

# Experiencing the Miraculous: Lived Religion in the Depositions

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## 1 Introduction

On the morning of 4 October 1307, a youth called Nicholas Piscatoris traveled from his home village in the parish of How Caple and entered the chapel of Saint Catherine in Hereford Cathedral. The seventeen-year-old boy stepped in front of the papal commissioners – esteemed bishops and a papal tax collector<sup>1</sup> – and swore an oath to tell the truth about his miraculous resurrection. He was asked to recount what he knew about the miracle and started his reminiscing: it all took place one Saturday, some eight years ago, he did not remember the month but estimated that it was around the time people collectively made pilgrimages to Saint Milburga of Wenlock. He had been asked to take care of his father’s cow, a reddish-brown animal with a star on its forehead. The cow was not properly domesticated, and when Nicholas was searching for a stick to tame the animal, he went onto his father’s boat, slipped into the water, and drowned. Obviously, as the case ended up in a canonization hearing, this was not the end of the story. In death, he was measured for the former local bishop, Thomas Cantilupe,<sup>2</sup> so that a wax image as a counter gift to the saint

1 The hearing of the life, merits, and miracles of Thomas Cantilupe was held from 13 July to 13 November 1307 in London and in Hereford. The commissioners in charge were William Durand, bishop of Mende; Ralph Baldock, bishop of London; and William de Testa, a papal tax collector. They were well educated and learned in canon law and papal administration. Robert Bartlett, *The Hanged Man: A Story of Miracle, Memory, and Colonialism in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 16–21 and 126–38. Writing and open-access publication of this chapter has been funded by The Swedish Literature Society in Finland’s *Lived Religion in Medieval Finland* project.

2 Thomas Cantilupe (1218–82) was a member of England’s high nobility. He was an educated man and had studied canon law and theology in Paris and civil law in Orleans. After returning to England, he taught law and theology at the University of Oxford, where he also worked as chancellor. Before achieving the episcopate in 1275, he held several canonries and was an archdeacon in Stanford. He was the bishop of Hereford until his death in 1282. For the details of his life and cult, see Ronald C. Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995 [1977]), 135–37 and 173–88, as well as

could be made. After this he was miraculously revived. He was then taken to Thomas's shrine as a token of gratitude. The gratitude of Nicholas's family was so strong that from that day forward they embarked on an annual pilgrimage to the shrine. The event remained famous enough that the proctor summoned Nicholas's family members to give their testimony during the hearing on the life, merits, and miracles of Thomas Cantilupe.<sup>3</sup>

Focusing primarily on this one case, this chapter seeks to understand how the experience of the miraculous was constructed in a deposition made for a canonization. Lived religion – religion as social process – provides an interpretative frame, while memory and narrative formation offer the specific perspectives through which the research was undertaken. The canonization process of Thomas Cantilupe is eminently suitable for this kind of analysis for its unique character: among medieval canonization processes, it is one of the most, if not the most, judicially accurate hearing containing long and detailed depositions. Several witnesses were interrogated for each case, and we are able to read their version of the event in the form through which they expressed their memories

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André Vauchez, *La Sainteté en Occident aux derniers siècles du Moyen Âge. D'après les procès de canonisation et les documents hagiographiques* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1988 [1981]), 257, 338, 463. See also the chapter by Adelheid Russenberger in this volume.

3 The Cantilupe process has not yet been edited; the edited selection of records in AASS Oct. I is not reliable and should not be used as a sole source in an academic work. The records are fully preserved in one manuscript in the Vatican Library (MS Vat. lat. 4015), while miracles scrutinized in the process can also be found in MS Vat. lat. 4017 and Oxford, Exter College Ms 158. The *relatio* of the process is found in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS Vat. lat. 5373A, fols. 66r–126r. The scholarship utilizing this process is, however, quite large; see especially Ronald C. Finucane, "Pilgrimages in Daily Life. Aspects of Medieval Communication Reflected in the Newly Established Cult of Thomas Cantilupe (d. 1282), Its Dissemination and Effects upon Outlying Hereford Villagers," in *Wallfahrt und Alltag in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit*, eds. Gerhard Jaritz and Barbara Schuh (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1992), 165–217; Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims*; Jussi Hanska, "The Hanging of William Cragh: Anatomy of a Miracle," *Journal of Medieval History* 27 (2001): 121–38; Bartlett, *The Hanged Man*; Sari Katajala-Peltomaa, *Gender, Miracles and Daily Life: The Evidence of Fourteenth-Century Canonization Processes* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009); Andrew Fleming, *The Cult of St Thomas Cantilupe and the Politics of Remembrance* (St Edmund Hall: Unprinted PhD in History, 2013); Harriett Webster, "Mediating Memory: Recalling and Recording the Miracles of St Thomas Cantilupe," *Journal of Medieval History* 41.3 (2015): 292–308, DOI: 10.1080/03044181.2015.1048977; Ian Bass, "Communities of Remembrance: Religious Orders and the Cult of Thomas de Cantilupe, Bishop of Hereford (1275–82)," *Journal of Medieval Monastic Studies* 7.3 (2018): 237–72, DOI: 10.1484/JJMMS.5.116571; Ian Bass, "St Thomas de Cantilupe's Welsh Miracles," *Studia Celtica* 53.1 (2019): 83–102, DOI: 10.16922/SC.53.6. See also the collection of essays in Catherine A. M. Clarke, ed., *The St. Thomas Way and the Medieval March of Wales: Exploring Place, Heritage, Pilgrimage*. Series Places and Spaces, Medieval to Modern (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020).

