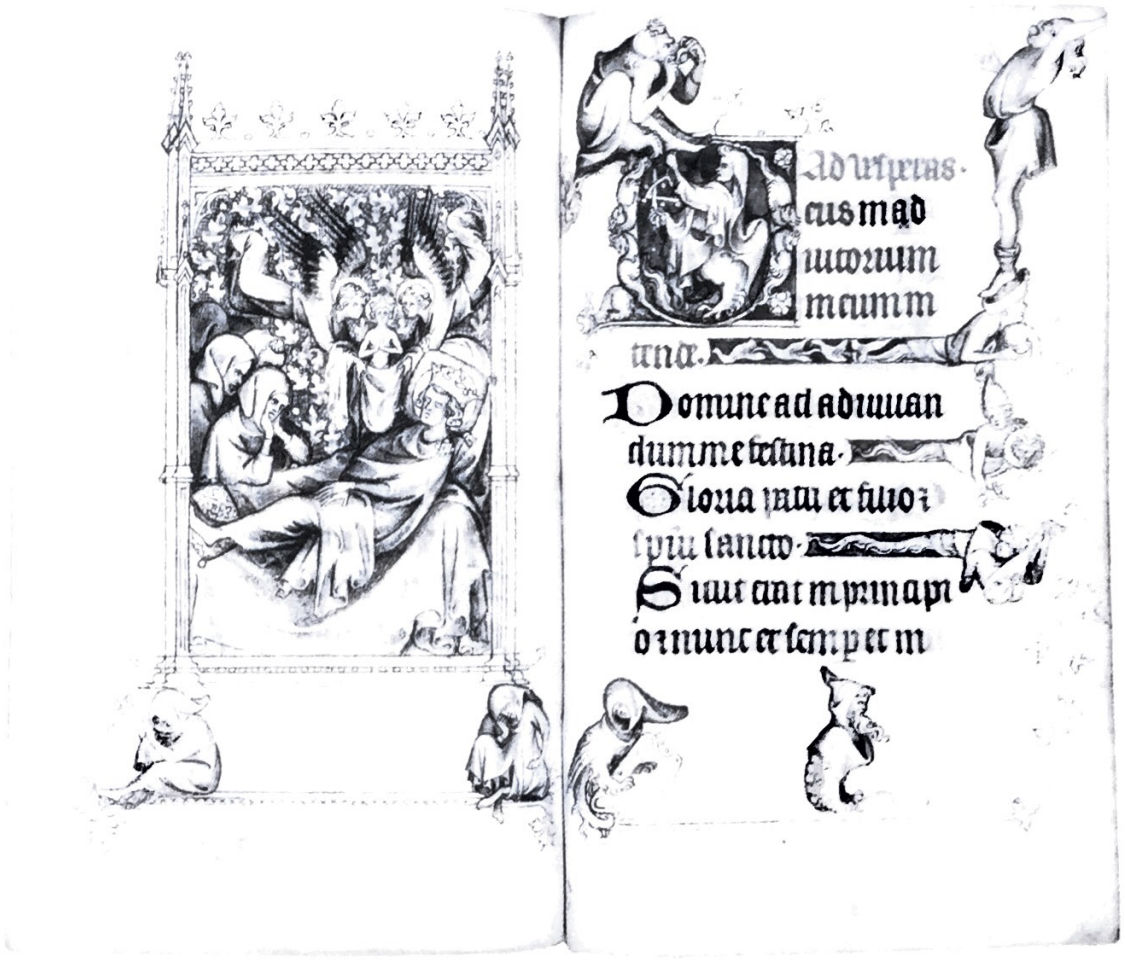
By the fifteenth century the form was sufficiently widespread to be aestheticized in the form of the literary testament, of which the most celebrated and gloomy example is associated with the French poet François Villon, namely his *Testament* written in the early 1460s. The will could also concern itself with the future of the deceased's body; many wills are in fact much more concerned with the place of burial than with its form, though wills could specify in detail the form of a funeral, or obsequy, as well as that of a tomb. That of Richard Peke of Wakefield, dated 1516, deals with spiritual property first:

> First I commend my soul to God Almighty, to our Lady Saint Mary, and to all the saints in Heaven; my body to be buried in the parish church of All Hallows in Wakefield in the choir of St Nicholas, in the midst of the lowest aisle, when God please to call me to his mercy.

Here was a strategy for the afterlife: the body is to be buried in a position of humility, yet one which was accessible. The protection and intercession of the saints were available to all. The will, aside from enacting a strategy, also served to give the dead a voice, a matter of critical importance in matters of *realpolitik*. In the great late eleventh-century Bayeux Tapestry, executed at a time before the formal will became widespread, the matter of the death in 1066 of King Edward the Confessor and the handing on of the realm of England, altogether bigger property, is treated with some elaboration. Edward's death is shown at two levels. In the Palace of Westminster, the king is shown first on his deathbed in an upper chamber, speaking with his *familia*, including Queen Edith, who weeps at the foot of the bed. Edward appears to stretch forth his left hand to touch that of



The death and funeral of Edward the Confessor, from the Bayeux Tapestry, *c.*1080. Compare illustration on p. 79.



The good death of St Louis (d. 1270), from the *Hours of Queen Jeanne d'Evreux*, 1325–8.

his interlocutor by the fingers; in all probability this is Harold Godwinson, who is about to assume the crown, the gesture signifying Edward's transmission to him of the kingdom. The gesture represents the king's will. Below, Edward is laid out and, to the left, his cortège moves solemnly towards Westminster Abbey. In 1161 Edward was canonized, and his hagiographical literature composed at this time includes an account of a vision had by the old king near his death, foretelling the ills of the kingdom to follow and its eventual reunification in the hands of one of his successors. Death could bring about breaches of time and space, and moments of insight into the future not of the self, but of the dynasty.

The good death formed an important part of the posthumous mythology of the great Christian king; St Edward was one such, but a greater was Louis IX, King of France (d. 1270), who was canonized in 1297, the first and last major French royal saint. Louis died on crusade in Tunis, and his death, as related to us by his biographer Joinville, reflected the preoccupations of his life. According to one tradition he called his son Philippe to his side and gave him the necessary instructions for the performance of his duties, or *enseignements*, some-

what in the manner of medieval advice literature (Louis' letters to his daughters are similar):

> 'Finally, my very dear son, have Masses sung for my soul and prayers said for me throughout your kingdom; and give me a full and special share in all the good you do. My own dear child, I give you all the blessings a good father can give his son. May the blessed Trinity and all the saints keep and defend you from all evils; and may God grant you grace to do His will always . . . Amen.'
>
> When the good king had given these instructions to his son, the illness from which he suffered began to take stronger hold on him. He asked for the sacraments of Holy Church, and received them with a clear mind and in full possession of his faculties, as was evident from the fact that while the priests were anointing him and reciting the seven special psalms he repeated each verse after them in turn.

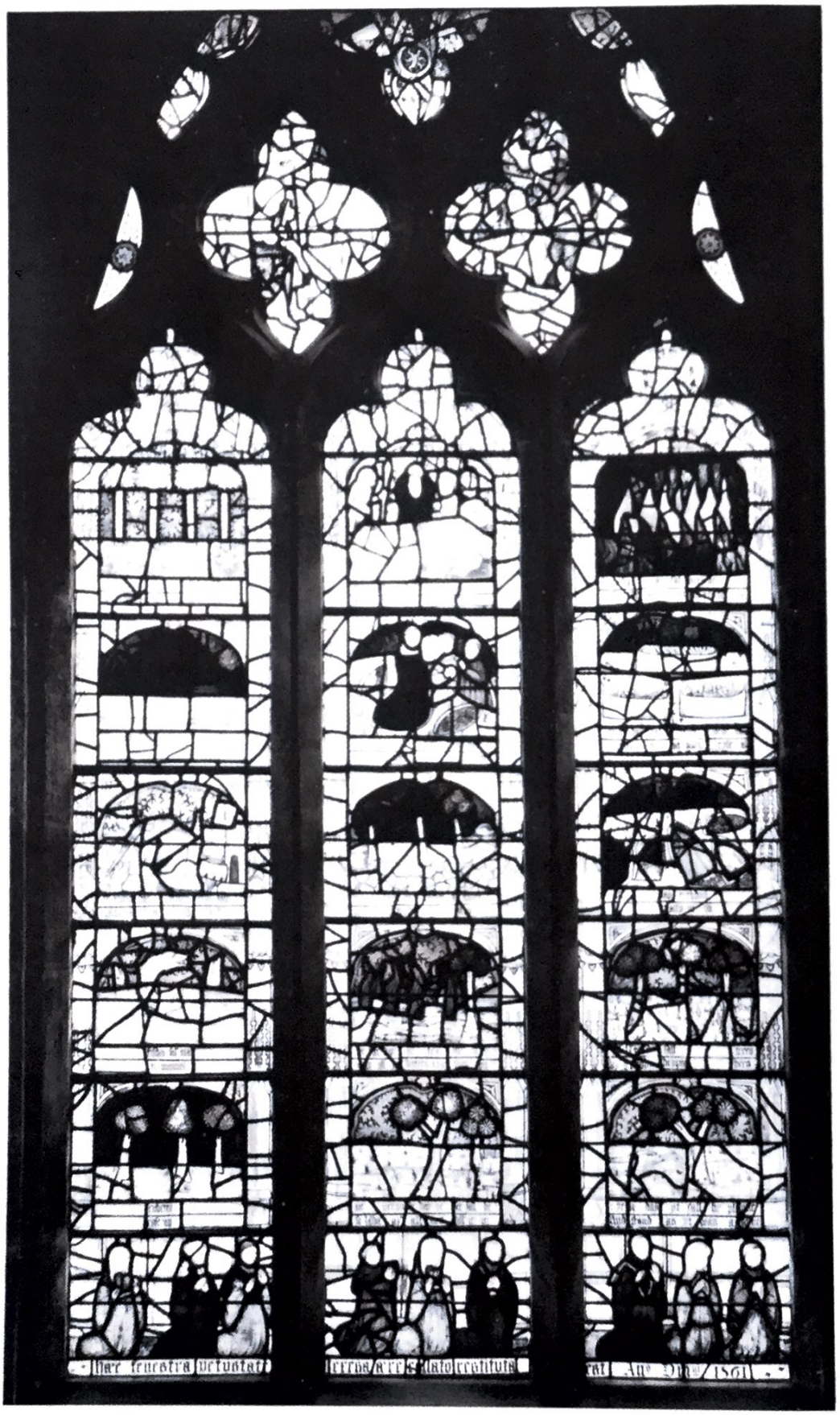
The king then had himself laid on ashes arranged on the floor in the form of a cross, and died. Implicit in this kind of ideal death – the 'tame' death identified by Philippe Ariès – are notions of peace, purity and reconciliation, which were frequently of monastic inspiration. The happy man died in bed in a domesticated and regulated fashion. Earlier, pagans had hoped for a quick (and presumably pain-free) death; Christians, as their wills often show, feared a quick death - a *mors improvisa* – because it robbed them of the opportunity to render themselves penitentially into a state of grace. Here, as we shall see later, was part of the threat posed by Death personified, namely his capacity to surprise. But late-medieval Christians in dying could aspire to strengthen the permanent bonds of solidarity between the dead and the living, and solidarity of this type was essentially an affair of kin and family.

