

Books of Golden Rays and Ripped Folios. Thomas Aquinas's Book-Relics in Religious Reforms

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Introduction

In medieval and early modern art one of the most common attributes of Thomas Aquinas is a book in his lap or arms. The book is usually open and often the text is readable. The earliest known representation of this type of image is in an altar panel of Simone Martini, a Sienese painter, which was finished in 1320.¹ The commissioners of the panel were the Dominicans of Pisa, who presumably gave good instructions to the painter on what they wanted the altarpiece to look like. Thomas Aquinas is in a central position in the predella, and moreover, he is represented with a halo. However, in 1320 he was not yet canonized. In the surviving Italian public art of that period representation of saint-candidates, especially with the halo, which normally signified a canonized saint, was rare² To include Thomas among the established saintly figures was certainly the choice of the local friars, not the artist, and they must have deliberated on the iconographical setting.

Besides the halo, what else seems to have been important to the friars when portraying Thomas Aquinas in their new altar panel? The image in the predella is a half-length portrait of

¹ The panel, called *Madonna and Child and Saints*, belongs nowadays in the collections of the Museo nazionale di san Matteo, Pisa.

² Cannon 1982, 73 and passim.

a man wearing the simple black and white Dominican habit. Although he has the halo, the most prominent and radiant element in the scheme is the huge book that he holds open with both hands, the text facing viewers of the image. On the open pages of the book are written these words from Proverbs: “For my mouth shall speak truth; and wickedness is an abomination to my lips.”³ They form the opening of Thomas’s *Summa contra gentiles*, which leaves us in no doubt that the man depicted is Thomas Aquinas. Golden rays of light emanate from the book, or perhaps from the text, so thickly that the margins around the text appear to be painted gold. The black cape is parted by the sleeves of Thomas’s arms holding the book, so that the tunic is visible below it and just visible as a triangle of cloth above it. The tunic is white, but here the triangle-shaped piece is transformed to gold by the rays in front of it, implying a connection between the text and Thomas’s breast or heart. The book appears to be the central focus of the image, almost as if Thomas’s main purpose in being there is to hold it. The rays from the book’s pages almost cover him, assimilating him with it and perhaps suggesting that his sainthood derives from it.

In this paper, I ask what the significance of Thomas’s book for his cult in general was, and more particularly for his cult as a reformer in the Order of Preachers. In contemporary discussion as well as hagiographical texts, Thomas Aquinas’s fame was partly anchored to his works which were “illuminating” the world.⁴ An open book soon became one of his attributes in pictorial representations. Thomas was perceived as a person who brought enlightenment to the world, a reformer, that is, a person who sustains the Catholic faith by his writings. From

³ Translation KJV, Proverbs 8:7. The inscription/Vulgate version: “Veritatem meditabitur guttur meum et labia mea detestabuntur [impium].”

⁴ When Thomas died, “the sun has withdrawn its splendour”, was how the Faculty of Arts of the University of Paris expressed its reaction to Thomas’s death in a letter sent to the General Chapter of the Dominican Order on 2 May 1274. See the letter in Latin Laurent 1937, 583–586. The English translation by Foster 1959. William of Tocco, who wrote Thomas’s first *Life* ca. 1323, was explicit on the importance of Thomas’s writings: he describes Thomas as a star who enlightened the world by his books, see William of Tocco, *Ystoria sancti Thome de Aquino*, cap. 2.

this perspective, I find it interesting to focus on the roles of books as pictorial or physical representations of Thomas in images of him. Because of the scarcity of sources, to understand the importance given to bound books as objects of veneration and instruments of reform the paper covers a wide time span from the late medieval to the Early Modern Era.

Thomas's writings addressing the metaphysical explanation of existence were vitally important for his saintly reputation and image in the centuries following his death.⁵ In turn, the books began to acquire their own holiness from Thomas's sainthood, becoming valuable and meaningful as objects, not only as texts. Alison Frazier has briefly discussed the assimilation of a holy person to his physical representations, and stated that manuscripts could assimilate 'historical saints, saintly narrative, physical book, and saintly relic' in humanist Italy.⁶ This stratification of significance of manuscripts comes out strikingly in Thomas's case when one studies both images of beautiful volumes (in Pisa and Rome) and mutilated, real books inside reliquaries (in Naples, Salerno and Aversa). Thomas's writings were understood as an organic part of his holiness, so that books or part of books written by him were considered holy objects, relics. Although the relic-utility of Thomas's autographs is clear, when they became venerated in themselves is not so clear.⁷ However, when analysing images (both pictorial and textual) representing Thomas's writings in the context of his cult, we can

⁵ The connection between Thomas's writings and his saintly reputation is generally noted but rarely properly analysed. A classic study by M.-D. Chenu 1950, on understanding of Thomas's production, partly explains the connection between the writings and sainthood. See also Torrell 1993. From early on, when anyone discussed Thomas's sainthood, they tended to emphasize Thomas's publications. The phenomena can be grasped, for example, from the testimony Bartholomew of Capua gave in the canonization hearings and Thomas's early *Vitae*. See *Processus canonizationis S. Thomae, Neapoli* (1319), 386–389; Ptolemy of Lucca, *Historia Ecclesiastica nova*; Bernard Gui, *Legenda sancti Thomae Aquinatis*.

⁶ Frazier 2004, 7.

⁷ For some remarks on the relic utility of St. Francis's autographs, see Bertrand 2006, 373; Boureau 1989, 18.

grasp medieval perceptions of books and images such as the one described above hint that the books were also understood as saintly relics.⁸

The relic nature of books and other forms of gathered texts or text fragments in the Middle Ages is remarkably understudied.⁹ However, the idea of texts bearing a supernatural power is perhaps as old as writing itself, and we know that textual amulets were used in pre-Christian Europe. Among the most valuable studies on textual relics is Don C. Skemer's book *Binding words*, which discusses the practice of wearing amulets with written words on, a habit that can be defined both magical and/or religious.¹⁰ Alan Boureau comes to similar conclusions in his excellent article on early prints and their uses for magical and Christian worship.¹¹ Paul Bertrand takes a slightly different approach that emphasizes canonically accepted ways to consider the manuscripts and shorter texts as sacred relics.¹² All these studies are extremely important but they can address a few of the manifold issues surrounding the uses of books and written pieces as power objects. Book-relics, as well as other representative relics, are still in need of much more detailed and varied study than there has been so far.¹³ The present paper offers a rather broad view on how to understand the material significance of Thomas's books. The topic is challenging, especially given the scarcity of source material from the Middle

⁸ My suggestion comes close to Heffernan's, according to which medieval hagiographical texts, including such books as saints's *Lives*, had two vital objectives: they had to respond to the specific community's traditional understanding of a holy person and they had to "establish the text itself as a document worthy of reverence, as a relic". Heffernan gives examples from throughout the Middle Ages of the ways in which *Lives* and miracle collections were placed on injured or infected parts of the body, curing the sufferer immediately. Heffernan 1988, 35.

⁹ Relics and relic practices have been the subject of numerous studies during recent decades, but these studies rarely concern representative relics such as clothes and other possessions of a holy person or things that had touched him/her. When some classical studies of relics present lists of types of representative relics, they do not usually mention books. Among the classics, see Herrmann-Mascard 1975.

¹⁰ Especially on textual relics and debates on their uses, see Skemer 2006, 50–58

¹¹ Boureau 1989.

¹² Bertrand 2002.