and constructed their narratives at the inquiry. In Nicholas's case, there were six witnesses: Nicholas himself; his father, Johannes; his mother, Lucia; a neighbor named Cristina; Nicholas's maternal aunt Felicia Morker; and Walterus de Caple, the rector of the church of How Caple.<sup>4</sup>

Several depositions offer a multisided perspective of the case, and the long depositions add further value. The testimonies themselves were guided by the inquisitorial committee's questionnaire, but, unlike in many other contemporary processes, the questionnaire was not formed by either the proctor's *articuli* or the *Interrogatorium*, the papal ruling on questions that would validate the witnesses' quality of knowledge. In the Cantilupe process, by contrast, the list of questions was formed by the commissioners themselves and was, in the end, a mixture of typical *articuli* and *Interrogatorium*. There were only four main *articuli* – on life, *fama*, miracles, and local devotion, respectively – and each contained several sub-questions. The other questions focused on ways of knowing and technical details, as proposed in the papal *Interrogatorium*.<sup>5</sup> In addition to answering to this questionnaire, the witnesses were permitted to narrate their version of the event; this enables comparison between the different perspectives offered during the process.

## 2 Experience within Lived Religion

“Lived religion,” the conceptual frame for this chapter, is an active social process – the things people do, feel, and sense within the field of religion.<sup>6</sup> It is a way to live, interact, and participate in one's community. While lived religion overlaps to some extent with an earlier thematic field known as “popular religion” – such as through rituals, symbols, and performances – it is, however, distinct from it. Popular religion is typically used to denote either the religiosity

4 BAV MS Vat. lat. 4015, fols. 157v–65v.

5 BAV MS Vat. lat. 4015, fol. 3v. See Sari Katajala-Peltomaa and Jenni Kuuliala, “Practical Matters: Canonization Processes in the Making,” in *A Companion to Medieval Miracle Collections*, eds. Sari Katajala-Peltomaa, Jenni Kuuliala, and Iona McCleery (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 78–101, for the details of these questions.

6 On conceptualizations of lived religion, see, for example, Meredith B. McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); John H. Arnold, “Histories and Historiographies of Medieval Christianity,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Christianity*, ed. John H. Arnold (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 23–41; Sari Katajala-Peltomaa, *Demonic Possession and Lived Religion in Later Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 2–4; and Sari Katajala-Peltomaa and Raisa Maria Toivo, *Lived Religion and Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2021), 1–21.

of the common people or “folkloric” elements in religion;<sup>7</sup> it was predicated on assumptions about the existence of strong polarity and differences between clerical and lay culture. Lived religion starts from entirely different premises. Here, religiosity or culture is not seen as a top-down process or as based on polar opposites. There is no intention to draw a clear distinction between the culture of the elites and that of the lower strata, since saints and miracles were inherent in both theological ponderings and the daily lives of lay Christians. Canonization hearings are by their very nature a nexus of various cultural spheres: theology and canon law as well as hagiography, a literary genre that shaped their content. Members of the educated elite acted as commissioners, but local officials influenced the practicalities. Furthermore, the focus of these hearings was on “ordinary” Christians who were testifying about their miraculous experiences.

“Lived religion,” as it is conceptualized in this chapter, corroborates the findings of American sociologists of religion who have argued that people never adopt religious systems in their coherent totality or as a given; rather, people choose and perform parts that are suitable for them in their daily life. Thus, lived religion can be understood as religion in action – a dynamic process through which theology and dogma were commingled with elements of daily life. Interaction with a saint offered people a performative space for communal participation and manifestation of their position in it. Lived religion was simultaneously personal and private, on the one hand, and shared, public, and visible to others on the other. Active reminiscing of past divine grace and forming, negotiating, and reshaping narratives of those memories were a crucial way to “live out” one’s religion.

When analysing details of lived religion and experiences of the miraculous in a canonization process, it is important to bear in mind that the depositions are not objective replicates or recitals of past events. There were many influences on the final dossier and its contents: the requirements of canon law and the miracle genre, the act of interrogation, the inquisitorial committee’s

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7 On the conceptualization of popular religion, see Laura A. Smoller, “‘Popular’ Religious Culture(s),” in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Christianity*, 340–56. On the historiography of popular culture and popular religion, see Gábor Klaniczay, “‘Popular Culture’ in Medieval Hagiography and in Recent Historiography,” in *Agiografia e culture popolari. Hagiography and Popular Cultures*, ed. Paolo Golinelli (Bologna: Clueb, 2012), 17–44. The strong polarity and differences between clerical and lay culture were stressed by Jacques Le Goff, *Pour un autre Moyen Âge. Temps, travail et culture en Occident* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977), while continuity rather than disjunction is stressed, for example, in Aron Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Perception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

preferences, and the witnesses' recalled memories of the past event and personal rhetorical choices.<sup>8</sup>

This essay begins with the premise that experiences are always mediated.<sup>9</sup> The inextricably intermingled nature of personal piety and memories, cultural conventions, and religious traditions lies at the core of this analysis. The miraculous was experienced as a holistic phenomenon that cut across the individual, communal, and cultural. Here the focus is on the whole process of the miraculous – from that spring Saturday when Nicholas' accident took place to the moment when he and his family testified in front of the papal commissioners, putting their oral narratives and memories into a recorded form.