But if the living could not always live in a state of absolute preparedness, treating each day as if it were their last, they could at least hope to die in such a state, Death permitting. Christianity is a religion of example. This meant above all that the dying, especially if they were laypeople, needed to understand the basis of sin, confession and penance. By the thirteenth century the western Latin Church had generated a complex and highly institutionalized culture of sin and penance, and in this period was endeavouring to spread knowledge of this system to the laity. At heart the system was legalistic in character, the system of tolerances or indulgences (relaxations of the penalties for sins committed) being juridical in its basis. This was a time when the doctrines of the afterlife were being formulated in terms appropriate to the quasi-scientific law of the medieval Church. Central to the definition of sin and punishment was the issue of the attitude in which a sin was committed: what defined the gravity of sin was the intention or will behind it. Involuntary sin was thus defined as venial, or pardonable; voluntary or wilful sin, as mortal. The distinction between involuntary and voluntary sin yielded a corresponding penitential structure. The graver of the two types of sin, mortal or voluntary sin, could be erased only in two stages:

first the sinner had to acknowledge guilt through confession, and second the sinner had to undergo a suitable punishment, which, having been received, yielded satisfaction. Confession and satisfaction thus effaced guilt, or *culpa*. Satisfaction further required the completion of penance, and this could go on if necessary after death, in Purgatory. It followed that it was sensible to acquire satisfaction before death in order to free the sinner from Purgatorial punishment, and this could be done, if necessary, on the death bed; the sinner, however, could choose, since the system was premised upon the idea of free will, on the voluntary character of sin and penance. In this stress on the voluntary character of sin lay an important element in the construction both of the idea of the sinner and, more importantly, of the individual sinner.

Naturally it followed from this that the process of confession and satisfaction should be personalized. The major document of this initiative was the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, canon 21 of which required auricular confession once a year on the part of laypeople to a priest, and the performance of penance on pain of excommunication and the deprivation of Christian burial and resurrection. Such massive sanctions lent growing weight to the importance of private, as opposed to communal, confession, and to its increasingly formalized character. They also, of course, transferred equally considerable authority to the Church, which already enjoyed the power of binding and loosing from sin. At work here, with the assistance of a formal instructive literature of penance, including confessional manuals, episcopal statutes and sermons, was the construction of a new psychology: that of sin and sinning. As the Church absorbed the intellectual procedures of the great schools of western Europe, so sins and their remedies became susceptible to classification and systematic description. Knowledge was power. In turn the laity had to acquire a basic knowledge of the Seven Deadly Sins, the Ten Commandments, the Seven Acts of Mercy and Seven Sacraments, and so on, just as, eventually, they had to have some practical ability to prognosticate through knowledge of the Four Last Things (Death, Judgement, Heaven and Hell). This new form of categorized knowledge system, frequently explicated by mnemonically clear numerical and diagrammatic structures in literature and images, is to be seen represented in much later-medieval parish church art, as for example in the stained-glass windows at All Saints' North Street, York, or in Franciscan-inspired images like those in the early fourteenth-century *Psalter of Robert de Lisle*. By the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries this type of literature was as capable of aestheticization as the will: it could become a genre. The sinner emerges as a distinct literary persona or psychological type in the writing of Langland, Chaucer and Gower. He was a type, namely one who was transformed by penance.

Like St Louis' advice to his son, and like the literature of sin and penance, the norms of death could be categorized and regulated. This did not have to occur



Wealthy York merchants supplied the early 15th-century window of the Fifteen Last Signs at All Saints', North Street. Based on the poem the *Pricke of Conscience*, the scenes show events in the last fifteen days before the Last Judgement.

with the assistance of the clergy; in fact, it could occur at home. In the later medieval period there was a flourishing literature of advice, typically courtly in nature, to be used in a domestic context, which regulated mundane behaviour and household practices. Literature of this type could have a serious ethical and political purpose, as in literature giving advice to princes of a type based on Aristotelian tradition. More often its basic tenet was that one should approach life with 'cunnynge', or practical wisdom. Such was the essence of the *Ars moriendi*, the how-to-do-it of death, a practical handbook for the ordinary (i.e. venial) sinner *in extremis*. One English text of the *Ars moriendi* is aimed in its own words at 'carnall and seculer men', though a clerical, perhaps Dominican, origin for the tradition of such texts seems highly probable. The early English publisher William Caxton made the link between the *Ars moriendi* and advice literature explicit. He translated a text from the French in the *Arte and crafte to knowe well to die* around 1490, including a list of texts concerning manners and accomplishments – how to converse, the use of correct table manners or playing chess. This association has led some commentators such as Philippe Ariès to link the late-medieval culture of death with a subtext of hedonism. But the *Ars moriendi* was critically concerned with the manner of death in this specific sense: that the character of one's death could be reasonably detached from the manner of one's life, and that self-improvement could, if necessary, be a matter of eleventh-hour reform. Actually for Ariès the issue of the *Ars moriendi* was more fundamental still: for him the 'tame death', the death of peaceful reconciliation, was supremely the death of the individual as opposed to the community. As John McManners has shrewdly pointed out, Ariès here dramatizes something more profound than the eschatology of the medieval individual, which may explain the extraordinary impact of French writing on the subject of death in the modern period. At heart Ariès is tackling (though without acknowledging the fact) the tension in modern, post-Revolutionary, French secular thought between the enlightened conscience and the tenets of Catholicism, which could result in the deathbed conversion. The drama here is thus also a modern one: between the individual conscience and the forces of unenlightened authority.

In any event, the *Ars moriendi* consisted of a layperson's version of forms of preliminal ritual developed by the medieval Church. In some respects, as a text of pastoral reassurance, it resembled the *Ordo visitandi* of the priest. In this sense its pattern of development resembled that of the Book of Hours, which was basically a layperson's equivalent to the texts used by the clergy in the public offices of the Church. It was an essentially late-medieval text, and is now preserved in over three hundred Latin and vernacular versions. The fact that it was eventually printed points to its widespread character in answering to a need. As a literary genre it developed in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, and is divided roughly into two textual types: the *Tractatus artis bene moriendi* and the

Ars moriendi itself. The latter was disseminated in the vernacular by block-book printing with illustrations. The *Tractatus* seems to have emerged at around the time of the Council of Constance, *c.*1414–18 which, like the landmark Lateran Council of 1215, stressed the importance of devout living amongst the laity. It seems to have followed from a section called *De arte moriendi* in the *Opusculum tripartitum* of Jean Gerson (d. 1429), the Chancellor of the University of Paris, a text which aimed at assisting the laity in the deaths of others, and not themselves.

The block-book version of the *Ars moriendi*, which is generally the most commonly illustrated text, consists of eleven woodcuts depicting a series of deathbed temptations of its central character, the dying man, *Moriens*. It is a form of bedside drama, which plays on the inescapability of death and also on the fragile but fundamental character of human choice – *Moriens* is in effect controlling the character of his own death, and so of his destiny. The most important thing is that he should die in a state of preparedness, that he should be 'shriven' (absolved) of his sins; to give someone 'short shrift' means to allow them little time for confession and satisfaction before death, to treat them curtly. He has to ponder the routes set out by the demons which cluster around and under his bed, or that prescribed by the holy presences of Christ, the Virgin Mary and the saints, before choosing the latter path and commending his soul to God, to the chagrin of the devils. In essence this is a restatement in rather direct form of a much older, and typically interiorized, struggle, that between the Virtues and Vices in Prudentius' *Psychomachia* in the old monastic culture. But here the struggle is objectified and rendered in simpler, more pastoral terms. Essential to both is the identification of the subject as a lone warrior facing an ordeal (and the *Artes moriendi* are a late survivor of this old judicial notion), rendered more telling in the case of *Moriens* by the isolation of death.

But the ordeal, like a catechism, is primarily one of interrogation. The ordinary sinner must contemplate a series of temptations against the theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity. The first two consist of temptations to unbelief and to despair. Not surprisingly, a focal image of the *Ars moriendi* is that of the model death of Christ, alone and suffering on the Cross. This is to be a central icon of contemplation in the vision of the dying, marking the idea of the imitation of Christ (*Imitatio Christi*), whose most famous contemporary exponent was Thomas à Kempis. A priest brought a cross for the contemplation of the dying in the *Ordo visitandi*. A third temptation is that to impatience. Illness, as a consequence of sin, is a form of Purgatory on earth, and the greater the sin the longer and graver the sickness; hence pride, which prevents contrition, also forms another temptation to the dying, and it is to the example of St Anthony as a model of suffering humility (like Job) that the dying should look. Models like this were already cited in the oldest Christian death prayer, the *Commendatio animae*, or Commendation of the Soul (based on Psalm 31:5). Finally there is avarice, the



The temptation to impatience (left) and the good death (right), from a late 15th-century *Ars moriendi*; in each case the demons are especially voluble.

storing-up of treasure on earth but not in Heaven. In some versions of the *Ars moriendi* this is accompanied by a series of interrogations of *Moriens*, some of which go back to St Anselm, and are again ultimately of much older monastic origin. The eleven illustrations of the standard *Ars moriendi* include, aside from the five temptations to unbelief, despair, impatience, pride and avarice, and five illustrations of the inspirations against them, a final picture of the good death.

The *Ars moriendi* represents a lay appropriation both of a body of knowledge and of a body of procedure; its pastoral character reminds us of those widespread efforts by the Church from the thirteenth century to educate laypeople in the basic tenets of sin, its character and remedies. In presenting death as a series of symbolic temptations, it serves, like many symbols, to simplify the reality of a messy process. At heart it acts as preventative medicine for the soul. Its nature as a procedural guide or codification might be explained, as Huizinga and Beatty suggest, by the tendency in late-medieval culture to formalize and regulate behaviour of all types. But the *Ars moriendi* relates much less successfully to what we might call late-medieval 'necromania'; it does not belong with the genres of the macabre with which it emerged historically, except in so far as it regulated anxiety. Rather, it confronts death with tried and tested forms of Christian consolation. Nevertheless, its fundamental premisses were clear, and related to newer issues in the culture of death and dying. For one thing, one of its central preoccu-

pations, the solitary character of death and the role of everyman, *Moriens*, in assuming choice and so responsibility, remind us that in this period there was a new attention to the notion of particular judgement, the judgement of the individual rather than mankind in general. Its assumption must be that death is followed briskly by at least one form of judgement; and this shifted importance to the critical stages of death itself, and to one's state immediately afterwards. It did not guarantee final salvation, which was a matter for the general Resurrection and Last Judgement at the end of time, but rather provisional salvation. In assuming a particularity of judgement it also implicitly favoured, but did not actually require, some experience of the Godhead immediately after death, a sensitive and confusing issue much debated in the early fourteenth century, to which I shall return in the last chapter. Finally, the assumption that the dead were in some sense judged at death closed that gap which had opened up between death and judgement with the postponement of the Christian promise of the Last Things.