¹³ A good example of the possibilities offered by study of these themes is an article by Éric Palazzo on books as relics in ecclesiastic treasuries, see Palazzo 1997.

Ages: possibly the fine distinction between superstitious and doctrinally correct relic practices has led to avoidance of the topic and the omission of descriptions of the uses of Thomas's texts as relic-objects in medieval or early modern documents.¹⁴ So far Thomas's autographs as holy relics have received special attention in the publications of Théry in the 1930s and Boyle in the 1990s.¹⁵ However, these two scholars focus more on the issues of identification, provenience and reconstruction of the mutilated manuscripts than on questions of their nature as relics in the past.

To understand the primary significance of Thomas's texts and books to the Dominicans from a material viewpoint, it is necessary to read the acts of the General Chapters of the Order of Preachers (i.e. Dominicans).¹⁶ A very useful source for remarks on book-relics associated with Thomas is the collection of Libri in the General Archives of the Order of Preachers in Rome. The collection contains dozens of large volumes, each of them conserving hand copied documents, histories and inventories of Dominican houses, most collected in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹⁷ I have read the descriptions of the movable chattels of numerous Italian convents to gain an understanding of the value given to Thomas's manuscripts and other belongings and analyse the practices connected to them. The Libri is also a promising source of material to explore the relic utility of manuscripts and other representative objects in connection to Dominican saints in the worldwide context of the Early Modern period. Besides this documentary material, I concentrate on the perception of books in the Dominican

14 Regarding the silence on "unsuitable" practices at a saint's tomb where the relics were kept, possibly regarded as superstitious in the Early Middle Ages, and official documents which omitted those practices, see Redon and Giles 1984.

15 See the bibliography (Boyle and Théry).

16 I have used the digital copy of *Monumenta Ordinis fratrum Praedicatorum Historica* (hereafter MOPH).

17 Manuscript series of the Dominican history, namely Libri or *Monumenta Annalium Ordinis Praedicatorum*, containing 44 volumes from the 15th century onwards and conserved at the Dominican General Archives in Rome (AGOP). The catalogue of the Libri is published by Koudelka 1968 and 1969, see the bibliography.

hagiography and iconography. In this study, hagiography and iconography are considered as two sides of one coin: following the concept of Birgitte Cazelles, the hagiography consists of “verbal and visual documents commemorating the saints”.¹⁸ Words and images are media through which the Dominicans represented their thoughts, doctrine and identity.¹⁹ The images of Thomas’s books are considered to reflect the Dominican theology and identity of the period, in both of which the veneration of Thomas’s doctrine gained an important place.

Study-books and book-collections

Thomas’s texts as physical objects attracted contemporary attention immediately after his death. The first institution expressing its interest in Thomas’s works appears to have been the University of Paris. The Faculty of Arts sent a letter to the General Chapter of the Dominicans asking that Thomas’s corpse and some of his writings be sent to Paris after the Master’s death in 1274. In exchange, the letter promised to keep the teacher’s memory alive. The content of the letter expresses the affection, even devotion, the Faculty felt towards the great Master and his bones. The tone of the letter is perhaps more practical when it addresses Thomas’s writings: it asks, almost demands, that all those works (and similar works) Thomas had started to write when he was last teaching in Paris be returned to the Faculty. It apparently considered

¹⁸ Cazelles 1991, 1. In the same book with Cazelles, Magdalena Carrasco analyses pictorial hagiography in an illustrative way as a source of history and spirituality: Carrasco 1991.

¹⁹ Dominican figurative art and theology, as well as art and politics of the Order, are examined in several recent or relatively recent studies; among those I have found important and useful are Cannon 2013, Gebron 2010 and 2016, Palazzo 2016. More widely on the theme of how to read visual images and relics as representations of the Early Modern worldview, see Dillenberger 1999, and on reading of medieval images, Belting 1996.

itself as the rightful owner of the texts because Thomas had contributed to their work while he belonged to the personnel of the University.²⁰

We do not know how the Dominican Order reacted to the demands of the University, as no reply has survived. However, we can guess the answer to the first request: the Dominican Order could not donate the Faculty the bones because Thomas had died at a Cistercian house, not a convent of the Order. There are acts of the Dominican General Chapters from a few years later that conserve interesting documentary material telling us how the administrative level of the Order reacted to Thomas's literary heritage.²¹

The first General Chapters that treated Thomas's intellectual work were organized in Milan in 1278 and in Paris in 1279 and 1286.²² The acts gave admonitions not to criticize Thomas's writings but only to promote them.²³ The General Chapter of Zaragoza in 1309 gave the first orders concerning Thomas's texts specifically as objects.²⁴ First it demands that lectors and sub-lectors read and teach using Thomas's works. Next, it insists that the teachers had to guide students to do the same. Then, the acts discuss the circumstances when students were allowed to sell their books. Most significantly, they were forbidden to sell only two types of

20 Laurent 1937, 583–586. The letter was sent by the rector of the University and all the masters teaching in the Faculty of Arts. The significance of the letter from the viewpoint of the Faculty of Arts is discussed, for example, in Kretzmann and Stump 1993, 13–14.

²¹ It is useful to know that the Dominicans are considered to have had a special relationship with their books from the very beginning of the Order. Studies were valued highly in the Order, and in consequence it emphasized the necessity to own books, both on a personal and a communal level: see Hinnebusch 1973, 191–230.

²² For Milan 1278, see MOPH 3, 199, for Paris 1279 and 1286, 204 and 235.

²³ Étienne Tempier, a bishop of Paris, issued a condemnation of over 200 propositions, including some from Thomas's works, in 1277. The same year Albert the Great arrived in Paris to defend Thomas's doctrine. The first steps taken by the General Chapters to defend Thomas were very likely a reaction to Tempier's act and other criticism of Thomas's doctrines. See Torrell 1996, 436–453.

²⁴ From here on, I will use the word 'book' rather freely to indicate the physical objects containing Thomas's writings. As my approach does not include traditional manuscript studies, questions concerning, for example, binding and whether the object was a compilation of several gatherings and different texts with a cover or not or just a single libellus, are not considered in this paper.

books under any circumstances - those containing Thomas's texts and the Bible.²⁵ In the General Chapter of Bologna in 1315, Thomas's book-objects received detailed attention, so much so that later Chapters did not return to the issue. The acts of Bologna give instructions on how to make books available in convents and how to make sure that the convents owned all the texts written by Thomas.²⁶

Thus, the Dominican Order forcefully promoted Thomas's doctrine and his writings inside the community of the friars, but the fame of his philosophical or theological works diffused far beyond the walls of the convents. Outside Dominican circles, Pope John XXII (1316–1334) was one of Thomas's early admirers. It may also have been John who provided the initiative for Thomas's canonization. John's liking for Thomas's doctrine is widely recognized by scholars. From Thomas's writings, the pope found support for his temporal power in his dispute with the Emperor, and, probably even more importantly, for the defence of the orthodox faith and the Roman Church against heresy.²⁷ Impressively, surviving eye-witness records tell us how the pope gave public sermons in the streets of Avignon during the festivities anticipating Thomas's canonization. In one speech, John praised the Order of Preachers and Thomas, saying that Thomas had illuminated the Church more than anyone since the apostles and the first doctors.²⁸ In the official canonization bull *Redemptionem misit*, issued on July 1323, the pope gave detailed testimony to the holiness of Thomas's life, also praising more moderately his intellectual work.²⁹ In other sources John's interest in Thomas's

25 MOPH 4, 38–40. See also Torrell 1996, 453.

26 MOPH 4, 83–84. The order to own and observe Thomas's entire literary corpus was applied especially in those communities with a *studium generale* or convents with a master of theology.