### 3 “When We Had That Reddish-Brown Cow with a Star on Its Forehead ...”: Narrative and Memory Forming the Experience

There is a general consensus among scholars that canonization records tell us about the past in a mediated form, given the processes of selection, reshaping, and molding in their creation.<sup>10</sup> Importantly, not all of the cases or witnesses were accepted for interrogation. For example, in the Cantilupe process the selection criteria were clear and rather strict. More than 450 miracles were written down in the records kept at the shrine, but in the canonization process only approximately 40 were approved for full investigation. The commissioners clearly favored to scrutinize publicly witnessed accidents that resulted in miraculous resurrections for signs of sanctity.<sup>11</sup> Nicholas's case fits into these

8 For these methodological issues with references to previous scholarship, see the introduction to the volume.

9 For a critical view of “simplistic ground of immediacy that fails to register the always already mediated nature of cultural relations and the instability of the subject who is supposedly the bearer of experiences.” Martin Jay *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 3. See also Joan Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” *Critical Inquiry* 17.4 (1991): 773–97; and Sari Katajalla-Peltomaa and Raisa Toivo, “Introduction: Religion as Historical Experience,” eds. Sari Katajalla-Peltomaa and Raisa Toivo, *Histories of Experience in the World of Lived Religion* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92140-8\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92140-8_1).

10 For claims made in earlier scholarship about hearing the unmediated, “live” voice of the witnesses – the unprivileged who in other types of sources are nearly mute – see Paolo Mariani, “Racconto spontaneo o memoria costruita. Testi a confronto in alcuni processi di canonizzazione del secolo decimoquarto,” *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Moyen Âge* 108 (1996): 259–319; and Michael Goodich, *Violence and Miracle in the Fourteenth Century: Private Grief and Public Salvation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 9.

11 Katajalla-Peltomaa, *Gender, Miracles, and Daily Life*, 163. On methods of selection in the case of Vincent Ferrer, see Laura Ackerman Smoller, “Choosing Miracles for Vincent Ferrer,”

parameters, but only partially because there were no direct eyewitnesses to his drowning or to the invocation of St. Thomas. Attempts to revive him were also limited to a rather small circle of people.

In this process, witnesses were also selected carefully beforehand. In addition to the six witnesses specifically interrogated about the drowning and miraculous resurrection of Nicholas Piscatoris, almost 200 other witnesses made depositions during the Cantilupe hearing. Some of the witnesses were interviewed several times, and altogether 223 depositions were recorded in the dossier.<sup>12</sup> Of the 205 witnesses, only 44 were women, and poor people's testimonies were on occasion treated with open suspicion. Canon law raised both gender and poverty as obstacles to those giving testimony. In many instances, a local cleric was interrogated simply to certify the public repute of other witnesses; good reputation was one of the main criteria required by canon law.<sup>13</sup> In Nicholas's case, the cleric Walterus de Caple, rector of the church of How Caple, stated that the witnesses to the case enjoyed good reputations in their parish.<sup>14</sup>

In the Cantilupe process, witnesses were required to reply to a preset list of questions, yet they were also free to form their own narrative of the event.<sup>15</sup> Often several years – and in Nicholas's case, seven or eight years – had passed

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in *Miracles in Medieval Canonization Processes: Structures, Functions, and Methodologies*, eds. Christian Krötzl and Sari Katajalla-Peltomaa (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), 75–104.

- 12 Identification of witnesses is sometimes unclear due to inconsistent orthography and lack of details. See Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims*, 177; and Katajalla-Peltomaa, *Gender, Miracles and Daily Life*, 7–8 and 29.
- 13 Testimony of witnesses of *infamia* was forbidden. Christian Krötzl, “Kanonisationsprozess, Socialgeschichte und Kanonisches Recht im Spätmittelalter,” in *Nordic Perspectives on Medieval Canon Law*, ed. Mia Korpiola, Publications of the Matthias Calonius Society 2 (Helsinki: Gummerus, 1999), 19–39, esp. 21–22; Christian Krötzl, “Prokuratoren, Notare und Dolmetscher. Zu Gestaltung und Ablauf der Zeugeneinvernahmen bei spätmittelalterlichen Kanonisationsprozessen,” *Hagiographica* v (1998): 119–40, esp. 122–23. Thomas Wetzstein, *Heilige vor Gericht. Das Kanonisationsverfahren im europäischen Mittelalter* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2004), 65–66. A concrete example in the Cantilupe process is Hugo le Barber testifying to his own miraculous cure of blindness. Since he seemed devote and was already elderly, there was no need to suspect his testimony due to his poverty, as the commissioners estimated. BAV Vat. lat. 4015, fols. 28v–29r.
- 14 BAV MS Vat. lat. 4015, fol. 165r.
- 15 See Nicole Archambeau, *Souls under Siege: Stories of War, Plague, and Confession in Fourteenth-Century Provence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021), 18 et passim for depositions as “crafted narratives,” which were repeated yet vivid at the moment of interrogation. See also Laura Ackerman Smoller, *The Saint and the Chopped-Up Baby: The Cult of Vincent Ferrer in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), 86–93. Cf. Didier Lett, *Un procès de canonisation au Moyen âge. Essai d'histoire sociale, Le nœud gordien* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2008), 10 and 234–35.

between the incident and the interrogation; this affected the reliability of details offered in the narratives. The act of recording also shaped the depositions. Personal acts, emotions, bodily signs, and sensations are described in the depositions, but primarily only those that were crucial for verifying the miracle. Furthermore, the oral narrative of events given in the vernacular was translated not only into Latin but also into a standardized judicial language by notaries to meet the papal curia's administrative needs.<sup>16</sup> Even with these kinds of "filters" in place between the medieval miraculous experiences and the modern reader, the depositions nevertheless offer an excellent view into lay lived religion.