Other images of the period relate to the complex, and never absolutely determinate, body of beliefs and procedures represented by the *Ars moriendi* and the culture of penance. A famous illustration to the Office of the Dead (PL. IV) by the so-called Maître de Rohan, in a Book of Hours illuminated for Yolande d'Anjou in the early fifteenth century, shows a moment of death and the *Commendatio animae*, the commendation of the spirit. A dying man, naked and laid out on an expensive-looking cloth which only enhances the pathetic character of his body, speaks to God in Latin written out on a long banderole: 'Into Thy hands O Lord I commend my spirit. You have redeemed me O Lord, thou God of Truth.' (From Psalm 31.) His soul issues up from his head (the soul was usually believed to exit via the mouth) and is rescued by St Michael from a demon. God, a mysterious and venerable figure with a cruciform nimbus, appearing to blend the qualities of the first two persons of the Trinity, replies in aristocratic French: 'Do penance for thy sins, and thou shalt be with me in the judgement.' Here *Moriens* is with God but is not judged finally; rather, like St Louis stretched out on ashes in readiness for death, he is a penitent, and his judgement is provisional. At one level the ideas here are very old: the notion of demons coming for the soul of the dying, as in the *Ars moriendi*, can be traced back to the Apocalypse of Paul. By the same token, the dying man in the Rohan Hours is as naked as when he was baptized, reminding us of that ritual reversal noted earlier in discussing rituals of death and purification. Here the sentiment is Pauline: 'Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death . . . so we also should walk in newness of life.' (Romans 6:3–4.)

Another feature of the *Ars moriendi*, the old theme of the ever-present threat of Satan, and of spiritual death, had figured for generations. We find it in such

contexts as representations of the Last Judgement, like that sculpted on the west facade of Bourges cathedral in the thirteenth century, where St Michael, guarding the saved, wards off demons attempting to tip the scales of judgement in their favour. Images of this type are in their essentials inseparable from the visualization of the Last Judgement in paintings, like that by the fifteenth-century Netherlandish master, Rogier van der Weyden, in the hospital of the Hôtel Dieu at Beaune, in Burgundy. The patron of the Hôtel, Chancellor Rolin, had called for thirty beds to be set in a ward continuous with a chapel at its end, in which Rogier's tremendous image was erected in order that it could be seen by those too infirm to go up to the altar. Here the world of bedside images in the *Ars moriendi* is given its most dramatic expression. In similar vein, Dürer's contemporary Grünewald depicted the temptations of St Anthony, together with one of the most grotesque Crucifixions in medieval art, on the Isenheim altarpiece in Colmar, which once adorned the chapel of a hospital. This is scarcely the comforting image of Christ on the Cross of the *Ordo visitandi.* More modestly, Bosch's sixteenth-century painting of the Death of a Miser (PL. 1) elaborates in single framed form the temptation to avarice. At the foot of the miser's bed, in a fashion common in medieval domestic settings, is his treasure chest: the miser sleeps with his money and not with Christ, and has stored up treasure on earth. But he can still redeem himself. Death enters through the door to his chamber, but the true route of salvation is indicated by way of the image of the Cross in a window above. Typically, the images of the good are smaller than the images of the bad. Choice is hard and the way of salvation is narrow: of the rich man who turns away from Christ in sorrow Jesus remarks, 'For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.' (Luke 16:25.)



The Last Judgement, by Rogier van der Weyden, Hôtel Dieu, Beaune. The imagery of Rogier's largest folding altarpiece, which was made in the 1450s and originally placed on an altar in the Salle des Pauvres at the Hôtel, conforms to most Last Judgement images. The patron and his wife are depicted on the exterior of the altarpiece.

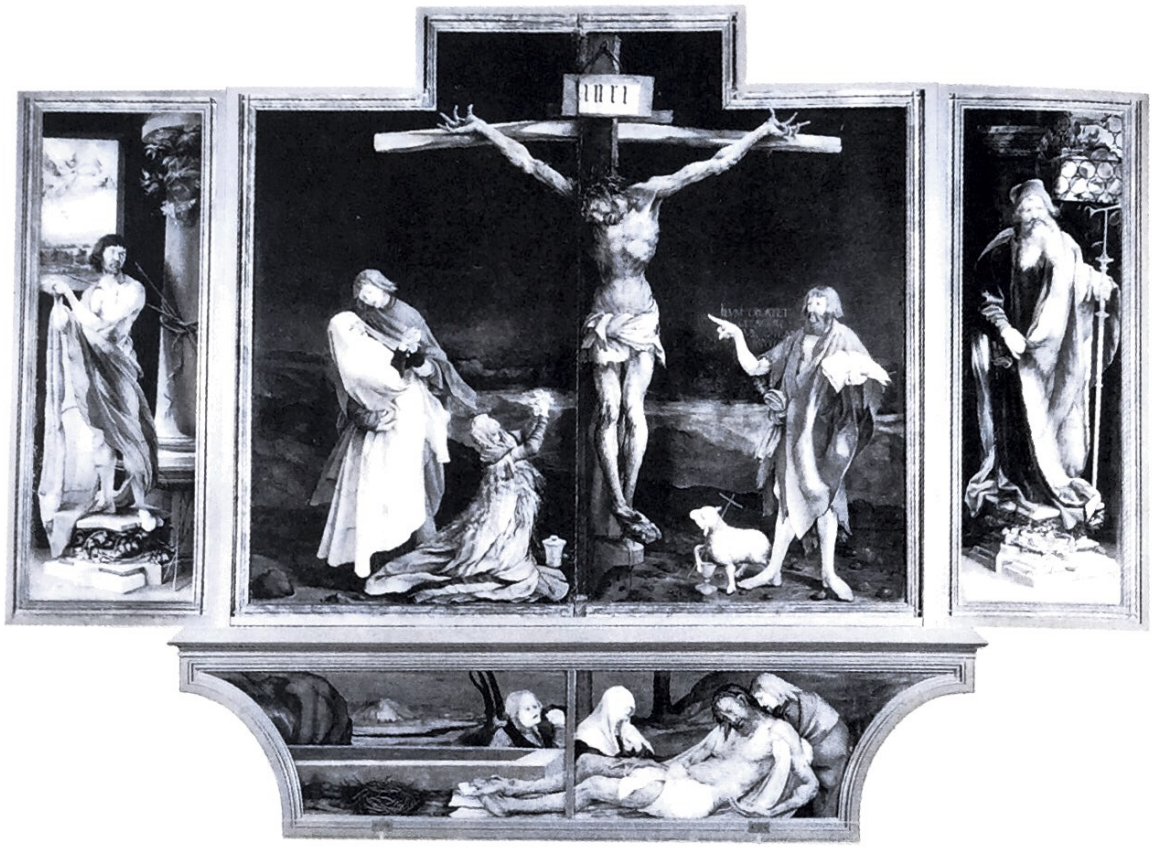


The Martyrdom of Saint Denis, by Jean Malouel and Henri Bellechose, *c.*1416. To the left the imprisoned saint is given the Last Sacrament by Christ in person, and is executed to the right; Christ crucified represents the model death.

From what has been said already, it is clear that the ideal Christian death was peaceful. But a violent death was not necessarily bad and could in itself represent an ideal: martyrdom for the faith. Saints who died peacefully were confessors; those who died violently in the service of the early Church, martyrs, the warriors and athletes of Christ. The early Church was fascinated by the phenomenon since the death of the proto-martyr, Stephen, whose profession of faith and death by stoning before St Paul is witnessed in Acts 7. Martyrdom was more than an ordinary mortal death; rather, it was in itself a sign of the transcendence of death, and of it the relics of the martyrs were proof. Frequently martyrdom was accompanied by signs and wonders. St Denis, the Apostle of Gaul and patron of France, had been executed by the Romans outside Paris at *Mons martyrius* (Montmartre); having been decapitated, he picked up his head and walked, to the astonishment of his persecutors. His body was the principal focus of the monastery at Saint-Denis whose crowd scenes were described earlier (p. 18). To triumph fully over death, it was necessary first to die. In keeping with this central Christian victory, the Church collected the stories of the suffering of its elect in

texts known as 'passionals', and 'martyrologies', which informed the writing of saints' lives, hagiography. One magnificent instance is the *Vie de Saint Denis* manuscript of 1317 in Paris, produced during the reign of Philippe IV of France at the instigation of Jean de Pontoise, Abbot of Saint-Denis, and finally presented to Philippe V. The manuscript's seventy-seven images are frequently cited for their marginal representations of daily life in Paris; as I noted earlier, one of the merits of sainthood was that it served to identify and emblematize a sense of place. But the bulk of the pictures relate a story of sorry sadism, the passion and death of Denis himself.

Narratives like this show that Christianity never entirely shed the ancient idea of the *cursus vitae*; but it spiritualized it and transformed it by the process of hagiographical writing, so that a saint's death stood as the summation, the final accomplishment, of his or her mortal life. In this process the transition of Christian cults from cults of martyrs (who died violently for the faith in its earliest period) to cults of confessors was important: the cult of the confessor was essentially a cult of a certain style of spiritual life and good works, especially miracles, whereas the cult of the martyr was centred principally upon a remarkable death. Each yielded a different type of personal history. Christ's example blended both. The religion had as its central sign the Cross, the means by which the universally good death had been obtained, and redemption won. Christianity is at once a religion of example and of history. It originated at a definite moment, and its commemorations addressed historical events. Of these the Crucifixion, the moment of redemption itself, was central. As with the lives of the saints, the story of Christ's Passion was expanded and dwelt on as a specific focus of devotional attention. Crucifixion scenes were probably the single most common in medieval art, together with images of the Virgin Mary. Canon Law eventually required the presence of this sign of expiation on the altar before the priest at Mass, the mystical commemoration of this sacrifice, and giant sculpted and painted crosses, or roods, stood at the centre of churches of all types as public objects of devotion. Images of this type evolved dramatically in the course of the Middle Ages. At first the Cross was a sign of triumph, but, with the rise of a new affective piety in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the Crucifixion became a barometer of changing attitudes to Christ's incarnation and suffering. By the thirteenth century the Gothic Crucifixion showed a dead Christ with nails through each hand, and one through both feet, hanging uncomfortably from the tree, being known as the *Christus patiens*. To either side stood growing numbers of witnesses in ever more distressed condition, Mary and John grieving and, in the tremendous Italian Golgothas of the type developed towards 1300 in Tuscany, a positively operatic array of onlookers. These witnesses were important, because their affective gestures and expressions of despair marked out a mode of response relevant to the audiences of such images. For this reason contempor-



The Crucifixion and Lamentation, by Matthias Grünewald. Painted *c.*1515 for the Antonite monastery and hospital at Isenheim (St Anthony is shown on the image's left-hand side), this gruesome tableau represents the outer of three possible arrangements of the folding altarpiece.

ary Latin Passion Plays like the Italian *Planctus Mariae* contain exact stage instructions for gestures and speech. This threnodic mode of response was related to the growing importance of identifying imaginatively with the facts of Christ's bodily suffering, of which St Francis' reception of the stigmata on his hands, feet and side in 1224 was the most well-known example at the time. By such imaginative means, Christ's suffering was universalized and repeated. As with the *Ars moriendi*, texts and images were prescribing behaviour; their character was thus normative.