27 Torrell, 1996, 321–324; le Brun-Gouanvic, 1996, 7–9; Räsänen 2017, 45–48.

28 *Récit anonyme*, 514.

29 *Redemptionem misit*, 523.

texts is more explicitly described, and it appears that he sought to collect them for his library in the Avignon Palace.³⁰

The letter of the University of Paris does not tell us whether Thomas's books were perceived purely as tools for teaching and learning or as something more besides, possibly as a symbol of Thomas's presence in the academic community. However, the acts of the Dominican Order give us a clearer picture of their value. As communal and individual property, his books were tools to teach and study, but they became more than utility objects: the Dominicans pronounced Thomas's works infallible and sacred in a similar manner to the Bible. The presence of theological and philosophical books in the Dominican convents was of axiomatic value, but Thomas's were regarded as an exceptionally important contribution to the Christian knowledge of God and Christ. As such, they were a part of the spiritual treasure of the convent and were kept well-guarded chests.³¹ From John XII's statement we can grasp the significance given to Thomas as one who belonged in the same exalted group as the apostles and Church fathers. By doing so, the Pope underlined Thomas ability to guide the Church, which was being accused of having become corrupted, back to its untarnished origins, the age of the apostles. This image of Thomas as the successor of the apostles was actively used by later reformers.³²

30 Horst 2002, 6; Mandonnet, 1923, 27–28; Torrell 1993, 466.

31 It is easy to get acquainted with Thomas's vast production on the Internet site of Corpus Thomisticum: <http://www.corpusthomicum.org/iopera.html>. Surviving manuscript copies of *Summa Theologiae* (over 600 according to Boyle) testify to the enthusiasm the work encountered among the Dominicans and laity in the Middle Ages. As Leonard Boyle reminds us, the parts of *Summa* circulated independently and they had their own identity. The best surviving – and the most popular – part seems to have been *Secunda secundae*, see Boyle 2000, 85. Tommaso Kaeppli has studied the Dominican libraries in Italy and managed to reconstruct parts of medieval collections. Thomas's texts seem to have been widely diffused as the Acts suggested to us: however, only two autographs are mentioned, see Kaeppli 1966. Also in general on books as a part of memory and treasure of Church, see Palazzo 1997. On definition of treasure in the medieval Church, see Cordez 2016, 19–46.

³² Thomas was an important model in many respects to such Florentine reformers as Giovanni Dominici, Fra Angelico, and Antonino of Florence. On the relationship between the last and Thomas, see Howard 2013.

Representing the book of the golden margins and reform

After reading the acts of the General Chapter, we need not be surprised that Thomas holds the radiant book in his hands in Simone Martini's painting: the books of the Dominican master represent knowledge comparable to the Bible. If we left things here, however, one of Thomas's most common attributes would remain only partially explained. The discussion of the significance of a book in Thomas's hands, or in his lap in comparable pictures, must be considered in the cultural context in which the depiction was born. By examining different representations, in the following pages I seek to understand both written and pictorial representations of books in hagiographical material.

William of Tocco's *Life of Thomas*, *Ystoria sancti Thome de Aquino* is often taken as a logical starting point when considering Thomas Aquinas's hagiographical image. It is true that William was already writing the *Ystoria* when Simone Martini's panel was ordered, but the panel was finished in 1320, whereas the *Ystoria* was completed only in 1323.³³ Although copies of early versions of the *Ystoria* presumably started to circulate among the Dominicans before the canonization, they are hardly likely to have been the source for the Dominicans of Pisa.³⁴ Besides this chronological problem, William does not represent Thomas so much as an author as a humble friar, often troubled by the Sacred Scripture, again making *Ystoria* an

³³ William had presumably started to collect memories of Thomas even before the official canonization process began and later he was appointed as a procurator of the case: see esp. Torrell 1993, 466–469. The first stage of the work was presented to the pope in 1318, and the fourth and the last redaction was finished in 1323, see Le Brun-Gouanvic 1996, 16, 68–76. On the value of William's work to other hagiographical texts written in connection to Thomas's medieval cult, see Räsänen 2017, esp. p. 205.

³⁴ On the manuscript tradition of *Ystoria*, see Kaeppli 1975, 166–167, and Brun-Gouanvic 1996, 61–80.

improbable model for Simone Martini.³⁵ In *Ystoria*, then, the image of Thomas as a writer and book-producer is subdued, although, as Agnes Dubreil-Arcin argues, the model of the scholar is detectable in William's text.³⁶

To understand better the context of the book with the golden margins and its meaning, I propose that we should study other contemporary sources. The southern Italian oral tradition and Ptolemy of Lucca's *Historia ecclesiastica nova*, in which he gives a short *Life* of Thomas, are especially interesting. I start with an analysis of the oral tradition, which was recorded in writing for the first time by the papal inquisitors and notaries in Naples in 1319.³⁷ The second round of hearings of the witnesses to Thomas's life and post-mortem miracles was organized in Fossanova in 1321.³⁸

When seeking counterparts for the representation of Thomas in Simone Martini's predella, one testimony stands out. In Naples in 1319, a Dominican friar, Anthony of Brescia, gave a testimony that Albert of Brescia, a famous Dominican theologian, had seen a vision in which St Augustine declared Thomas his equal in doctrinal purity but his better in the purity of flesh. In the vision there were two persons, one wearing the vestments of a bishop and another the Dominican habit. The latter had a crown and vestments ornamented with precious jewels, two halos and a great shining jewel on his chest. According to Albert, Augustine clarified the symbolism of the vision by saying that the precious jewels represented the numerous books that Thomas had written.³⁹

³⁵ In these situations, Thomas received visions, in which, for example, the apostles Peter and Paul helped him to explain difficult passages, see William of Tocco, *Ystoria sancti Thome de Aquino*, cap. 31.

³⁶ Dubreil-Arcin, 2011, 82.

³⁷ *Processus canonizationis S. Thomae, Neapoli* (1319). See Räsänen 2017, passim.

³⁸ *Processus canonizationis S. Thomae, Fossanova* (1321). See Räsänen 2017, passim.

³⁹ *Processus canonizationis S. Thomae, Neapoli* (1319), cap. LXVI: "Qui lapides pretiosi libros multos et opera scripture sue que composuit significant."

If we compare the vision to Simone Martini's predella, we notice that Thomas does not carry the jewel on his chest, but both the chest and the whole central part of his body is covered by the shining book and golden rays. The radiant book possibly replaced the jewel on the chest and made visible the books mentioned in the vision. If we take a wider look at the predella, we notice that the saints are grouped in pairs; only the central part is divided into three, the theme of *Man of Sorrow* being at the centre and St Mary and St John the Apostle at the sides. To the right of St John the first pair of saints are St Thomas and St Augustine. The pair gives us good reason to suggest that the imposing vision of Albert of Brescia was the inspiration for the representation of the book in Simone Martini's predella. That the vision had a powerful effect is clear from the fact that Albert of Brescia's testimony appeared in *Ystoria* and other hagiographies without much editing.⁴⁰ Similarly, it became an impressive final part of the Matin lections of the liturgy for Thomas's *dies natalis* on 7 March and one of the themes of Dominican sermons for the same day.⁴¹

Joanna Cannon has recently studied the panel and interpreted the messages transmitted by the chorus of biblical saints together with two canonized Dominican saints, St Dominic and St Peter Martyr, and not yet canonized Thomas. Cannon's interpretation is fine and multilayered and she emphasizes the significance of the panel for the Dominican identity through several themes central to the vocation of the Order.⁴² However, I would have expected the analysis of Thomas's vicinity to the *Man of Sorrow* to be more central, although she returns to the theme of the connection between Thomas and Christ's body when discussing the case of a lost panel

⁴⁰ William of Tocco, *Ystoria sancti Thome de Aquino*, cap. XXII; Bernard Gui, *Legenda sancti Thomae Aquinatis*, cap. LI.