To analyse the experience of the miraculous, we need to return to that spring Saturday in the Herefordshire village of How Caple. Nicholas, his father, and his mother all began their depositions with details about the cow. For a family of fishmongers, the cow likely was important in an economic sense, and thus these details were remembered eight years later.<sup>17</sup> More importantly, however, the details given about Nicholas searching for a stick to train the untamed animal was the key starting point for the chain of events that followed; it thus acted as a fixed element in recollections of the accident. Storytelling is one way to make memories more persistent, and it seems that the details about the reddish-brown cow had become part of the family memory: an established way to begin the story of Nicholas's accident and his miraculous resurrection. Testimonies about miracles in canonization processes generally were crafted as chronological narratives: they had a starting point, like the accident, and a sequence of events leading to the manifestation of divine grace. The required turning points were the desperate situation beyond human help, the invocation and the vow, the sudden recovery, and the rituals of thanksgiving. Each "stage" also required the production of emotions as active performances: desperation, humility, devotion, and thankfulness.<sup>18</sup> All of the steps were part of the proper performance of and proper narrative about a miraculous recovery. Thus, they were also parts of reliable testimony given in a judicial inquiry.

16 Vauchez, *La Sainteté en Occident*, 5–6. Laura Ackerman Smoller, "Miracle, Memory, and Meaning in the Canonization of Vincent Ferrer, 1453–1454," *Speculum* 73 (1998): 429–54, here 430–31. For standardization of testimonies done by the notaries to turn the spoken recollection into a written judicial deposition, see Lett, *Un procès de canonisation*, 265.

17 Ownership of animals, like cows or bulls, can be found as a narrative element in other court records as well. Bronach C. Kane, *Popular Memory and Gender in Medieval England: Men, Women, and Testimony in the Church Courts, c. 1200–1600* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2021), 233.

18 On the emotional stages of a miracle, see Katajala-Peltomaa, *Demonic Possession and Lived Religion*, 85–86.

The hagiographic genre, and more specifically the miracle genre, undoubtedly affected the way witnesses in canonization processes conceptualized their miraculous experience, remembered it, and formed a narrative of it. Modern psychologists working with memory have found similar general trends: when stories of past experiences are created and re-created, culturally available storytelling forms or genres are adopted and adapted.<sup>19</sup> According to Michael Goodich, miracles had achieved the status of literary genre during the Middle Ages, and thus contained institutionalized discursive qualities with both fixed and optional elements. Signposts – a series of customary clichés, as Goodich calls them – helped the participant to recognize an event as a miracle and to formulate a narrative account of it.<sup>20</sup> The contrast is clear, for example, when compared to inquisition trials in which the unfolding of the testimonial narrative tended to be less ordered and chronologically structured, focusing instead only on certain events and details.<sup>21</sup>

So, Nicholas was searching for a stick on his father's boat. Unluckily for him, the wooden deck was slippery and he fell into the water. He could not swim, so he prayed to the Virgin Mary and Saint Thomas for help. Unfortunately, he prayed in his customary way – aloud. When he opened his mouth, he sensed the water flowing in and then he drowned, as he explained at the interrogation. The next thing he remembered was waking up at home. The last question the commissioners asked, since Nicholas looked faint, was whether he was as healthy after the accident as he had been before it. Nicholas replied no, explaining that before drowning he neither felt burdened nor had a weight on his heart, as he currently did. The commissioners added their estimation of his

19 Alistair Thomson, "Memory and Remembering in Oral History," in *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History*, ed. Donald A. Richie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 78–95.

20 Michael Goodich, "Filiation and Form in the Late Medieval Miracle Story," in idem, *Lives and Miracles of the Saints: Studies in Medieval Latin Hagiography* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004), 307–9. On typical elements of a miracle narrative, see also Gábor Klaniczay, "Ritual and Narrative in Late Medieval Miracle Accounts: The Construction of the Miracle," in *Religious Participation in Ancient and Medieval Societies: Rituals, Interaction and Identity*, eds. Sari Katajala-Peltomaa and Ville Vuolanto (Rome: Institutum Romanum Finlandiae, 2013), 207–23, esp. 211–14. Both Goodich and Klaniczay have used the analytical categories of folktale proposed by Vladimir Propp as the basis of their categorization. These categorizations have not, however, taken into account the role of memory and reminiscing in the construction of miracle narratives.

21 For a comparison of these processes and inquisitorial methods in canonization hearings, see Gábor Klaniczay, "The Inquisition of Miracles in Medieval Canonization Processes," in Krötzel and Katajala-Peltomaa, *Miracles in Medieval Canonization Processes*, 43–74. See also Saku Pihko's chapter in this volume.

character at the end of his deposition: the boy was simple-minded – *simplex erat multum*.<sup>22</sup>

The word “simplex” may have been a reference to the physical and cognitive results of his drowning, but Nicholas was not the only witness assigned this label during the Cantilupe process. Some first-hand witnesses were also described similarly. This does not seem to have been a problem if these witnesses provided a coherent narrative of past events that was corroborated by other witnesses and that fit the inquisitorial committee’s expectations.<sup>23</sup>

Details were important for creating a proper, trustworthy testimony. The years that had passed between the event and the interrogation may have wiped specific details from memory, leaving some witnesses unable to measure up to the standards of the inquisitorial committee. The depositions in canonization processes typically do not offer information on how the memories were shaped, and the amount of free narrative varied from one canonization process to another. Sometimes the narrative of the miraculous cure was already offered in the *articulus*, and thus was created before the interrogation. The witness at the interrogation could then mainly corroborate that narrative or admit that they did not know all the details.<sup>24</sup> In other cases, the interrogation dialogue is blurred in the dossier and several testimonies are recorded together in a synthesis. The meticulous recording methods used in the Cantilupe process, by contrast, offer a glimpse into how the recollections were turned into a narrative.