Not surprisingly, representations of the Crucifixion were a matter of debate and sensitivity. One commentator of the period, Bishop Lucas of Tuy, objected to the presence of Crucifixions with only three (rather than the older four) nails as being heretical. But such three-nail representations had the advantage of looking more excruciating (a word itself derived from the Latin for 'cross'). And when, in the early 1300s, a German plague or 'fork' Cross (*Gabelkreuz*) with Y-shaped arms was installed in a chapel in London, the image, which excited much popular devotion, had to be taken away by night and concealed. In both cases the artists who made the images, and not their patrons, were blamed.

Symbols had to be just right. In any event, all these examples point to one important fact about late-medieval Christian devotion, which will be of relevance to the culture of medieval death: many of its preoccupations were with the spiritual significance and representation of the body, whether divine or not. This bodily, or somatic, concern, is clearly related to the vividness and extremes of images like the fourteenth-century Röttgen *Pietà*, or Grünewald's horrendous Crucifixion on the Isenheim altarpiece.

The Bad Death

Christ died as a criminal, but he died well, promising the presence with him in Paradise of the good thief crucified with him, and commending his own soul to God. The bad death, and especially the violent death, was of course inherently more entertaining than the Christian notion of the 'tame' death, with which it contrasted. The Middle Ages inherited from the ancient world, and especially from the Romans, another view of death, which saw in it a form of justice without regard to supernatural remedy. In this sense death was not normative, but exemplary in the negative sense: it was an example of what not to do, and therefore could establish principles for action. Something of this can be judged from the account of the death of the Emperor Caligula in Suetonius' first-century biographical *Lives of the Caesars*, with its characteristically Roman blend of hedonism and violence:

> On 24th January, then, just past midday, Gaius [Caligula], seated in the theatre, could not make up his mind whether to adjourn for lunch; he still felt a little queasy after too heavy a banquet on the previous night . . . Two different versions of what followed are current. Some say that Chaerea came up behind Gaius as he stood talking to the boys and, with a cry of 'Take this!', gave him a deep sword-wound in the neck, whereupon Cornelius Sabinus, the other colonel, stabbed him in the breast. The other version makes Sabinus tell certain centurions implicated in the plot to clear away the crowd and then ask Gaius for the day's watchword. He is said to have replied 'Jupiter', whereupon Chaerea, from his rear, yelled 'So be it!' and split his jawbone as he turned his head. Gaius lay writhing on the ground. 'I am still alive!' he shouted; but word went round: 'Strike again!', and he succumbed to thirty further wounds, including sword-thrusts through the genitals.

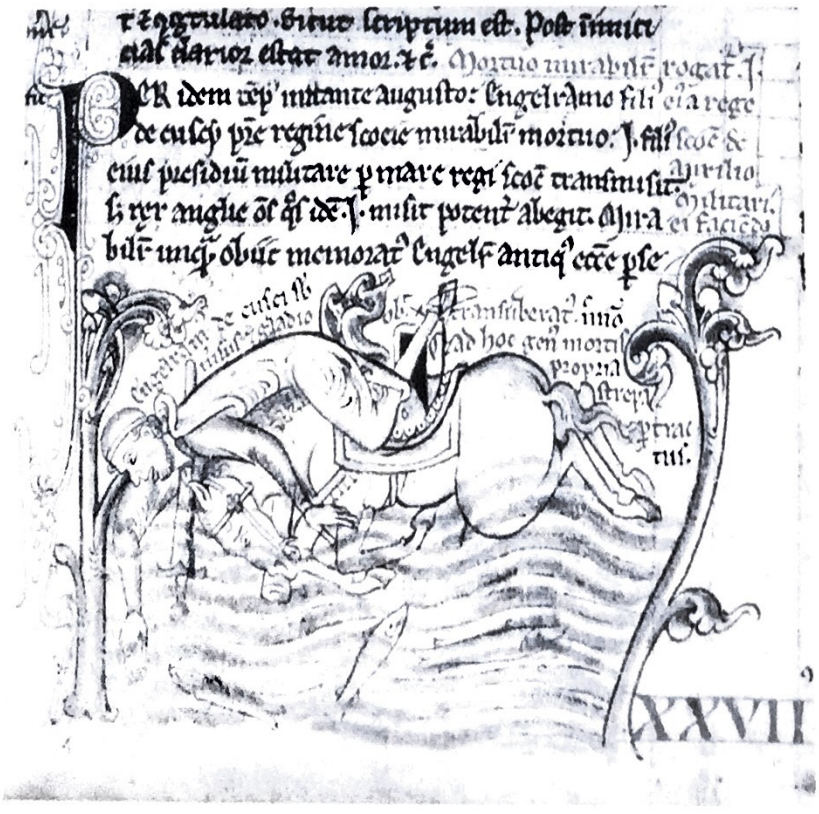
The transition from this cynical and worldly outlook to the construction of a specifically Christian sense of the character of men's lives is marked, of course, by the historical and spiritual vision of Eusebius, Augustine and Orosius. This vision, though strongly anti-pagan in intent, recalls much of the rhetorical and ethical outlook of Roman moralists who viewed the activity of the historian as that of a censor. Antique form now took on Christian content; what concerned Augustine (in his *City of God*) and the many philosophers who followed him in the sphere of political thought, like John of Salisbury writing in the twelfth

century (e.g. the *Policraticus*), was the fundamentally corrupt nature of men's hearts. Rulership was now related to Christian notions of justice: 'We Christians call rulers happy if they rule with justice,' said Augustine. If justice was ignored, tyranny followed; and the manner of a tyrant's death was a sign of the character of his rule.

Medieval monasticism inherited this viewpoint and generalized it. The great thirteenth-century English chronicler monk Matthew Paris, writing at St Albans Abbey, had a wicked eye for moralizing narratives of death. Of that of Enguerrand de Coucy 1244 Matthew writes in his *Chronica Majora*:

> Enguerrand, the old persecutor of the Church . . . died in a remarkable way; for he died, as it were, by a double death. Whilst living, he was a zealous builder up in material matters, but in spiritual matters a sad dissipator. One day, when travelling, he had occasion to cross a certain ford, when his horse's foot stumbled over some obstacle, and he fell backwards into deep water, into which he was unfortunately dragged by his stirrups; as he fell headlong, his sword escaped from the sheath and pierced his body, and thus drowned and pierced by his sword, he departed this life to reap the fruit of his ways.

Matthew's tangy rhetoric recalls Sallust or Cicero, but it points to ordinary concerns of the day, specifically the relationship between temporal and spiritual power that had erupted so viciously in the life of Thomas of Canterbury a generation earlier. His illustration of Enguerrand's death reminds us of the Fall of Pride. Matthew, in keeping with his contemporaries, saw unjust rule or behaviour as a form of disturbance of the natural order. In the ancient world the death of



The historian as moral censor: Matthew Paris of St Albans represents the death of Enguerrand de Coucy (1244) in his mid-13th-century *Chronica Majora*.



Mass burial formed the aftermath of the battle of Wisby, Sweden, 1361.

the mighty was often preceded by omens, like the comet which appeared before the death of the Emperor Claudius. Exactly this inheritance is reflected in the Bayeux Tapestry's account of the fall of King Harold. As we have seen, the tapestry includes one elaborate scene, that of the death of King Edward, which in representing the transmission of the kingdom to Harold at Edward's behest at least established that idea of continuity important to moments of liminality and passage. Edward is of course thus subtly implicated in Harold's assumption of the crown, notwithstanding Harold's oath to William the Conqueror that he would renounce his claim to the succession. Harold having been crowned and thus having committed perjury, the following scenes show the appearance of Halley's comet in 1066 and its warning to Harold; the ill omen provokes in Harold the ghostly vision of the ships which will bring William to England to conquer it. Harold's breach of the feudal order thus results in a portent of nature, and Harold's subsequent bloody death at Hastings by blinding is seen as a form of censorship and moral retribution (physical blindness equating with moral blindness); it is an exemplary death in the negative sense, because it restores order.

This kind of narrative, drawing on epic and biblical ideas, was popular in high circles in the Middle Ages; the fall of the bad pagan rulers, an Augustinian theme,

was illustrated in images in the palaces of Charlemagne, like that at Ingelheim, and the thirteenth-century English kings had scenes of the fall of Old Testament tyrants depicted in the Palace of Westminster. The theme became something like a genre, as in Boccaccio's fourteenth-century *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium*, Chaucer's *Monks' Tale* and Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*, all accounts of the great tragically brought low by their failings. But the violent death was not necessarily a matter of moral deflation. Facing death is at least in part about the virtue of courage, and both Aristotle (*Ethics*) and Aquinas (*Summa Theologiae*) thought that courage was shown above all in battle. The noblest deaths in the Christian-chivalric world-view, as in the *Song of Roland* or the great Arthurian cycle, were in battle. It became possible to construe biblical history as a history of warfare, as in the stories about Abraham, Joshua and David in the great mid-thirteenth-century French Morgan Bible Picture Book, which include some of the most telling scenes of gratuitous violence in medieval art, worthy of Joinville's accounts of the horrors of the Crusade. In these cases the history of the violent death is at one level a history of virtue; but it is also the history of a certain type of masculinity, and the history of a certain view of power. Death can exemplify both good power and bad power and, as we shall see shortly, can exhibit contested views of power in relation to the treatment of the body.

Reinstalling the Dead: Mass and Office

The bad death by its nature contravened the norms of preparedness and virtue that marked the ideal Christian rite of separation. Rites of reinstallation customarily follow rites of separation; and in the case of death, this required the reinstallation of both the living and the dead, a state which was attained through ritual. The role and importance of ritual is always problematical, since rituals can be defined in various ways as enacted symbolic representations understandable in psychological, social and historical senses. Rituals serve to communicate and to affirm beliefs, and because it is central to ritual that it tends to assume formal and invariant shape, rituals also act to stabilize moments of crisis, like death. But despite the fact that rituals are symbolic representations, and as such need to be both simple and correct in their content and performance, they nevertheless relate the individual to the social group, and to belief systems, in ways that are disputed. One school of thought, descending from Emile Durkheim, a founder of sociology, suggests that rituals are a form of social control: they express and reinforce ideas of group coherence. Individual responses to traumas like death are thus conditioned and articulated by rituals that express pre-existing social arrangements and expectations. The role of religious belief and symbolism in such arrangements is thus annexed, like the individual, to broader ideas of social order. The preponderance of such ideas in the study of 'deathways' has led

inevitably to a marginalizing, or even to a retreat, of religion, whereby religion itself is understood merely as the outcome of social expectations, and not as a primary motivation of such expectations. This problem – perhaps the hardest and deepest with which the cultural historian has to deal in considering the relationship of society, the individual and belief – is for our present purposes insurmountable. Religion is not separable from the social units that subscribe to it, and Christianity's great strength was that it could assimilate and rearticulate ideas – attitudes to the 'impure' corpse, for example – of pre-Christian pagan origin, which were both religious and social. Neither religion nor society are pure categories in themselves; they intersect in a complex order of symbolism, and that symbolic order is expressed in ritual.