⁴¹ The ninth lection for Thomas Aquinas's feast: see Räsänen 2017, appendix. On sermons, see for example Vincent Ferrer's cycle *de sanctis*. On the vision and its implications, see the interesting article of Hall 1985.

⁴² Cannon 2103, 147–150.

of the Orvietan polyptych. In the case of the Orvietan polyptych, Cannon stresses Thomas's role in composing the Corpus Christi office in 1264 and the possibility that the Dominican art reflected the contemporary discussion of Thomas's composition before he was canonized.⁴³ Considering the early date of the production of the predella of Simone Martini, Thomas's presence and the golden margin book is understandable through the master's theology and texts, clearly highly esteemed among the well educated friars. However, in my view, Thomas's halo becomes understandable only through the *Man of Sorrow* and his interpretation of the Corpus Christi office and other eucharistic writings.

Officially, the Dominicans started to promote Thomas's authorship of the Corpus Christi liturgy rather late: the first acts of the General Chapters on the matter were published in 1322, although the re-establishment of the feast started in 1318.⁴⁴ The earliest and most commonly surviving of the written sources on Thomas's role in writing of the Office is Ptolemy of Lucca's *Historia ecclesiastica nova*, probably finished by 1316:

[Thomas Aquinas] composed the Office of Corpus Christi at Urban's demand, which was the second that he had made at Urban's request. He did this completely, both including the readings for the whole office, for both day and night, as well as for the Mass, and for everything to be sung that day. If we look closely at the author's words in the History, almost all the figures from the Old Testament seem to be included in this Office, adapted in a splendid and unique style to the sacrament of the Eucharist.⁴⁵

43 Cannon 2013, 150–152. On Thomas's role in composing Corpus Christi, there is a vast bibliography. A very accurate study on the theme of the Eucharist that covers far more than just Thomas's participation in reshaping the Corpus Christi liturgy is Rubin 1991. For a new approach to the old theme, see Constant Mews (forthcoming in 2018).

44 Räsänen 2016.

45 Ptolemy of Lucca, *Historia ecclesiastica nova*, 566. Translation from Rubin 1991, 186.

Other early hagiographical texts, including William's *Ystoria*, are more cursory on the matter. Ptolemy clearly considered the office important among Thomas's works. In general, Ptolemy, being a former student of Thomas Aquinas himself, concentrates on describing his master mostly from the perspective of his intellectual career, not forgetting to mention how he received heavenly help in certain situations. Ptolemy's confidence in Thomas's abilities was so great that he declared him supreme among modern teachers in every subject.⁴⁶ To emphasize Thomas's intellectual authority, Ptolemy gives a long list of titles written by Thomas, meant to be complete.

I propose that the interpretation of the golden margin book should be made in the context of promoting Thomas's activity in writing the Corpus Christi liturgy. The book golden radiating rays represents the truth of Christ's body.⁴⁷ It truly materializes the incarnation of Christ on parchment.⁴⁸ Moreover, the book, together with the opening verse, "For my mouth shall speak truth", seems to attach God's voice to Thomas's body. The opening verse is from the *Summa contra gentiles*, and not from the Corpus Christi liturgy or the Eucharist treatises as one might expect. Thomas had handled the Eucharistic theme abundantly in his writings, but the Corpus Christi was the only liturgy that was approved by the pope while Thomas was living. In a sense, that work was canonized before the canonization of Thomas himself.⁴⁹ In the predella,

46 Ptolemy of Lucca, *Historia Ecclesiastica nova*, 589.

47 A much later source from the beginning of the seventeenth century describes Thomas's corpse as radiating the divinity of the holy sacrament ("Corps Glorieux que -- rayonné de la Divinité de ce S. Sacramenta"). In this much earlier case, indeed, I would confirm that the radiating element is Christ's body. See Lavour 1628, 20–21.

48 On object, living material such as parchment and representation, see Baschet 2008, 25–64.

49 Interestingly, Joanna Cannon has proposed that Simone Martini also painted for the convent of Orvieto an altar panel with the representation of Thomas Aquinas slightly after the Pisa in 1320/21. If Cannon is correct, the lost panel would have presented Thomas as equally sized to other, officially (canonized) saints –which would have been exceptional, but not impossible. The commissioner of the panel was Trasmondo Monaldeschi, an admirer of Thomas's doctrine, and a person who was a very active promoter of Thomas's cult in the town. See Cannon 2013, 150 and 1982, 83, 87. It is worth

Thomas was placed on the right side of St. Augustine, a figure of great importance to the Dominican Order. St. Augustine had handled the Eucharist in his works and according to the Dominican tradition of the famous vision, he had declared Thomas's doctrine equal to his own. Both the vision and the predella suggest that by following Thomas's doctrine, it was possible to return to the original Church and the age of the apostles, Church Fathers and early martyrs, all of whom are represented in this art work. From the birth of their Order, the Dominicans had promoted themselves as the new apostles. By preaching, they corrected those who had chosen an erroneous path. Thus, the panel must be interpreted as a propagation of the Order and its future saint, who was a perfect follower of Christ – more perfect than St. Augustine himself. The idea of Thomas as the follower of Christ and the one to lead Christians back to the purity of the early Church seems to have been dear to the later reformers. As Cyril Gerbron has noted, the radiant book in Thomas's hands again took a prominent role in the art of Fra Angelico.⁵⁰ Fra Angelico was a Dominican friar who gave his support to the famous reformers of the Order such as Giovanni Dominici and Antonino of Florence.

The radiant book draws the spectator's attention to it and highlights more the sacred nature of its texts than the man who holds it. The golden rays cover Thomas's breast; bathing it in gold just as they make the book golden. The depiction of the golden margin book emphasizes Thomas's works as treasures, something we saw already expressed in the Acts of the Order. Moreover, I would suggest that the image assimilates the book and Thomas, the assimilating

noting that Thomas also wrote *Contra gentiles* in the Umbrian town. Locally in Orvieto, Thomas's authorship of the Corpus Christi liturgy was more strongly emphasized than in the Dominican Order in general or anywhere else, see Räsänen 2016, and the forthcoming article A. I would stress that such an exceptional panel would have been possible to execute only in Orvieto, and the active, close contacts between the central Italian convents would have been in the background when establishing the very young cult of Thomas Aquinas in Pisa or elsewhere.
50 Gerbron 2010, 230–237. See also his book 2016.

element being the golden colour emerging from the text of the book. The book, as well as its author Thomas, were sanctified by the sacred scripture he put on the parchment by the guidance of God. Thus the predella image makes a strong case that Thomas should be canonized. Clearly, Thomas's books had an important doctrinal and affective role in the Dominican community from very early on.