Memories or experiences do not exist in solitude, outside of the community and broader culture, as surrounding values are internalized and utilized to give meaning to past events. Furthermore, cultural ideas and beliefs, circulating narratives, and even the experiences of others can be incorporated into autobiographical memories. This sometimes happens without one being aware of the process. Consensus within a community, such as belief in the supernatural protective powers of the local intercessor, increases the probability of such processes taking place.<sup>25</sup> Instead of “authentic” memories and

22 BAV MS Vat. lat. 4015, fol. 158v.

23 For example, in the drowning of Johannes Drake, the father was also described as “valde simplex homo,” BAV MS Vat. lat. 4015, fol. 142v, but his testimony was accepted, while the testimony of Iuliana de Lude, who was described as simple-minded and oblivious, was cut short, fol. 219v.

24 See, however, the chapter of Laura Ackerman Smoller in this volume for witnesses’ ability to add personal details in their depositions in this kind of hearings.

25 Vladimír Bahna, “Memorates and Memory: A Re-evaluation of Lauri Honko’s Theory,” *Temenos* 51.1 (2015): 7–23, compares ethnographic theory of “memorate,” a personal experience narrative, and psychological understanding of autobiographical memory; it argues

experiences becoming muddled with traditions and social norms, the latter are – to a certain point – internalized and a natural part of the personal experience. A deposition made at a canonization hearing thus can be seen as a multi-authored narrative: Nicholas' personal perspective embodied narratives of his own memories mixed with the demands of the miracle genre, the preset questions asked by the inquisitorial committee, and, finally, the act of recording the narrative in a preestablished format and style.<sup>26</sup>

Individuality nevertheless is part of the narrated experience in a deposition. This is clear, for example, in one of the last questions posed to Nicholas. The commissioners wanted to know whether he saw someone or something as he was drowning. Plausibly, this was a way of asking whether he had seen a vision of the rescuing saint without putting direct words into his mouth. A saint saving a drowning person underwater was a topos from late antiquity, while visions of saints were part of the hagiographic genre in general. These literary models could have been internalized to the point that they became elements of lived religion. In the Cantilupe process, several beneficiaries testified to seeing a vision of a saintly figure during their miraculous experience.<sup>27</sup>

At the time of his accident, Nicholas was an eight-year-old boy and may have been too young to form a narrative that included a vision immediately after the accident, but such elements may have become part of his later narrative.<sup>28</sup> A similar case can be seen with Adam de Kylpek's miraculous recovery from blindness. He was only five when he was cured at the shrine

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for plasticity of human autobiographical memory and the role of cultural transmission creating it.

- 26 Michael Goodich calls these "layers" concentric circles, each circle adding new authors participating in the composition. Goodich, "Filiation and Form," 306–7. See also Klaniczay, "Ritual and Narrative," 211–12. On possible moulding done by the notaries, see Lett, *Un procès de canonisation*, 265. See also Smoller, "Miracle, Memory, and Meaning," 430–31. On narratological analysis of court records of witchcraft trials, see Raisa Toivo and Liv Helene Willumsen, "A Narratological Approach to Witchcraft Trial Records: Creating Experience," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 47.1 (2022): 39–61, DOI: 10.1080/03468755.2021.2014953.
- 27 Visions were a complicated matter; they could certify the performer of the miracle, but there was no way of certifying the vision itself. They gave a lot of autonomy and initiative to lay visionaries and could be troublesome for the clergy controlling the saint's cult. See Jonas Van Mulder, "The Prosaic Supernatural: Representation and Function of Lay Visionary Experience in Miracle Collections from the Low Countries," in Krötzel and Katajala-Peltomaa, *Miracles in Medieval Canonization Processes*, 257–83, and Jonas Van Mulder, "The Mobilization of Thought: A Narratological Approach to Representations of Dream and Vision in Late Medieval Miracle Collections in Low Countries," in Katajala-Peltomaa et al., *A Companion to Medieval Miracle Collections*, 299–326.
- 28 See Bahna, "Memorates and Memory," for personal experience narrative borrowing from cultural tradition.

of Thomas Cantilupe. Yet, a key part of his miracle narrative was the vision of a man touching the boy's eyes with his priestly clothes, which cured him. This was a well-known detail and still mentioned by several witnesses nearly twenty years after the incident. An important role in the formation of that narrative was played by dominus Gilbertus, then the shrine's custodian. He had prepared a bed for Adam, who spent some nights at the shrine hoping for a recovery. The vision took place on the third night. According to Gilbertus, Adam had shouted at dawn that a man had appeared to him. This man was dressed in clothes similar to those of the boy's late uncle, a priest.<sup>29</sup>

Gilbertus was a cleric, and his corroboration validated both the detail and the vision.<sup>30</sup> Nicholas's case, by contrast, took place at home among lay witnesses. Another detail may have also helped in creating Adam's vision and his ability to remember the details later on: his uncle had just been buried in priestly clothes. This event undoubtedly enabled Adam to envision such a thing in the first place and helped him to remember the details later. Indeed, Margeria, Adam's mother, offered a more detailed testimony of the vision than the visionary himself did, even though she had not accompanied her son to the shrine.<sup>31</sup>

A living memory of the event in question was a prerequisite for a case to be interrogated and witnesses to be summoned; there needed to be an element of public fame concerning the event before it could be investigated and recorded in an *inquisitio*-type hearing. Accidents and subsequent recoveries were obviously memorable events, all the more so if the victim was deemed dead and the resurrection was interpreted as divine grace. Memory is a crucial constituent of the experience; it gives meaning to the present – much like Nicholas's simple-mindedness. Memory also guides anticipation for the future, like the Piscatoris family's ongoing pilgrimages. Experience of the miraculous thus requires more than individual reminiscence of the event. Memories constantly interact with the surrounding society's cultural values, such as perceptions of

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29 “circa auroram dictus Adam in predicto lecto clamantem et dicentem quod quidam vir indutus talibus vestibus quales habebat quidam presbyter eiusdem Ade avunculus quando fuit cum ipsius vestibus sepultus.” BAV MS Vat. lat. 4015, fol. 237v.