The medieval symbolic order of death emerges most clearly in ritual forms and in tombs. In assessing rituals we have also to recall that the historian or archaeologist has to make a rigorous distinction between what can, and cannot, be excavated: generally in considering ritual we are considering not belief as such but behaviour; not what people thought but what they did. In suggesting that highly organized rituals were a means of negotiating the trauma of the living, and of reinstalling both the living and the dead, we must recall the artificiality of ritual. This is perhaps especially apparent in two areas, emotion and gender. There is little agreement as to whether the powerful emotions usually provoked by death helped to condition ritual or whether they were conditioned by it. Because thoughts, or *mentalités*, are (at least to my mind) beyond reconstruction, all we can ponder is the formulaic or conventional character of emotion. Grieving was certainly formalized in the Middle Ages. The Bible presented notable examples of male mourning, as in David's grief, covering his face, at the news of the death of Absalom (2 Samuel 18); but grief did not become a king. Joinville in his biography of St Louis notes that the king was prostrate with grief on hearing of the death of his mother, the formidable Blanche of Castile; but he also tells us that a certain seneschal of the king reproached him for too obvious a display of emotion before his subjects. The contemporary visual culture of French royal tombs, which we shall consider later, indicates this notion of decorum: the great thirteenth-century tombs of kings and queens at Saint-Denis erected during Louis' reign are quite devoid of any emotional content; images of 'weepers' carved on tomb-chests of French royal burials were to be found instead at Cistercian Royaumont amongst the burials of the lesser members of the French royal family, and so distanced from the sites of power.

In grieving, gender divisions are equally notable; usually in medieval art the codification of grief is the special preserve of women. This had long been the case, in keeping with practices of hiring professional female mourners in the ancient Mediterranean world. St John Chrysostom complained of Christians who 'hired women, pagans, as mourners to make the mourning more intense, to fan



Formalized gestures of despair, in this case male, accompany the 13th-century Castilian sarcophagus of Don Sancho Saiz de Carillo.

the fires of grief, ignoring the words of St Paul'. Here mourning, the *planctus*, was unacceptable because it was related to pre-Christian notions of placating and honouring the dead. It may be partly for this reason that later there was some inhibition (primarily monastic and clerical) about the presence of women at funeral rituals, and eventually mourning rituals were private. Women usually helped to prepare the corpse for burial. So-called 'gestures of despair' were a feminine attribute, and it is usually women who are seen as mourners on Spanish medieval tombs, or in Italian images of the Passion of Christ: the Virgin Mary fainting at the Cross, and Mary Magdalen tearing her hair, were especially notable exemplars of feminine behaviour in grief, rather different from the highly regulated norms of behaviour usually prescribed for women in advice literature. This illustrates the way that mourners were suspended from social norms for the duration of grieving. The occasion of death was one appropriate to a display of affective relations, whether brought about by the bonds of marriage or kin.

But this sense of occasion was most developed in the highly symbolic rituals of the Church. Earlier, I mentioned the domination of formal death rituals by 'technocrats of death', namely the clergy. After the good death, which required above all that Everyman had been confessed, given communion and anointed, the Church customarily possessed two basic types of ritual which speeded the process of reinstallation and which were primarily the preserve of the clergy: the Office and Mass. Van Gennep notes that rites of incorporation of this type are

much more fully developed in funerals than are the rites of separation and transition which precede them. As we have seen, the basic structure of medieval funeral rituals went back to the Roman *Ordo defunctorum*. The *Ordo defunctorum*, which provides one basis for the Office of the Dead, is characteristically well organized. It prescribes the performance of a service for the dead after the administration of the *viaticum*. Particularly important is the reading of the Gospel account of Christ's Passion at the deathbed; this sowed the seeds of the imaginative identification between the death of the Christian person and Christ's own suffering so central to medieval culture: this we witness in the *Ars moriendi* and in the content of van der Weyden's hospital altarpiece at Beaune. The *Ordo* advocated prayer without intermission for the dead. It retold the parable of Dives and Lazarus in Luke 16, with its comforting (and central) image of the dead pauper Lazarus in Abraham's Bosom, and Dives the rich man far off in Hell. The *Ordo* thus disclosed the basically bipartite (Heaven–Hell) vision of the afterlife which prevailed until the advent of Purgatory as a place as well as a state. Readings from the Book of Job, a central text on man's alienation in suffering from God, formed an important element. Psalmody was also vital to the *Ordo*. The Psalms, which in contrast to Job are essentially cheerful texts, formed the basis of the public offices of the Church. Psalms 22, 42 and 116–18 were especially important to early funerary rites and remained so.

Typically the mature later-medieval Office of the Dead served as the main funeral service and was performed before the Mass. The Office was customarily enacted in the chancel or choir of a church with the corpse in a coffin with hearse and drapes: the laity would usually not enter this space but could in theory follow the service in a Book of Hours or Primer. In churches of all types the Office consisted of a routine of sung and said worship based heavily upon the Psalter and divided into liturgical Hours. These texts were found in a Liturgical book called the Breviary, and it was from the Breviary and certain other texts that the Book of Hours, essentially a lay prayer book with strong emphasis on worship of the Virgin Mary, emerged. Books of Hours preserve the same types of rites as Breviaries, including the Office of the Dead. For this reason they demonstrate the same propagation of ideas from the clerical elite to the laity as the *Ars moriendi*. The Office was, of course, also to be found in many Psalters of the period.

As preserved and illustrated in most Books of Hours, among the richest source of illustrations of death, the Office of the Dead comprised three of the liturgical hours: Vespers, Matins and Lauds. In medieval wills stipulating its recitation, it is usually referred to by the opening words for Vespers and Matins: *Placebo* and *Dirige*. It is from the solemn antiphon of the first nocturn of the Office for Matins, *Dirige, Domine, Deus Meus, in conspectu tuo vitam meam*, that we derive the word 'dirge'. The Office of the Dead draws upon the type of imagery we saw

included in the *Ordo defunctorum*. That of Vespers typically draws upon the Psalms; that of Matins cites the book of Job extensively; and at Lauds are performed the last Psalms of praise, ending with the great *De profundis*, Psalm 129: 'Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord.' Representations accompanying the Office of the Dead in Books of Hours fall into distinct categories, not all of which are explicable by the tastes of patrons: such manuscripts were frequently mass-produced. One type of illustration could concern the deathbed and its attendant rituals, such as the administration of the *viaticum* at the Last Rites, and the drama of salvation enacted in the chamber. The solemn nobility of the church service which followed may explain why the Office of the Dead is the one office most usually accompanied by images of a liturgical type. Some of these, though rare ones, explicitly depict the beneficial effects of Mass for souls in Purgatory. Other subjects could include the Last Judgement, events from the story of Job as related in the Office itself, the Raising of Lazarus, images of Death, or the Three Living and the Three Dead. The Office of the Dead frequently stands as an inventory of late-medieval images of the macabre, to which I will be returning later in this book.

The performance of Mass as a votive offering was, as we have seen, directly related to the benefit of souls in Purgatory (PL. III), but it also carried with it the notion of rest, in allusion to the dead which sleep in Christ (I Corinthians 15:18); the Mass thus ensured *requies* in the *refrigerium*. The funeral Requiem Mass which developed in the Middle Ages especially from the Carolingian period, was usually performed either immediately after the Office (Masses and Offices tend to overlap or even clash in medieval liturgy) or first thing the next day. Mass could be either a communal or a private affair, but it conferred benefits upon both the living and the dead. It was of course possible to perform Masses for the dead on occasions other than funerals: thus a *Gregorian*, named after Pope Gregory the Great (d. 604), is a series of thirty Masses for the dead, celebrated for a month. By the later Middle Ages patrons could ask in their wills for a thousand funeral Masses, and these could, in lavish cases, be said or sung concurrently in a church with many altars. In the Middle Ages the actual celebration of Mass was largely a clerical concern. The Mass could accompany the Office, but it had a slightly different function, and medieval illustrations of the two services are usually careful to distinguish between the two, typically by including a priest celebrating at an altar in illustrations of the Mass, accompanied by clerks or monks in black. The use of black for funeral occasions in the Latin West appears to be old (indeed anthropologically speaking it is common), but it was also culturally relative; the Eastern Greek Church employed white at such rituals, black or white standing at the poles of the colour spectrum. In the early twelfth-century debate between St Bernard of Clairvaux of the Cistercians (who wore white) and Peter the Venerable, a Cluniac (at Cluny the monks wore black), on which colour

was appropriate for the monastic life, Peter said that only black could express the humble and penitential character of monasticism, and noted that it was anyway used for funerals in Spain. Black is the colour of unconsciousness.

Burial and the Politics of the Body

After the celebration of Mass, absolution was performed by blessing and purifying the body with incense and holy water. The body was then buried in the appointed place. Illustrations to the Office of the Dead introduce us to the medieval graveyard (PL. V). In reading these images we should recall that the dead were usually laid out in a shroud for burial (like Edward the Confessor in the Bayeux Tapestry), though from the thirteenth century it was becoming common to transport, if not to bury, the corpse in a wooden coffin to the singing of the Penitential Psalms (nos 6, 31, 37, 50, 101, 129, 142). Funerals were thus in part processional activities. The development of the coffin for use in the pre-burial procession is for Ariès 'a major cultural event', since it was restricted principally to northern Europe, and attested to a change in attitudes to the corpse less apparent in the south, where the old habit of exposing the body at the funeral survived. Made-to-measure coffining was done in the deceased's house, whereas the ready-to-wear variety, for paupers, was rented. The graveside events amounted to a final laying-out. Corpses were manipulable and divisible for essentially practical reasons: graveyards were sites of recycling, and their earth and worms participated in a sacred ecology. For this reason the bones and skulls that litter medieval graveyard scenes are not signs of macabre neglect; they simply reflected the fact that coffins were used for transport and not burial. Once a body had been buried and had decomposed to the point of defleshing, it was normal to exhume it and to store the bones in a charnel (from the Latin *carnus*, 'flesh', 'carrion') house. One of the most famous examples of a medieval *charnier*, or *aître*, was the Cemetery of the Innocents at Paris, which consisted of ossuaries, or bone-storage 'units'. The existence of a specific grave was less at issue than burial in consecrated ground: and this in turn reveals general cultural issues about territory and social exclusiveness.

In law, burial – and so the person – was defined in terms of a hierarchical view of the body; so burial was where the head of the body, physically and metaphorically, was retained. The dead were normally buried in their parish of birth. But burial by its nature expressed, too, notions of loyalty and affection of a spiritual or institutional kind which could run against the ties of birthplace. Neither kings nor popes had fixed burial places, though exceptions to this arose with the establishment by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries of dynastic mausolea. There were in addition other pressures, such as the desirability of being buried in close proximity to a saint. Though the *Decretum of Gratian*, a compen-

dium of Canon Law, had determined that burial was a spiritual affair not subject to financial transaction, the giving of 'gifts' became normal; the ordinary dead were bound as a rule to pay mortuary fees to the parish of birth, though these could be diverted to places of burial elsewhere. Since burial was a form of business this could, as we shall see, give rise to antagonism. To stem disputes over rights to a body or to mortuary fees, a papal Bull of 1303 assigned one quarter of the mortuary fee to the parish of birth.