Venerating Thomas's books

Only a couple of years after the above image was painted, the Dominicans of Pisa ordered a new altar panel in which Thomas was depicted following the same principal idea as in the earlier panel. This time, however, Thomas, canonized more or less at the same time when the panel was finished, was the protagonist of the work, again with his books. The panel is called the *Triumph of St. Thomas Aquinas*. The painting was formerly attributed to Francesco Traini, but nowadays to Lippo Memmi. In this painting Thomas has not just one book, but five in his lap. It is worth noting that the five books are far from unique in this panel painting, but there are Christ himself with the closed book, Moses with the plaques of law (not exactly a book), St. Paul, all four Evangelists with the books as well as Aristotle and Plato with books. All of them and their books are depicted as sources of wisdom for Thomas: golden rays descend from them to Thomas's head. There is one book upside down. It belongs to Averroes. The Andalusian polymath is in a position that symbolizes his inferiority: He is cast down by the strength of the saint's writings, specifically by Thomas' *Summa contra gentiles*, which is the most prominent book in the altar panel.⁵¹ The painting glorifies Thomas, his wisdom shines, his words diffuse as rays and inspire the people at the bottom edge of the panel. Among them

51 Cannon 2013, 150.

are religious folk and clergymen, even lay men of high status. In this panel Thomas is principally a mediator of knowledge to an educated audience.⁵²

It seems to me that in this panel Thomas's books are depicted as objects to be venerated, perhaps even as relics. Below I will analyse the books as a physical extension of Thomas's mind and body and as the activation of his presence through his texts. The Memmi panel shows in greater detail than the panel discussed above why Thomas' scripture had to be taken as sacred: Thomas's books were a synthesis of divine annunciation and learned knowledge of the ancient philosophers and earlier Christian authors. This depiction contrasts strongly with the 'official' hagiography, William of Tocco's *Ystoria*, presented above. William was particularly careful to show Thomas's writings as a product of divine guidance, and in this sense unique.⁵³ In the Memmi panel, the books on Thomas's lap are emphatically his works and they transmit the essence and truth of God and his apostles. Bernard Gui, a famous inquisitor, wrote a new *Life* of Thomas Aquinas a couple of years after the canonization and realization of the Memmi panel. He was more interested in Thomas's writings than William. Bernard proclaims, among other things, that "This is not the place to describe at length the errors which the razor edge of Thomas's mind has cut off at their root; enough to say that the errors and follies of unbelievers have never, to this day, met with so terrible an adversary as the author of the *Summa contra Gentiles*."⁵⁴ With this sentence, Bernard seems to articulate

52 The panel is still in the custody of its original community, the Dominicans of Santa Caterina of Pisa. On the basic information and detailed interpretation of the altar panel, see Polzer 1993.

53 According to William, Thomas also received a reward for his faithfulness as a follower when the crucifix speaks: "Thomas, you have written well of me, what would you have from me for your reward?" Thomas answered: "Lord, nothing else but you." Following this vision Thomas wrote several texts: these are the third part of *Summa theologiae*, on Christ's Passion, Resurrection and the sacrament of the Eucharist. On another occasion, a Christ figure appeared and spoke of Thomas's notes on the Eucharist. This time, the assurance was more specific: "You have written well of the sacrament of my body." See William of Tocco, *Ystoria sancti Thome de Aquino*, cc. 34 and 52. Colledge 1974, 23.

54 The translation from Foster 1959, 35.

the same as the Memmi panel, in which Thomas is depicted sitting inside a round form with a noteworthy resemblance to the iconography of *Maiestas Domini*, referring to Christ's task as lawgiver or judge. The impression of *Maiestas Domini* becomes stronger when one reads the beginning of *Genesis* from another book on Thomas's lap "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void", and from the third book "Beholding the contents of the old and new Law by careful study we...".⁵⁵ The people below Thomas receive his doctrine, represented as rays coming from his books. Among the rays are written sentences "Teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity" and "Here he found the entire way of discipline".⁵⁶ The panel conveys strongly the idea of the beginning of a new era for the Christian people under the rule, law and guidance of St. Thomas.

The books in the Memmi panel appear as venerated objects. They are depicted individually with their own independent characters, which makes it possible to recognise them easily, even to read them without difficulty as their open pages are turned towards the spectator. The composition gives an idea of an altar table on which the books are piled. The most central is *Summa contra Gentiles*, which radiates golden light. Below the people admire and honour Thomas with his books, as one can see from their gazes and gestures. Both Polzer and Cannon have read later *Annales* of the convent of Pisa and they affirm that an altar dedicated to Thomas as well as the Memmi panel were activating a very lively cult at the Dominican convent. According to Cannon, the panel was in the area which was accessible only to the friars, but despite this it seems to have been the object through which the laity prayed for miracles. Cannon argues persuasively that the lay people knew the image well enough to

⁵⁵ Transliterations of the texts from the book-images are from Polzer 1993, 38–39. Translations KJB.
⁵⁶ *Doctor gentium in fide et veritate* and *Hic adinvenit omnem viam discipline*. Transliterations are from Polzer 1993, 39. The first sentence is from the Epistle of Paul to Timothy 2,7, but the source of the second was unknown to Polzer.

venerate it and donate many wax figures to it as *Annales* reports.⁵⁷ When one takes into consideration the way in which the books on Thomas's lap are depicted and how the people venerate them in the painting, it seems very probable that in Pisa Thomas's presence was emphasized with the texts he had written. The books were likely used to promote his saint cult just as body part relics did in other places.

In fact, there is other surviving written evidence of the devotional uses of Thomas's texts; especially interesting is a legend written after the translation of Thomas's relics to Toulouse. It explains that the Dominican Master Elias Raymundus, who did not yet have the rights to Thomas's body, ordered that every week a mass should be sung to Thomas and principal lectors of the Dominican convents had to read *Epistolas* of Peter and Paul and bachelors *Summa contra gentiles*.⁵⁸ I propose that the mass and reading of Thomas's writings aloud functioned as common prayers to transfer the relics into Dominican possession. In medieval understanding when the saint was present, it was hoped that he or she would mediate the supplicant's prayers to God. Reading the texts written by Thomas activated his presence and power in the same way that bodily relics did when a supplicant had them next to him/her.⁵⁹

If the Memmi panel strongly suggests that Thomas's books had achieved a relic-like status in rituals, the composition in the Carafa Chapel in Santa Maria sopra Minerva, the Dominican church in Rome, makes this status, in my view, absolutely clear. First, there are several books depicted in the paintings of the Chapel commissioned by Cardinal Oliviero Carafa in 1488.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Polzer 1993; Cannon 2013, 150.

⁵⁸ Toulouse, Ms. 610, p. 13.

⁵⁹ On the Office of Thomas dies natalis as an activation process when the Dominicans did not possess the Saint's body, see Räsänen 2017.

⁶⁰ The painter was famous Filippino Lippi whose role as well as other aspects of the decoration is abundantly studied. For further reading, and especially regarding Thomas's image in Lippi's paintings, see Norman 1993.