30 BAV MS Vat. lat. 4015, fol. 237v. Other witnesses corroborated: “Et publice ac communiter referebatur eundem Adam habuisse nescit quam visionem prope tumulum.” BAV MS Vat. lat. 4015, fol. 237r.

31 According to Margeria, the clothes were “vestes presbyterales albas cum cruce ante et retro,” while Adam himself stated only that the figure was “hominem indutum sicut indutur sacerdotes vestibus albis.” BAV MS Vat. lat. 4015, fol. 235r and 235v.

saints and miracles.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, we may partly agree with Didier Lett, who claims that social dominion is prevalent in the depositions.<sup>33</sup> This does not mean that personal memories cannot be traced, but rather that it is impossible to draw a distinct line between the personal and the social – memories are not static but repeatedly constructed.<sup>34</sup>

In the case of the Piscatoris family, the construction of memories occurred through repeated narratives as well as bodily actions in the form of pilgrimages. Shared remembering created a shared comprehension of the event: the participants shared a similar set of cultural tools – rituals and narratives – that made the remembering collective. Memories of Nicholas's miraculous resurrection were a process: the details of importance were negotiated and contested but also reinforced by repeated rituals. The miracle of Nicholas was well known in the area, and many witnesses testified. Walterus de Caple, the rector of the parish church, was also familiar with the case, having commonly heard of the incident, as he testified, even if he was still studying in Canterbury at the time it took place.<sup>35</sup>

#### 4 Interaction with the Saint

Meanwhile, on that spring Saturday, back in the village of How Caple, Johannes and Lucia were not alarmed when Nicholas failed to return; they thought he had gone to play with his friends after taking care of the task assigned to him. They learned what had happened only hours later when a beggar's child informed

32 Thomson, "Memory and Remembering in Oral History"; and Donald A. Richie, "Can Memory Be Collective?" in Richie, *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History*, 96–111.

33 Lett, *Un procès de canonisation*, 10 and 234–35.

34 Collective memory is a form of memory that is shared by a group and of central importance to the social identity of the group's members. See James V. Wertsch and Henry L. Roediger III, "Collective Memory: Conceptual Foundations and Theoretical Approaches," *Memory* 16.3 (2008): 318–26, DOI: 10.1080/09658210701801434; Henry L. Roediger III and Magdalena Abel, "Collective Memory: A New Arena of Cognitive Study," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 19.1 (2015): 359–61; Jacob J. Climo and Maria G. Cattell, "Introduction: Meaning in Social Memory and History: Anthropological Perspectives," in *Social Memory and History: Anthropological Perspectives*, eds. Jacob Climo and Maria Cattell (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 2002), 1–36; James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992). The seminal works in the field of social memory are Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), and Elisabeth Tonkin, *Narrating Our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

35 BAV MS Vat. lat. 4015, fol. 165r.

them. The child had been on the other side of the river with his mother, and they had seen what happened. Delivering the message to Nicholas's parents took time. Together with Cristina and Felicia, the other witnesses to the case, the parents ran to the river and discovered a lump of clothes in the water. They understood that it was Nicholas. According to Johannes and Lucia's depositions, they collapsed to the ground and nearly lost consciousness due to the pain of losing their son. Someone needed to sprinkle water on their faces to help them recover.

Desperation before divine help was a prerequisite for a miracle; it was a part of the miracle process and an indispensable part of the proper narrative. Obviously, despair and anguish are quite normal at the scene of an accident, yet they needed to be expressed in a suitable mode at an interrogation. Collapsing to the ground, and especially the father losing consciousness, stands out as quite an extreme way of laying the foundation for a miracle. Both parents described the situation vividly: they explained that their intestines were shaken (*commotis visceribus*), which caused their collapse. Lucia added that this emotional upheaval was due to her motherhood.<sup>36</sup> While the signs of desperation at the accident scene were part of the miracle genre in general, these narrative elements could be expressed in a very personal way.

The entire group involved in Nicholas's death was teary-eyed and invoked Saint Thomas to resurrect him. The mother touched the boy's face and mouth to check if he was breathing. Nicholas's eyes were open but unmoving. He did not breathe and his limbs were cold and rigid like wood. He gritted his teeth tightly. Cristina made similar observations. Johannes tried to open Nicholas' teeth and mouth with his knife but could not – the boy was dead, as Cristina rather bluntly noted. To touch a victim of drowning may be a quasi-automatic reflex: to discern the situation, check if something could be done. For the witnesses closest to Nicholas, it was also a way to concretize and comprehend what had happened: the rigid limbs and tightly gritted teeth created a lasting mental image, one that could be repainted at an official hearing years later. Emotional arousal may have helped them to remember these details, but at the same time they generated a feeling of reliability for the testimony.<sup>37</sup>

36 "ipsa testis videns dictum filium suum mortuum commotis maternis visceribus fuit quasi ex animis collapsa in terram." BAV MS Vat. lat. 4015, fol. 161r; "ipse testis post eam dolorem facere nequintes commotis visceribus collapsi fuissent ad terram quasi ex animis et demum perfusi aquam infacie ad se ipsos redussent," fol. 159r.

37 Psychologists argue that memories of events that involve emotional arousal tend to be more vivid and detailed. When narrated, they generate a feeling of reliability; at the same time, though, this kind of memory is more liable to include misinformation. Bahna, "Memorates and Memory," 7–23.

The commissioners were not interested in the emotions for the sake of empathy or sensory experiences at the scene of the accident as such. Rather, the signs of death were important for validating the miracle: they certified that Nicholas had been truly dead before the divine intervention.