Burial, like the death and rituals that preceded it, was still a sacral matter. This had spiritual and social dimensions. The necessity of proper burial, and the concern of the dead for it, is attested by accounts of apparitions of the dead from the time of Bede. Belief in the value of burial in consecrated ground explains the growing concern amongst the laity for spiritual provision. Burial in a graveyard usually meant burial in association with a parish church, and parishes had themselves grown in north-western Europe in tandem with the rise of minster churches and manorial establishments founded by the laity. Even ordinary parochial burial thus exemplified quite basic relations of territory, and so power, in medieval society. These grew more complex as burial within churches became increasingly common. The logic of the general Resurrection and Last Judgement was still essentially communal. The great thirteenth-century Roman liturgist Durandus, Bishop of Mende, stated in his *Rationale* that the dead were to be buried with their heads to the west and feet to the east so that all, regardless of station, were pointing in the right direction at the Last Things. But in reality the location of the dead either inside or outside mapped the order of the social elite as, in effect, a supernatural elite.

The graveyard was, no less fundamentally, the site of social taboos. The role of the priest in marking the burial place in the churchyard with a cross, breaking the ground and performing the final rites was central. The corpse, which had to be of a baptized Christian, was to be ritually cleansed and covered in incense, ivy and laurel. Women did not participate in the carrying of the funeral bier. The graveyard had to be consecrated by a bishop, and required reconsecration in the event of pollution by the spilling of blood or semen. A thirteenth-century council at Rouen forbade dancing in churchyards doubtless, in part, to control the hormonal excesses of village youth. Later, the cemetery of the Innocents at Paris, famous for its Dance of Death image, was also a favourite haunt of prostitutes. Nor could these spaces witness the burial of the spiritually and socially marginalized: the unbaptized, heretics, lepers, Jews and suicides, were all proscribed. So were excommunicants. For these other cemeteries existed. Unbaptized infants, consigned spiritually to Limbo, were pathetically buried in the circuit of the cemetery (to avoid this, midwives could baptize, one singular instance of the administration of the sacraments by women). So Limbo, a periphery of Hell, found its topographical equivalent on earth. Exhumation rewarded heresy: the

bones of William Wyclif (d. 1384) were disinterred in 1428 and cast into a nearby stream.

All these groups were in a sense socially and spiritually dead. The prejudices of life were extended into death; and the character of death reached into the life of the fringes. Heretics, and lepers especially, were treated as objects of spiritual contagion. Thirteenth-century France saw the development of a rite of separation for lepers which mirrored the separation rites of the dead: those smitten were parted from society and led, corpse-like, from the church to the chanting of the seven Penitential Psalms. They were required to stand in an open grave while the leper ritual was recited by a priest, and to be literally humiliated by having spadefuls of earth chucked over their heads. Jews were similarly ostracized in the increasingly intolerant period from the twelfth century. The gates of Jewish urban ghettos were locked at night to prevent the Jews from wandering amongst the sleeping faithful, and they had their own cemeteries. Of these practices, often defined by the clerical elite, R. I. Moore has noted: 'This was an age of classification, and it was in the eleventh century that cemeteries began to imitate the precise and sharp distinctions which were then rapidly and harshly being established among the living.'

Classification of this type also structured the nature of burial and its attendant sense of display, and we shall return to this important area of differentiation in considering death and representation. In doing so we will see that a fundamental prerequisite for the development of the medieval tomb was the strategy of burial within church rather than outside, which by the thirteenth century was becoming more common for privileged laity. The process whereby wealthy or aristocractic laity were buried within had begun with cathedral and monastic churches, which benefited materially from the possession of an influential corpse. Burial was in effect tied up with various forms of endowment. As a result – and ecclesiastical legislation proves as much – an important and competitive economy grew up around bodies, extending that which had previously grown up around the relics of saints. This sat uneasily with the standard forms of prohibition against burial in church which were repeated throughout the Middle Ages precisely because the demand for it was so widespread. Papal privileges permitted religious orders to accept the bodies of the laity within the monastery: the Benedictines were the first beneficiaries of this privilege, but with the development of monasticism other orders, notably the Cistercians, followed by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. By the fourteenth century Cistercian monasteries like that at Waldassen in Bohemia were fetching corpses from miles around for burial in their cemeteries. By then the threat of the Cistercians was paling in comparison with the hold established over the devotional life of the laity in northern Europe by the Mendicant orders, the Dominicans and Franciscans. The Dominican General Chapter of 1250 in London decided that their churches should not be used for

burial, but the restriction was short-lived: by the fourteenth century, as *Piers Plowman* relates, the friars had become notoriously greedy in their pursuit of the bodies of the new urban elites. Alvarus Pelagius remarked in his *De Planctu Ecclesiae* that there were men

> who having died unto the world, have literally come back to bury the dead of this world: and such men, lying spiritually dead to their sins, bury others who are dead in the body . . . that they may feed upon their corpses as wolves and dogs feed upon the carrion of beasts; many have buried themselves in Hell for the sake of lucrative sepulchres.

By this Alvarus was alluding to the peculiar status of those in religious orders, who were in effect socially dead; as St Jerome said: 'The monk does not have the function of a teacher but rather of a mourner.' Monks could not hold private property and, according to one English medieval lawyer, could not inherit it. Reception of a monk into a monastery required his closure from the world for three days (as in death), before his resuscitation into the new life. Monks were usually buried in the monastic cemetery, while their superiors, the abbots, rested in chapter houses and, later, in the bodies of monastic churches, frequently in tombs vying in splendour with those of bishops. The spiritual power of monks lay in their separation from the world, their exile, enclosure and denial of worldliness, and in their position on the threshold between life and death. Their 'institutionalized marginality' was the source of their immense authority. The power of the friars lay, in contrast, in their entry into the world, and especially into the royal and aristocratic households as spiritual advisors and confessors: the development of late-medieval penitential piety owed much to Mendicant inspiration.

ROYAL BURIAL AND THE BODY POLITIC

In the thirteenth century, the competition for bodies between the older monastic and the newer Mendicant orders manifested itself especially in one new arena: possession of the body politic in as far as it was incorporated in the person of the king. This was a potential source of strain, since it brought into antagonism old tribal loyalties of a communal type and the interests of personal salvation. In France, the Benedictine Abbey of Saint-Denis had attempted, since the time of Abbot Suger, to reinforce its privilege as the traditional burial place of the French sovereigns. This practice at Saint-Denis had been noted by Gregory of Tours in the sixth century. For Saint-Denis, this was a matter of institutional prerogative, one compatible with the ideology of the oldest monastic order. But with the rise to favour of the Cistercians as protectors of royal families in Castile, England and France, a tension arose between the demands of lay burial and the

Right Royal effigies at Saint-Denis, Paris, from left to right: Philippe II (d. 1322), Jeanne d'Evreux (d. 1371 – compare illustration on p. 35) and Charles IV (d. 1328).

tenets of the order. In 1228 St Louis and his mother had founded the Cistercian monastery of Royaumont near Paris, and it was there that members of the Capetian royal house – though not the sovereigns – began to be buried. By the middle of the century Saint-Denis was forced to reply to this new and widespread trait by reviving its privileged past through the erection of restrospective tombs of the Carolingian ancestors of the royal house, buried beneath the abbey church. Royaumont, however, was in a quandary, and it is a sign of the importance of the possession of aristocratic lay bodies that in 1263 the abbot was instructed to return the church's ornaments to the simplicity required by the Cistercian Order, excepting the royal burials (*sepulchris regalibus*) in the church. This was only more



or less in line with Cistercian legislation of 1240 which stated, 'Let none be buried in our greater churches but kings, queens and bishops.' We know from the surviving parts of these tombs of the French royal family, and the children especially, that these tombs were gaily adorned and coloured, answering to the tastes of the laity.

The question was especially important in the case of those dynasties which possessed, or came to possess, royal saints. The emergence of a royal mausoleum at Benedictine Westminster in the late thirteenth century took place notwithstanding exactly the same competitive environment as that in France; in England, the role of Westminster's royal saint, Edward the Confessor, became especially important in virtue of that quality of sainthood we noted earlier (p.21), namely its capacity to offer a focus for local and national loyalties. This served to give Westminster an eminence not enjoyed by other royal Cistercian foundations. Burial could focus upon these new, saint-centred, loyalties in a period when sainted kingship offered a paradigm of Christian rule. Joinville noted of St Louis, canonized in 1297, that

> . . . as the scribe who, when producing a manuscript, illuminates it with gold and azure, so did our king illuminate his realm with the many fine abbeys he built there, the great number of hospitals, and the houses for Predicants, Franciscans, and other religious orders . . . On the day after the feast of St Bartholomew the Apostle in the year of our Lord 1270, the good king passed out of this world. His bones were put in a casket and taken to France, where they were laid to rest at Saint-Denis, the place he had chosen for his burial. At this tomb in which he was buried God has since then performed many fine miracles in his honour, and by his merit.

Royal sainthood declined as an institution from then on. The great royal burial houses of Europe were the last manifestations of that grouping of the very special dead that had begun a millenium earlier. But as from the thirteenth century royal government became increasingly identified with specific locations – London and Paris, for example – the royal mausoleum took on increasing importance within the framework of the state as a sign of that new centralization. The burial of a king was an act of state, a means by which the continuity of power could be expressed and assured symbolically; burial was thus inextricably linked to coronation as a rite of passage, since it was a guarantee of legitimacy.

The death of a monarch was a means of disclosing and enforcing forms of power. This had implications for the way kings were represented in death, as signs of order and hierarchy. Royal burial rituals, as public events, incorporated moral and social value systems; and they had also to observe constitutional conventions. Ralph Giesey's remarkable study of French royal burial ritual demonstrates the delicacy of these systems. When, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, a king died, an elaborate series of rituals was developed to guarantee the transference of power, and to cancel the inevitable anxieties which arose at such