One of the themes of the paintings is the *Triumph of St. Thomas*, which had become quite common in late medieval Italian art after the Memmi panel.⁶¹ However, according to Polzer, the overall message of the composition highlights Thomas's role as a mediator of God's truth and interpreter of sacred and classical texts more than the Memmi panel.⁶² In Pisa Thomas's figure resembles *Maiestas Domini*, and in Rome he also sits on the cathedra, or throne, but there he is depicted in the same way and more or less in the same perspective as others around him. He has a book in his hand, which says, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise", referring to the false wisdom of malice.⁶³ The personification of theology points to the lunette of a building, partly a chapel or shrine, where one can see an open book located in the tondo. At the centre of the lunette of the chapel-like construction, the book in the tondo is in the position (the apse) where the *Maiestas Domini* usually was in medieval Italy. The book in the tondo is *Summa contra gentiles*, as shown again by the words we can see.⁶⁴ The image in Rome, like the two images discussed above, emphasizes the nature of Thomas's book as the word of God and even an embodiment of God. Placed high in the tondo in the lunette, in the place often reserved for representations of God, Christ and his mother, the book has a special meaning. It can be seen as a symbol of the Holy Church. In a sense the representation of the book was comparable to the *Maiestas Domini* theme, which provided the link between Thomas and the very essence of God already noticeable in the Memmi panel in Pisa. In sum, in Renaissance Rome Thomas's book was elevated to the position previously occupied only by biblical figures, Church Fathers and early martyrs.⁶⁵ The book in the tondo (and the very similar-looking book in his hand) represents Thomas himself, the presence of his sainthood and the

⁶¹ A good general analysis of the context and message of this particular fresco, see Geiger 1982.

⁶² Polzer 1993.

⁶³ *Sapientiam sapientium perdam*, I Corinthians 1,19. See Polzer 1993

⁶⁴ Polzer 1993, 50.

⁶⁵ On Thomas's cult in general in Renaissance Rome, see O'Maley 1974 and 1981.

wisdom in his texts. The book is the embodiment of Thomas, the object of veneration, even of the cult.

It was probably in Renaissance Rome that Thomas's book became established of open veneration and consequently understood as the relic that most fully represented him.

However, if we read Williams's *Ystoria* carefully we can recognize that it did attribute some kind of relic nature to Thomas's book. At one point William describes how the saint's hand transmitted saintly wisdom to the sacred book and how the hand remained worthy to write numerous works for the Christians with texts that led them to divine knowledge: "The hand which with the finger of intelligence opened the book in a spiritual way to the one who sat to the right of the throne."⁶⁶ Interestingly, the passage links the book and its text to Thomas's hand, which was the only body-part relic in Dominican possession at the time when the text was written.⁶⁷ Indeed, this is one of the rare passages in which William places emphasis on Thomas's activity as a writer, which gave holiness to Thomas's body. His explanation of why Thomas's book should have been considered a relic is, it appears, material: because the letters and words were a continuation of his hand and fingers, and because his saintly hand transmitted the power of God to the parchment.⁶⁸ The text echoes medieval views that saints' belongings and all material items connected to a saint's body, even after death, were considered representative relics. In fact, *Ystoria* gives us good reason to believe that Thomas's texts, at least in those cases when they were believed to have been written by the

66 William of Tocco, *Ystoria sancti Thome de Aquino*, cap. 70: *illum librum in spiritu digito intellectus aperuit quem de dextera sedentis in throno.*

67 The hand-relic was first given to Thomas's sister Teodora, the Countess of Sanseverino, in 1288 and it was later relocated to the Dominican convent of Salerno where it has since remained. See more in Räsänen 2017, 216–217.

68 William was not the only one who was interested in the relic nature of Thomas's hand. Later, for example, a famous reformer, Antoninus of Florence (1389–1459), visited the hand-relic in Naples and described its miraculous appearance. See an early testimony on the hand's special value from *Neapoli XLVI* and Antonino de Florentia, *Tertia pars historiarum CXCIIV*. On St. Thomas as the model for Antoninus, the famous reformer of Renaissance Florence, see Cornelison 2012, 22.

saint himself, were perceived and used as relics.⁶⁹ Possibly the use of books as relics began at the same time when the body-parts acquired their official status as relics, that is, from the day of canonization.

I would argue that William emphasized Thomas's hand because it was one of the rare body-part relics in the public possession of the Dominicans, and his writings because they were written by the very same hand. Equating the hand-arm-relic with the written text may thus have resulted from the situation when William wrote, when the Dominicans did not possess Thomas's corpse or other significant bone relics. So they seem to have started to venerate and use Thomas's books and part of books as they normally used bodily relics. They had plenty of Thomas's books: a special category of the text-relics, Thomas's autographs, were circulating in some numbers, for example in southern Italy.⁷⁰ A further factor that enabled Thomas's books to achieve a status equal to that of the body parts as relics may be that achieved a prominent role in the Dominican art of reform in medieval and Early Modern Italy. One of the most impressive examples of art works that praise Thomas's books and reform is in the

⁶⁹ A similar idea of the veneration of a book emerges from Alison Knowles Frazier's book, *Possible Lives*. Frazier illustrates a case in Milan some decades before the painting project in the Carafa Chapel started. Cardinal Brada da Castiglione was searching for material in relation to the reunification of the eastern and western churches in the library of St. Thecla. He found a manuscript which was allegedly an autograph of St. Ambrose, the Church Father and patron saint of the city. Milanese people got wind of the cardinal's departure from the city and his intention to bring the manuscript with him. The people rose up and prevented the theft of the manuscript; moreover, according to a contemporary eye-witness, they came close to killing the cardinal because they suspected that he had mutilated the manuscript by splitting it into pieces and was prepared to steal some of the bodily relics of Ambrose as well. Frazier indicates the several ways in which the contemporary perception of the book equated with the perception of relics in the minds of most people, including the most educated, in the fifteenth century. The book, together with St. Ambrose's bodily remains, was a vital part of their identity and cultural heritage in Milan and by their act they defended the Milanese way of living and self-understanding. See Frazier 2004, 1–7.

⁷⁰ Some surviving sources give an idea that the places where Thomas was working possessed some of his autographical writings and they may have been donated by them to other places. One example is mentioned in the article of Kaeppli, in which he describes how one autograph manuscript was transported from Naples to Bergamo by two Dominican friars in 1354. The manuscript was conserved in the Dominican Library of Bergamo until the end of the 18th century, and then moved to the Vatican Library (nowadays Vat. lat. 9850), see Kaeppli 1966. See also Taurisano 1924.

Carafa Chapel in Rome, as described above. The reform spirit and power of the books was perceivable not only from pictorial representations but three-dimensional objects, the books and their fragments. as we will see in the next section.

The cult of autograph books in Naples, Salerno and Aversa

Thomas's cult increased in popularity during the fifteenth century. The popularity seems to have grown especially in connection with the Church reforms but also in lay piety.⁷¹

Thomas's fame as a reformer and warrior against heretics were the most likely reason for the flourishing of his relic cults, including those of both body-part and book-relics in Early Modern Europe. Indeed, in Naples Thomas was elevated to take a place among the old saintly protectors of the town in 1605. His promotion was due to his orthodox doctrine, clearly defined by Pope Clement VIII (1592–1605). The Pope reminded people of the divine nature of Thomas's scripts and affirmed that with the help of the prayers of the new protector, powerful and merciful God would make all the bad things good and satisfying.⁷² Thomas's ability to combat heresy was considered important in the turbulent period when protestant movements were sweeping the Catholic cities. The same phenomenon, Thomas's newly recognized power and his elevation to the ranks of the saintly protectors, is identifiable in several European towns at the same time.⁷³ In addition to the image of the active soldier of Christ, Thomas retained his meditative side. In his orthodox faith, he was the perfect model of how to turn to God's help in prayer and contemplation.

71 Räsänen, forthcoming article A.

72 Ancient saints were Ianuarius, Athanasius, Asprenus, Agrippinus, Severus, Eusebius and Anellus. The bull of Pope Clement VIII on elevation is copied in the Acts of the General Order of Preachers, see MOPH 11, 187–188.