At this point Lucia took a piece of thread from her purse and measured her child for Saint Thomas, asking him to bring Nicholas back to life so that they would not have to suffer the scandal of raising the hue and cry.<sup>38</sup> Measuring was a concrete yet ritualistic act: victims were measured for the saint so that a wax image or a candle of desired size could be made. The ritual communicated an unspoken promise to take this wax image to the shrine; in other words, it was a promise to undertake a pilgrimage with an oblation.<sup>39</sup> The hue and cry, *hutesium id est clamore*, in turn, was a legal obligation for the founder of a person accidentally killed or a murder victim. The hue and cry notified other members of the community; hence, they knew to come to the accident scene and fetch the coroners.<sup>40</sup> This detail in the depositions also served to certify the state of affairs – Nicholas was truly dead. Simultaneously, her emotional response – not only sorrow but also the sense of shame – was meaningful for Lucia; they were individual elements of her later reminiscing and construction of the experience. Other witnesses mentioned neither this reasoning nor the detail as part of their recollections.

Invoking a saint in a moment of despair is one way in which religion was lived out in daily life, but the depositions are not unanimous about the rituals. Cristina claimed that it was she and Felicia Morcker, not Lucia, who measured Nicholas for Saint Thomas. They not only invoked Saint Thomas but also prayed to the Virgin Mary with her child to console them in their sorrow over losing Nicholas. The witnesses agreed, however, that all the participants prayed – on their knees with tears in their eyes (*flexis genibus cum lacrimis*) – for the boy's recovery. Obviously, tearful prayers and invocations are a sign of devotion and spirituality, but they also illuminate the social aspects of religion: they may have been the only remedial option available to the parents and the others. In other words, they were a coping mechanism that offered hope and

38 “... quod non paterentur cum scandalo eorum levari hutesium,” BAV MS Vat. lat. 4015, fol. 161v.

39 Wax images and pilgrimages were the most typical counter gifts mentioned in the depositions at canonization processes and can regularly be found across various parts of Europe. Sari Katajala-Peltomaa, “Devotional Strategies in Everyday Life: Laity’s Interaction with Saints in the North in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries,” in *Lived Religion and the Long Reformation in Northern Europe c. 1300–1700*, eds. Sari Katajala-Peltomaa and Raisa Toivo (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 21–45.

40 Barbara Hanawalt, *The Ties that Bound: Peasant Families in Medieval England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 11–12.

consolation. Such ritual expressions manifested not only personal emotions but also social expectations.<sup>41</sup>

Contradictory details are not exceptional in depositions. Individuals tend to stress their own role when retelling memories. This may have been done on purpose because of vanity, but often it was unintentional.<sup>42</sup> However, contradictions may also point to the way a miracle was comprehended, and the invocation as a crucial element became part of individual personal memories. Attention was paid to this detail in the hearing since, in the judicial context, it held fundamental value: it validated the performer of the miracle and the legitimate means of invocation. The person invoking the saint and their words of invocation, the people present, and the witnesses' way of knowing these details were all part of the basic formula of the *Interrogatorium*.<sup>43</sup>

The invocation details were important for canonization processes and were often recorded in a mode of direct quotation and first-person speech.<sup>44</sup> The customary way of invoking Saint Thomas, however, was the measuring ritual. As a result, direct quotations of invocation were not regularly recorded in the Cantilupe process. The legitimacy of invocation was nevertheless important, and the commissioners wanted to certify certain essential details. In addition to the details of the drowning and recovery, the details of the invocation ritual itself were interrogated to determine whether some sort of fraud had taken place in the miracle, and whether in Nicholas's recovery demons were invoked, or incantations or superstitious things or sorcery performed. Even this was not enough: the commissioners continued to ask whether natural or artificial help was used around the time of the miracle. The witnesses all replied in the negative, with his father explaining that Nicholas was rescued only by divine grace operating through the merits of Saint Thomas.<sup>45</sup>

41 On common kneeling, BAV Vat. lat. 4015, fol. 128r; fol. 138r; fol. 145r.

42 On similar discrepancies in the testimonies of canonization hearings, see Smoller, "Miracle, Memory, and Meaning," and Hanska, "The Hanging of William Cragh," 121–38.

43 "ad cuius inuocationem et quibus verbis interpositis," Wetzstein, *Heilige vor Gericht*, 539, with the commentary, 337–41; see also Sari Katajala-Peltomaa and Christian Krötzl, "Approaching Twelfth- to Fifteenth-Century Miracles: Miracle Registers, Collections, and Canonization Processes as Source Material," in Krötzl and Katajala-Peltomaa, *Miracles in Medieval Canonization Processes*, 1–39.

44 Direct quotations can be found even in cases where the witnesses do not include the beneficiary himself. They could have been hagiographic reformulations and not direct evidence of past speech acts. See Gábor Klaniczay, "Speaking about Miracles: Oral Testimony and Written Record in Medieval Canonization Trials," in *The Development of Literate Mentalities in East Central Europe*, eds. Anna Adamska and Marco Mostert (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 365–95; and Klaniczay, "Ritual and Narrative."