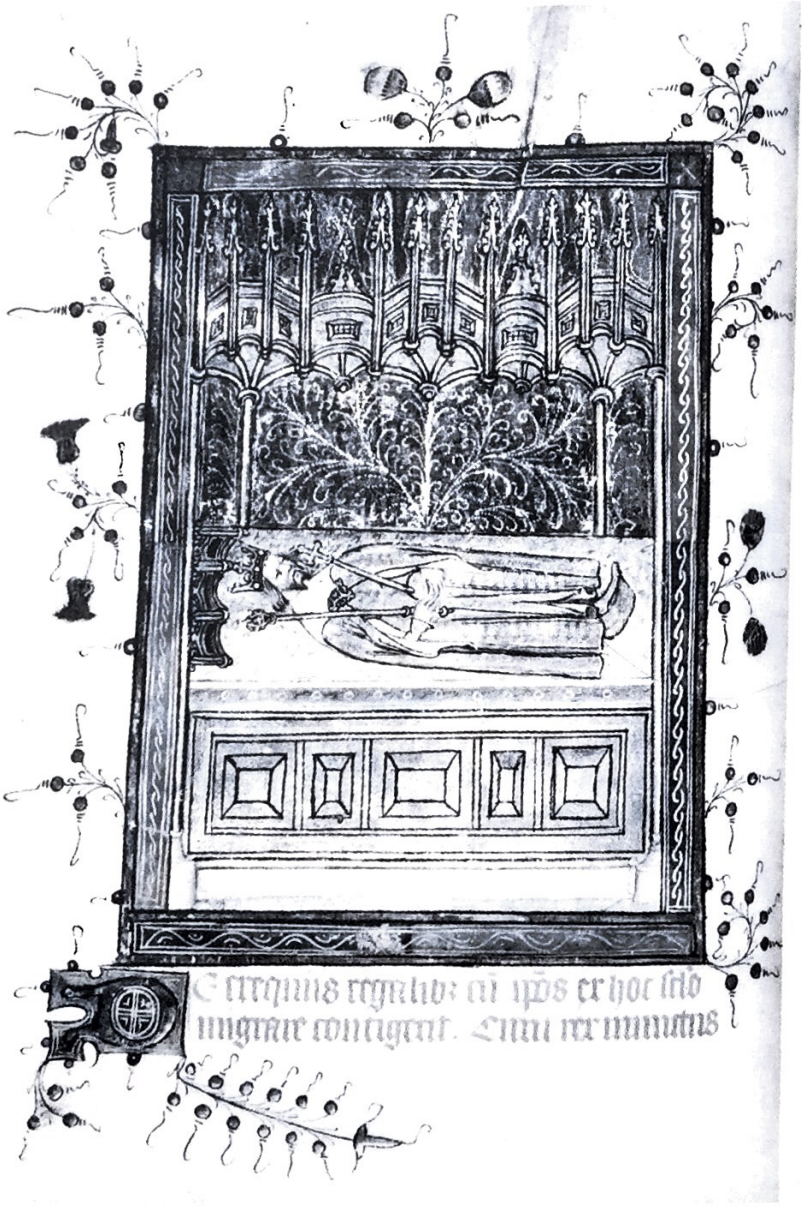
points of passage. This meant observing the ritual niceties of proper Christian burial sketched out earlier, only at a much amplified level. In the case of royal burial, however, the principal strategic problem was where power was located in the period between the death of one monarch and the inauguration of the next. An ingenious solution to this question was derived from the dual understanding of the body politic which emerged in this period in political and juridical thinking, and which has been discussed by Ernst Kantorowicz. This thinking was congenial to a Christian tradition which thought of the origin of all power, God, in synthetic terms, as a fusion of three entities forming the Trinity. In the case of temporal power the entities were double, one eternal (the office) the other mortal (the body). The nature of a king came to be understood as a corporation of two separate bodies – the natural mortal body of a particular king and the eternal, official body politic which survived the mortal body and was incorporated in the successor at his coronation. In the interim phase after the death of a monarch, the body politic could be incorporated not in a person at all but in an image: a funeral effigy, which could be ritually respected as if it were the king itself. This effigy was then displayed at the funeral of the king, and we know that this practice dated from at least the early fourteenth century in England.

A more extreme French instance concerned the effigy made for François I (d. 1547) which was displayed on a state bed in Paris:

> And in this state the effigy remained for eleven days. And it is to be understood and known that during the time the body was in the chamber next to the great hall . . . the forms and fashions of service were observed and kept just as was customary during the lifetime of the king: the table being set by the officers of the commissary; the service carried by the gentlemen servants, the bread-carrier, the cupbearer and the carver, with the usher marching before them and followed by officers of the cupboard, who spread the table with the reverence and samplings that were customarily made.

Behind this development lay a form of animism; this was a ritual of substitution which protected the office against destruction by investing it in a simulacrum. The power of such images is demonstrated in France by the fact that the Dauphin, the heir to the throne whose reign had notionally begun at his father's death, could not be seen with the image of his father lest two kings should be seen to rule in this state of political liminality. Late-medieval rituals were especially obsessed (as this example shows) with the minutiae of behaviour, and it may be the case that the elaboration of contemporary royal funerals resulted from improvements in embalming techniques which could buy time for rituals to expand. On the other hand necessity may have been the mother of invention, the drive to ritual elaboration provoking better mortuary practices. One can also see how these 'forms and fashions' could transfer to the permanent representations of royalty in death upon their tombs. Often monarchs are shown in their regalia, and we know that in the cases of Edward I (d. 1307) and his son

Edward II (d. 1327) kings were buried in vestments corresponding closely to their anointed coronation garb, indicating that concern with the symbolics of continuity noted earlier (p. 30) in discussing death and baptism. It was also often the case – certainly at Saint-Denis and Westminster – that sovereign tombs tended to have much more restrained representational systems than those of lesser members of the royal family, which often had brighter decoration and a richer imagery of celestial and familial comfort. The tombs of monarchs in the Anglo-French sphere tended to be of bronze or white marble – material counterparts in their pure and ineluctable quality to the extraction of the state, the soul of the kingdom, as an abstract entity from the mortal body of the king. The tombs of non-office holders, like unanointed royal children, did not need to reflect this aesthetics of the body politic. Hence the force of the exemption of



The ritual of a royal funeral is set out in a late 14th-century English Coronation Order, the *Liber Regalis*; two royal rites of passage are thus connected.

Royaumont from normal Cistercian practices of austerity. The restraint of sovereign burial reflected both a sense of the decorum of the body politic and, more fundamentally, an essentially new feeling for the character of the royal mausoleum as a showcase, a museum, of collective history unbroken by the individual pieties of the dynasty.

BODILY DIVISION

The conflict between tribal loyalty, or group solidarity, and individual piety also gave rise to another ingenious but controversial practice which enabled monarchs or other highly-placed patrons to have it both ways: the division of the body so that it could be buried at several places. By the thirteenth century bodily division had become something like a norm in the highest aristocratic circles, precisely because of the complexity and importance of the economy of death. At heart it bore witness to the importance of two competing priorities: priorities of place and priorities of the body. It also exposed inter-institutional rivalry. Ugly disputes could centre on this issue: thus in the 1260s there was an unpleasant row over the location of the tomb of Pope Clement IV (d. 1268) at Viterbo: who was to have it, the cathedral, the Franciscans or the Dominicans? John Peckham (d. 1292), the Franciscan Archbishop of Canterbury, planned to be buried with the Franciscans in London, but was dissuaded from doing so by the Prior of Canterbury; thus his body was left to the cathedral, and his heart given to the friars in London instead. A chronicler at Benedictine St Albans was piqued to note of the death in 1291 of Edward I's mother, Eleanor of Provence, that the nuns of Amesbury, where she died, got her body 'but her heart was buried in London at the church of the Friars Minor who . . . claimed for themselves somewhat of the body of any great folk who died; like dogs at a corpse, where each is in greedy expectation of his own gobbet to devour'.

Bodily division arose in the first place as a mortuary practice which acknowledged the fact that kings and queens tended not to die at the place of burial, and that embalming practices were insufficiently good to preserve the corpse during increasingly amplified royal death rituals. In the Anglo-French sphere division of the body reflected political and territorial divisions. Henry I of England and Normandy (d. 1135) wanted to be buried at Reading Abbey, but he died at Rouen. His entrails, brains and eyes were taken out on the spot for burial; so foul had the corpse already become that the surgeon involved died of septicaemia, and the body had gone off completely by the time it arrived at Caen. The funeral was less than fragrant. Nor were institutions necessarily delighted, in this early period of the practice, to receive those parts of the body which were lower in the physical hierarchy, and more closely associated with appetite, vice and disease: Roger of Wendover tells us (probably apocryphally) that Richard I's grant (1199) of his guts to the abbey of Chaluz caused positive offence. On the other

hand by the time Charles v of France (d. 1380) had his entrails buried at Maubuisson, his tomb representation could boast a large bag of the royal offal held proudly by the king's effigy.

By the thirteenth century embalming *more teutonico* ('in the German method') – which meant boiling the body down to the bones for easier transport and which appeared first in medieval Germany – was more widespread: St Thomas Aquinas was treated in this way, and so was St Louis, who died at Tunis in 1270 and was buried at Saint-Denis. Later scenes from the life of St Louis show him gathering up the stinking bones of the crusaders. Mortuary practices of this type were a form of extraction: by reducing the body to its bones, the dead person is reduced to a durable and pure essence. It follows that the practice of bodily division and extraction was taking on a more symbolic dimension. The hierarchy of the body was both a political one – the head remained the official site of the burial of the person – and an affective one: thus the heart was coming to be regarded as the seat of personal piety, and Christian bodily metaphors tended to be based on the head/heart pairing. The donation of different body parts reflected different views of the sovereignty of those parts. It was common, for example, to give the heart to the religious order particularly favoured for devotional reasons. Sweetheart Abbey in Kirkcudbright was founded in 1269 to enshrine the heart of John Balliol by his widow Devorguilla, the foundress of Balliol College, Oxford. The Mendicants, who enjoyed special favours as royal confessors, coming closest to the spiritual heart of the monarch, were special beneficiaries. Eleanor of Castile (d. 1290) gave her heart to the Dominicans in London, her entrails to Lincoln and her body to Westminster, marking the latter as the head of the kingdom. Each burial was marked by a different representation of the queen, and her images stood on the celebrated and triumphalist series of crosses erected in the 1290s to mark the path of her funeral cortège to London. Isabella of France, the queen of Edward II, was buried with the Franciscans in London with the heart of her husband under the breast of her effigy.

Division of the royal body amounted, in effect, to a final exertion of the royal virtue of largesse, power being registered by the gift of body parts. In this sense it related directly to the circulation of relics by theft or by gift, as a means of obtaining bonds through patronage. Indeed the more burials one had, the greater was one's sphere of influence, and the greater the number of prayers one received back for one's soul. But this cunning did not render division unproblematical. The practice exposed much deeper anxieties about fragmentation and the integrity of the person. Medieval culture had inherited from the ancient world a taboo about opening the human body for any purpose; medieval medicine worked extrinsically, by manipulating the bodily humours, and was less disposed to surgical intervention in view of the impurity of the body and blood (this, as Pouchelle has shown, marked the professional division between doctors and

surgeons). Henri de Mondeville's early fourteenth-century Parisian treatise on surgery, *Chirurgie*, reveals a profound sense of the metaphorical and symbolic value of the body: the body, especially the female body, is a court, a microcosm and an object of wonder (and for this reason bodily division was at first less common for queens than kings). Official dissections were not practised in Paris until the fifteenth century: the body was not to be a didactic spectacle.