73 For example, according to a Toulousan advocate, Thomas's glorious body prevented heresy from entering the city and threatening the Holy Sacrament. Thomas's Eucharistic writings were believed to enforce his power against heresies, see Lavour 1628.

Thomas's presence among the Patron Saints of Naples took material form in his arm relic, previously lodged at the Dominican convent of San Domenico, but now translated in a silver casket to the high altar of the city Cathedral.⁷⁴ The translation took place on 20 January 1605, and in connection to the act Pope Clement emphasized the power of the arm against heresy.⁷⁵ The capacity of the arm to illustrate the sacred scripture and overthrow heresy had been a feature of William's and Bernard's *Vitae*, as noted above. In Naples, the precious arm-relic received a new feast day: Pope Paul V (1605–1621) gave detailed orders for its annual celebrations on 19 January. The festivities, as Paul promised, would be a part of the compensation for Thomas's protection against pestilence, famine, war and other disasters.⁷⁶

When the arm relic was translated to the cathedral of Naples, it appears that the Dominican friars kept a part of it for themselves. Surprisingly, the piece of the arm-relic remains in the background, almost as if it no longer existed, when studying the inventories and other sources from Early Modern Naples. It is the relic-book which takes a prominent role. Liber A in AGOP gives a schematic list of statues that contain a relic at the sacristy of the convent and among them is a statue representing St. Thomas which includes a piece of his arm bone.⁷⁷ The same document describes in a much more detailed manner Thomas's former cell, which was

⁷⁴ This arm-relic arrived in Naples from Toulouse in 1372. The relic donation seems to have been some kind of compensation to the Neapolitan friars, who had to give up their desire to have Thomas's body in the custody of the local convent. See Douais 1903 for the document of the relic donation in 1372, and Räsänen 2017 on the early history of Thomas's relics (ca. 1274–1372).

⁷⁵ AASS, Martii I, 741: "partem dexteri ejus brachii, quo scribente profligavit haereses et sacras litteras illustravit." MOPH 11, 189.

⁷⁶ The bull is edited in the Acts of the General Order of Preachers, see MOPH 11, pp. 192–193. Besides the arm relic in Naples, in Salerno the hand was forcefully promoted among the laity in the seventeenth century as part of the cult of the body-part relic. According to Théry 1930, 319, on 22 April 1662, Gonzales visited Salerno where he "retira du reliquaire où elle était enfermée la main de s. Thomas, pour la faire vénéreraux magistrats de Salerne, et afin commémorer ce pieux souvenir, institua une fête speciale."

⁷⁷ Rome, AGOP, XIV, Liber A pars II, f. 535r: "Di più vi sono diverse statue famosissime -- altra di S. Tommaso d'Aquino, dove si conserva il suo braccio, di palmi." See also Koudelka 1968.

transformed into a chapel and where the mass was celebrated. There were several reliquaries in the chapel, one being a large and well executed silver and gilded copper ostensory.

According to the description, it contained a book written in St. Thomas's own hand.⁷⁸

Nowadays this manuscript, once in the ostensory, is kept among the other manuscripts from the Dominican convent at the National Library of Naples (Ms. I. B. 54). The famous book is Thomas's copy on commentaries of Albert the Great on the works of pseudo-Dionysius.⁷⁹

One of the earliest mentions of the cult of Thomas's book-relic in Naples comes from the editor of the collection of saints' lives, *Acta sanctorum*, tome I of March, which was printed in 1668. The Bollandist Daniel Papebroch describes how he himself participated in Thomas's feast day festivities and venerated his relics some years earlier:

Moreover, there is a holy altar in the cell of Saint Thomas (transformed as a chapel). On the altar lies a book on Dionysius's celestial hierarchy which Thomas has written by his own hand. In the year of 1661 in Naples, on Thomas' feast day [on 7 March], we have honored each of these monuments.⁸⁰

78 AGOP, XIV, Lib. A pars II, f. 412v: "il volume scritto di proprio pugno da S. Tomaso sopra il trattato che fas[?] Dionisio de Coelesti Hierarchia, e tutto questo è di argento, e rame indorato."

79 We know only a little about the early history of the manuscript. It was copied by Thomas himself when he was Albert's student in the years 1245–1252. The manuscript belonged to the Dominican house of San Domenico Maggiore in Naples from Thomas' own days there. The hypothesis is that Thomas carried the manuscript to his home convent and left it there when he himself travelled around Europe. When the convent was suspended, the manuscript was transported with the rest of the convent's library to the Biblioteca nazionale at the beginning of the nineteenth century. One of the first mentions is by Caracciolo from his *Napoli Sacra* (1624), in which he describes San Domenico Maggiore: "In questo famoso tempio se serba il braccio dell' Angelico Dottor San Tomaso... In oltre vedesi un libro scritto dal detto Santo sopra san Dionigi De Coelesti Hierarchia." For a detailed description of the manuscript, see Théry 1931, 15–54. On the history of the ms., see Boyle 2000, 123 and more generally on the history of Dominican manuscripts in Naples, Kaeppli 1966, 30–53.

80 AASS, Martii I, 739. "Est praeterea cella S. Thomae piissimum sacellum commutate ubi et liber supra Dionysium de coelesti hierarchia, propria S. Thomae manu conscriptus, habitus. Nos ipsi anno MDCLXI Neapoli in festo S. Thomae existentes, singula ista monumenta venerati sumus."

According to Papebroch, the focus of the friars' veneration was Thomas's autograph manuscript and the cell itself. For a religious and scholarly inclined person, the veneration of the place where Thomas studied and wrote some of his most famous texts seems natural, as does devotion to the book.

Interestingly, it was not only Dominicans and scholars who were attracted by Thomas's manuscript in Naples. G. Théry, who has studied Thomas's Neapolitan autograph, has remarked that several seventeenth-century travel guides described Thomas's cell as a place worth visiting where one could see Thomas Aquinas's book.⁸¹ Théry also refers to other interesting early modern sources from the seventeenth to early nineteenth centuries and cites them frequently. According to these sources, Thomas's book relic was continuously venerated in his chapel. An eighteenth-century source, for example, describes the festivities of Thomas's feast day on 7 March, saying that the book in the ostensory was displayed at the altar, candles illuminated it and the Neapolitans came to venerate it.⁸² According to Vincenzo Maria Perrotta and his *Descrizione storica della Chiesa e del monistero di s. Domenico Maggiore di Napoli*, printed in 1828, the mass was celebrated in the chapel every day, but Thomas's feast day was an exceptional event: many foreign priests arrived in the city to visit and venerate Thomas's cell, and because of the pilgrims, "the famous manuscript of Saint Thomas was unveiled for the veneration of the faithful".⁸³ Théry's citation suggests that the relic-book was no longer kept on the altar of the chapel but moved to a safer place and presented to the faithful only in special occasions.

81 Théry 1931b, 18–19. According to the guides, numerous Neapolitans visited Thomas's chapel on his feast day.

82 Théry 1931b, 22.

83 Perrotta 1828, 136: "esponevasi alla venerazion de' fedeli il celebre manoscritto di s. Tommaso."

Another illustrative example comes from Aversa, not far from Naples. A source describes how the Dominican convent of the town conserved

a book with the second volume of the sentences written by Thomas' own hand as a precious relic. On 7 March [1720], on the day which was dedicated to angelic doctor Thomas Aquinas, a feast especially for the book is organized in the Dominican church.⁸⁴

Based on this record, all the students of the town arrived in a procession to listen to the divine office and the sermon in the saint's honour. They also offered a big white candle as a gift to the saint.⁸⁵ Interestingly, the above quotation emphasizes that the liturgical feast was given explicitly for the book, which would therefore have been the central object of veneration on that day.

Reading Théry's words, it is difficult to say whether the first Neapolitan guide books are referring to Thomas's autograph more as a curiosity object than as a relic for a larger audience. Step by step, the book seems to have become an important relic of lay devotion. The practices of veneration of the book-relics are similar to those for the saintly bones, which certainly was a good strategy to emphasize the nature of the books to anyone who was not yet aware of their relic value. Seemingly, Thomas's book had become popular and famous, and

⁸⁴ Rome, AGOP, Liber GGG, pars II, f. 682v–683r: “In questo medesimo luogo conservasi anco[ra] come preziosa reliquia un libro, che contiene l'esposizione sopra il secondo libro delle Sentenze, scritto di propria mano del nostro Angelico Dottore S. Tomaso di Aquino, per il quale libro li 7 marzo, giorno dedicato al santo, si fa in questa chiesa, particolar festa.”

⁸⁵ Rome, AGOP, Liber GGG, pars II, f. 682v–683r. In his article in 1931c, 326, footnote, Théry adds that the manuscript in question was the third part of Thomas's *Sentences*. When Théry wrote his text the manuscript was conserved in the Vatican Library, nro. 9851. In addition, Kaeppli gives a shelfmark Vat. lat. 9851: see Kaeppli 1966, 9. According to Uccelli, the manuscript was a gift of Charles d'Anjou to the convent of Aversa.

possibly to emphasize its preciousness it was moved from the altar to a safer place. If this removal was done, its purpose was also very likely to protect the manuscript from relic thieves and other collectors.

There are examples of the autographs being broken up to increase the number of relics, just as happened with saints' corpses. Théry read this as a sign that Thomas's autographs had the same success as the body-part relics, to the point that there were fears of Thomas's books being destroyed completely. Leonard Boyle has stated that the autograph manuscript at San Domenico had been plundered for souvenirs and relics from the sixteenth century onwards. Another example of a book which was split up to the point of being lost is in the Museo del Duomo of Salerno.⁸⁶ At the beginning of the 1930s, at the time when Théry studied the manuscript, it was conserved in one side chapel of San Tommaso d'Aquino, the Salernitan Dominican church. In the Chapel, it was inside the altar, behind bars and inside a reliquary.⁸⁷ The manuscript consisted 65 folios, and according to Théry, the division had happened before 1662, when a general vicar Antonio Gonzales foliated it.⁸⁸ In any case, in 1693 the Dominican Master General ordered that this and other reputed autographs in the area of Naples be shown respect: "by no pretext or argument shall any folios or parts of folios from the manuscripts be taken away."⁸⁹ The order's main purpose was probably to conserve the manuscripts as complete as possible, but it may also have been intended to prevent a dubious practice that sometimes led to magical uses of parchment pieces as amulets.⁹⁰

86 Boyle 2000, 124.

87 Théry 1931c, 311.

88 Théry 1931c, 312, 318, 319.

89 "ne quocumque praetextu aut ratione folia, aut folium quodlibet, aut partes folii ex iisdem manuscriptis aut extrahant aut extrahere permittant". Théry 1931c, 335, seems to think that the manuscript at the San Tommaso of Salerno was not in fact Thomas's autograph, but that the Dominican master had just added single words here and there. It is also important to remember that in Milan people rioted when they thought the cardinal had stolen and ripped up St Ambrose's autograph, see the footnote 69.

90 On this practice, see Skemer 2006.

Ecclesiastics in Catholic areas apparently saw Protestant heresy as the biggest threat to Early Modern people. They forcibly promoted the cult of Thomas Aquinas, who was presented as the greatest opponent of all kinds of heretical ideas.⁹¹ In southern Italy, where there were some body-part relics, all pieces from different parts of Thomas's arms and hands, his autographs became very important as they were seen as the continuation of the part of the body that acted against heresy. The above description of religious and lay veneration of Thomas's book in his chapel in San Domenico Maggiore closely resembled the descriptions of the festivities organized to celebrate Thomas's body part relics. It is plausible that both religious and lay people perceived Thomas's manuscripts as a very functional (and material, as they were a physical embodiment of God's truth) remedy for the threat posed by heretics. Although the laity fervently venerated Thomas's autographed texts, some practices, like for example the translation of the relic-arm in the main church of Naples or the festivities organized by the governors of Salerno for the local arm-relic, hint that the bones remained the main focus of lay piety. At the same time, the sources strongly indicate that the Dominican friars of southern Italy were even more orientated to veneration of the book-relics than Thomas's bones. It would be interesting, if difficult, to study whether the pieces cut from Thomas autographs were used especially as portable and personal relics to protect the owner from sins of heresy.⁹² I presume that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Thomas's writings were read aloud publicly in churches everywhere in the Catholic realms to promote

⁹¹ Thomas's image as the persistent adversary of heretics seems to have been one reason why he was selected as the Protector of the confraternity of the book printers and binders in Rome in 1600. The confraternity was founded to control the profession and book circulation. Obviously, the purpose of the supervision was to prevent the spread of the seditious printed material of the Protestants, see *Statuti* 1674.

⁹² In the case of St. Francis's autograph, brother Leon (the thirteenth century) is said to have carried the manuscript with him all the time. In the fifteenth century, Abbess Eustochia of Messina was buried with the books that allegedly belonged to St. Claire. The book was presumably used for her protection in death as well in life. See Bertrand 2006, 373–374. Talismanic uses of all types of relics were, and still are, common.

not only his cult but the (counter-) Reformation. This is a topic that would be interesting to explore further in the future.

Conclusion

The books as material objects or their representations in art were perceived as Thomas's embodiment and presence in those places where they were presented. These books or pieces of parchment were understood as holy objects, relics, as they were an extension of Thomas's sacred right arm and the fruit of the writer's achievement as a voice of God and his holies. It seems that the books were more than just contact relics, being regarded as continuations of the body, just like body part relics. They were also an incarnation of Christ, interpreted by Thomas. Thomas was a special author as he had close contact to his subject, that is Christ; and the subject himself had approved some of Thomas's texts. In his closeness, Thomas belonged in the same reality as Christ and his followers, the apostles. From this perspective, he was very natural choice for the early reformers to emphasize as a model for all Christians.

My contention is that Thomas's autographs were used alongside his body-part relics and in a similar way in a much earlier period and on a larger scale in observant reform than we can demonstrate with the surviving sources. I have managed to find solid evidence of this kind of practice only from the post-medieval period and in connection with the Catholic reformation. In the seventeenth century Thomas's autographs appear to have a prominent position among the other relics in the area of Naples. There are presumably many reasons for the success of the book relics. From the viewpoint of the ongoing Church reform, the fact that the books contained doctrinally solid material probably helped to sustain the reform effectively. The

books described the ideal world, the world that the reform was intended to realise. In addition, the widespread criticism of the saints and their relics by protestant movements was a serious challenge to the Catholic party. In this situation, books that were approved as genuinely written by a saint who had indisputably been flesh and blood, and who could not be represented as a remote and imagined personification from ancient times, and who was a relatively respected master even among the Catholics' adversaries, were perceived as the perfect relics.

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