The body politic was an especially sensitive arena. In an era of royal sainthood the royal person claimed thaumaturgical powers; kings in life touched for the 'king's evil' or scrofula, a glandular affliction, and miracles attended their tombs. The body politic was a site of health. Henri de Mondeville stated somewhat opportunistically: 'And just as we said above that our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, decided to honour all surgeons by performing with his own hands the office of a surgeon, so also our most serene Prince, the King of France, honours them and their estate in that he cures scrofula solely by the laying on of hands.' As it happens, surgery lay closer to the work of the butcher, cook or executioner than that of the 'hands-on' saint. But the body politic was also a microcosm of the idea of the state. Mary Douglas has noted that 'The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system'. The bodily hierarchy was itself a kind of politics, based on a notion of friendship and interdependence. The higher faculties were based in the head and heart, especially the eye. There was some disagreement as to the exact priority of the head and heart, which related to notions about the medieval sensorium. The head, in a political system dominated by spatial metaphors of verticality and descent, traditionally dominated just as a king is head of his realm, but Mondeville also characterized the heart as the centre of the realm where the king is – a relatively new viewpoint which reflected the notion of political centralization itself. To Jacobus de Voragine, the author of the *Golden Legend*, the soul was in the heart with the blood. The heart was thus the site of devotional feeling and moral conscience. The bodily organs rendered quasi-feudal service to one another and to the higher organs, the whole system being supported by concord and gratitude. John of Salisbury's twelfth-century *Policraticus* uses an anthropomorphic analogy for medieval social structure, with the head as the prince, the heart as his counsellors, the feet as the peasantry, and so on; and a fundamentally similar model is found in Christine de Pisan's *Livre du Corps de Policie* (*c.*1407). Anatomical cohesion, based on an Aristotelian notion of the friendship between the various parts of the body, thus equated symbolically with political cohesion: to divide is to weaken.

There were several implications of this model. In the first place, it ceded immense power to the body politic in respect both of itself and other bodies within the system. Kings and queens thus had the power to divide themselves in death as signs of largesse, but they also had the power to divide others who threatened the body politic with division. This power was a form of 'surplus'

power over others, which acted in the feudal system upon bodies primarily because, in this period, the body was the thing most available to punishment. The body politic thus stood at the opposite pole to that of the condemned man. Judicial executions were becoming more common from around 1300: just as royal bodily division dramatized the process of salvation, public execution dramatized the reaffirmation of temporal power; and finally, in works like Villon's *Ballade des Pendus*, art sanctified it. Dismemberment, and especially the severing of the head, was the reward of traitors, and served as the most splendid ritual of contemporary punishment. After his defeat in 1265, the baronial rebel Simon de Montfort had his limbs, head and testicles cut off by royal forces and sent to various parts of the kingdom, division here marking an inversion of royal largesse in the interests of disempowerment. The Scots rebel William Wallace was dealt with thoroughly in 1305: he was dragged through the streets of London by the tail of a horse, hanged, then taken down and eviscerated while still alive (it was important that the victim should be able to watch himself in this process); his guts were thrown on a fire and he was dismembered, his limbs being sent to Scotland, and his head displayed on London Bridge.

Secondly, bodily division in the interests of salvation focused concern upon the exact nature of the person. The practice ties in with a general development in medieval spirituality noted earlier (p. 47) in connection with imagery of Christ's body and its suffering: the tendency for sprituality to take on bodily or somatic character. I will be considering this idea again in relation to notions of the macabre. The period which saw the rise of bodily division of aristocrats also saw the initiation of devotional practices directed towards the body of Christ. The most important of these centred upon the final formulation of the doctrine of Transubstantiation at Mass, and the feast of Corpus Christi. As it became possible to think of Christ in terms of His wounds, His heart (as in St Bernard's twelfth-century *Cor Jesu dulcissimum*) and the Instruments of His Passion, as well as the consumption of His body at Mass, so it became possible for this fragmented mode of spiritual attention to rebound upon the body of the layperson. Multiple burial – of one body at more than one site – thus reflected a form of devotional life within the *corpus mysticum*.

But, as the pagan Romans had sensed when they scattered the remains of Christian martyrs at Lyons, multiple burial also stood in a potentially antagonistic relationship to the logic of the Resurrection. This had been a source of mild concern in relation to the cult of relics. Although a saint was fully present in any particular bit of his or her body, just as Christ was to be fully present in fragments of the consecrated Host, even Prudentius had described how the martyrs returned in visions to command that their bodies, dismantled in different shrines, should be reassembled for ease of the Resurrection. This issue of the relationship of relics to the final Resurrection proved a logical quagmire. Guibert de Nogent,

in his celebrated twelfth-century critique *De sanctis et eorem pigneribus*, attacked cults of the tooth of Christ and of the Holy Foreskin because they implied that Christ had not risen in total perfection, and therefore that our resurrection too might be imperfect. Hence it was absurd to accept the validity of Christ's milk tooth kept at St Médard at Soissons, or the the milk of the Virgin Mary at Laon cathedral. Relics of the Holy Blood, though popular in aristocratic circles in the thirteenth century and earlier, were no less problematical in subverting the logical ideals of cogency and consistency of doctrine to which the medieval mind now aspired. Why had they not resurrected, and how many bodies did Christ actually have? There were scholastic arguments against this position, like that arrived at by the Paris-trained Thomas of Chobham in his *Summa de arte predicanti* of about 1210, which was designed to equip slower-witted preachers in replying to awkward questions from irritatingly intelligent congregations:

> Certain people object that if Christ was resurrected in glory and His whole body was glorified, how is it that the Church claims that Christ's foreskin, cut off at the time of his circumcision, still remains on earth? There is an easy response to this, since just as by a miracle the body of our Lord can be at one and the same time in several places, so that same body can exist in several forms.

By this Thomas referred to the miracle of Transubstantiation at Mass. The crisis in this increasingly sophisticated morass of competing forms of interest was reached around 1300, by which time it had become hard to disentangle the spiritual, doctrinal and political elements of the equation. We will be returning to this in considering the related problems of the general Resurrection at a later point (see pp. 199–203). Division of the ordinary mortal body was a means of asserting spiritual and political power but it too touched sensitive doctrinal matters. Pope Boniface VIII grasped the nettle in the midst of his dispute with Philippe IV of France. In 1299 he issued the bull *Detestandae feritatis abusus* (An abuse of horrible savagery):

> . . . we have thought it fit to abolish that abuse of detestable savagery which certain of the faithful imprudently practise in accordance with a horrible custom, lest this abuse should continue to lacerate human bodies and stir the minds of the faithful to horror . . . for the aforesaid faithful, intent upon this vicious and reprehensible custom, at the death of any one among their kinsfolk who may be illustrious for nobility of race or dignity of rank (especially if he have paid the debt to nature beyond the limits of his own country), when he has chosen to be buried in his own parts . . . truculently disembowel him, divide him limb by limb or gobbet by gobbet, and seethe him down in a cauldron.

The practice was banned under pain of excommunication, though one could be freed if one paid for an indult. Boniface did not offer complex theological justifications for this move, though he may have been influenced by Roger Bacon's view that decay was simply an attribute of ageing and that the living should

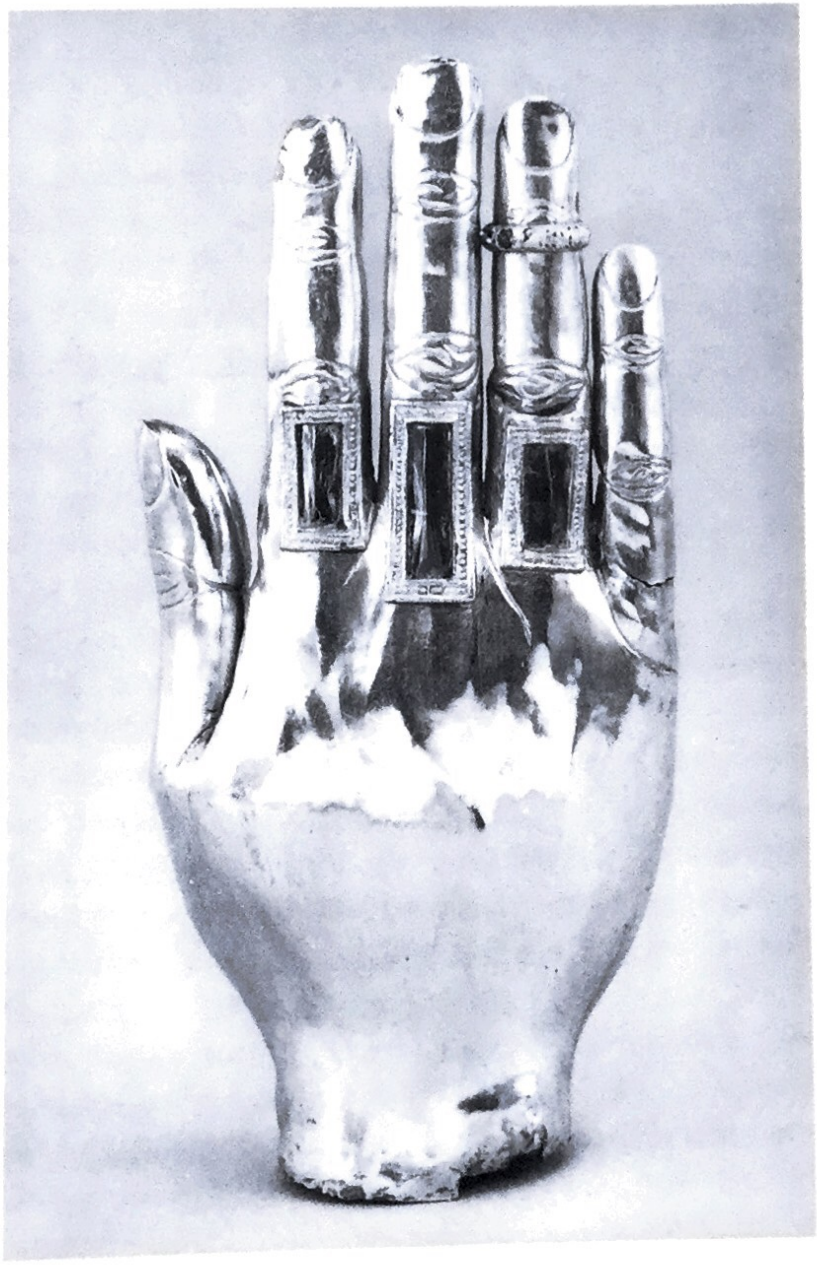


prepare for the Last Judgement by retaining both their moral and physical intactness (a notion which was rather hard on the medieval horde of amputees). Theological justification was in a sense unnecessary because the Pope's action was essentially political and polemical; it was aimed at the practices of a particular class at a time of maximum tension in relations between Christian kingship and the papacy. As it happens the gambit was ineffective: Boniface's bull was just not practicable, and Clement VI effectively killed it in 1351. The practice of evisceration was known amongst popes in the fifteenth century.

The practice of bodily subdivision amongst aristocrats had numerous analogies in the field of self-commemoration. For one thing it provoked new genres of

tombs, like the dapper late thirteenth-century heart tomb of Count Thibaut v of Champagne at Provins; in dividing the body it also coincided with the practice of multiple self-representation on tombs, again a new element in late-medieval funerary art. In a sense it marked the assimilation of the art of power to the art of the cult of relics, where the Christian cult of the dead had begun. Kings and queens, bishops and popes, were as divisible as the saints, even if they were not quite as powerful; in 1210 Otto, Bishop of Würzburg, requested that the convent of Ahausen should be given a barrel of excellent Franconian wine and in return that his right arm might be buried in the convent. The visual economy of body parts which had so tempted the eye of the pilgrim was now universalized, and the elites were now clothed in death with the same metallic decorum as the saints, in the commemorative art of their tombs.

Left Part of the heart tomb of Thibaut v, Count of Champagne (d. 1270), at Provins.



Right Hand from an arm reliquary, silver parcel-gilt, Flemish, 13th century.