45 "Item requisites si circa operacionem dicti miraculi intervenerunt fraus vel dolus aut machinacio aliquius ut dictus Nicholas fingeretur submersus mortuus vel resuscitatus

The prayers at the riverbank proved to be futile. Nicholas was carried home and his parents started preparations for the funeral. Johannes wanted to shut the boy's eyes – it would not be good to bury him with the eyes open, he estimated. While he was doing so, though, Nicholas cried out for help.<sup>46</sup> Lucia declared that her drowned son twice shouted “*Dulcis domina, adiuva, sancte Thoma, adiuva.*” The commissioners considered these words to be so important that they wanted further clarification, asking which lady she thought the boy meant. Lucia replied that he had invoked the Lady of Heaven, since it was a local tradition to plead for the Holy Virgin's help using those words.<sup>47</sup>

Obviously, the first signs of life were a crucial turning point. They were a vital element in the memories that constructed the miraculous experience and thus an essential part of the narratives of those memories. Indeed, each of the eyewitnesses remembered and mentioned them, and they all claimed that they were present at this critical moment and heard those words. However, Lucia and Johannes, Nicholas's mother and father, insisted that they were alone at the time of his revival. Likely, this turning point in the miracle process had become such a fixed element in the narrative that people who may have only heard about it second-hand remembered it as a part of their personal experience. This detail and these words were eminently important in the judicial context, too; they thus were recorded verbatim and helped to validate both the performer of the miracle and the actual invocation.

## 5 Corporeal Memories

While there clearly was a collective memory of Nicholas's accident and miraculous resurrection, the narratives offered at the interrogation reveal fractures in the remembering of it: the experience was at the same time shared but colored with individual details. Each of the participants presented a coherent chronological narrative of the chain of events and their own interpretation of them. They did not present contradicting views about the elements that constructed

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et non fuisset et si fuerunt pro eius resuscitacione demones invocati vel incantaciones vel supersticiones vel sortilegia facta aut si res naturales aliquid vel artificiales cooperate fuerunt circa miraculum predictum.” BAV MS Vat. lat. 4015, fol. 160v. In the preset list of questions, the use of herbs, stones or other natural or medicinal things was interrogated as well as the use of incantations, superstitious means, or frauds. For the list of questions, see fols. 4v–5r and for the translation of them Katajala-Peltomaa and Kuuliala, “Practical Matters,” 100–1.

46 BAV MS Vat. lat. 4015, fols. 159v, 161v, 163r, and 164v.

47 BAV MS Vat. lat. 4015, fol. 162v.

a miracle: signs or duration of death or the entity invoked. The witnesses did, however, personalize the occurrence by emphasizing different details and their own role in them. Cristina and Nicholas's parents disagreed about who did the measuring and who was present at scene of resurrection. Similar discrepancies can be found in descriptions of the rituals of thanksgiving.

Interaction with a saint can be seen as gift exchange. While praying for help, the petitioner makes a vow, a binding promise to offer something to the heavenly intercessor in exchange for a recovery or rescue. In the Cantilupe process, the vow was often implicit and took the form of a measuring ritual. A counter-gift was an important element in the interaction with a saint: it was a way to negotiate with the heavenly intercessor, to thank him or her for the recovery and to manifest gratitude. It also enabled an independent religious action, since theology and church teachings did not dictate directly how a saint's favor should be pleaded for or rewarded. Votive offerings thus can be interpreted as a way to personalize religion. The church *did* regulate the interaction with a saint, however, demanding that a promise made to a saint be made good. To leave a vow unfulfilled was a sin. Since all offerings demanded time, effort, and money, promises to a saint should not be given lightly. In addition to theology and personal taste, local custom also dictated a major part of the interaction.

In Nicholas's case, the pilgrimage seems to have formed the most crucial part of the counter-gift, and its description is particularly detailed. Nicholas's family embarked on a journey to the shrine after a few days – “next Tuesday,” as they all mentioned – once Nicholas was strong enough to travel. Indeed, young Nicholas traveling a distance of six *miliaria* (ca. 9 kilometres or 5.5 miles) after a near-death experience was considered to be further proof of the miracle. Nicholas's parents informed their neighbors immediately after his recovery, and some – or many – of them accompanied them on the pilgrimage.<sup>48</sup>

Cristina saw the thanksgiving ritual in a different light. She not only emphasized the community's role but also gave the joint pilgrimage a ritualistic nature. Cristina claimed that all the local parishioners accompanied the parents to the shrine after the miracle, implying that it was a collective performance.<sup>49</sup> She likewise stated that Nicholas was taken to the shrine

48 “ipse Nicholas, propriis pedibus cum patre et matre ipsius et aliis viciniis venit ad tumulum dicti domini Thome.” BAV MS Vat. lat. 4015, fol. 160r; “venit cum patre et matre et cum aliis multis peditando,” fol. 162r.

49 “ipsa Cristina et communiter totus populus dicte parochie venerunt processionaliter sicut venire consueverant aliis annis dicto Nicholao in processione existente [...] ad ecclesiam Herefordensis.” BAV MS Vat. lat. 4015, fol. 163v.

*processionaliter*. Processions were a widespread form of devotion but did not represent spontaneous expressions of religious fervor because they required prior planning. Furthermore, processions were not led by lay people but rather by clerical authorities who took the initiative to organize them. Processions typically took place on certain feast days or in order to placate God in the face of a natural disaster, like drought or flooding. It seems likely that no official procession was organized in the parish of How Caple to give thanks for Nicholas's miracle. The miracle itself took place on the day before Pentecost, and officially ordained processions generally took place on Rogation Days, which fell close to Pentecost – and thus to this pilgrimage for Thomas.<sup>50</sup> It is possible that a common procession was an annual habit in the parish, as Cristina described, but Cristina may have mixed up two different occasions.

Cristina also may have been a bit careless in her wording or unable to express the religious event accurately. It seems that official ceremonies were part of the pilgrimage, but they took place at the shrine and not in the parish. Once the pilgrims reached Hereford Cathedral, the canons questioned them. Then, the bells chimed, people were called into the cathedral, and, according to Lucia, a procession was made and the miracle published. Nichols was presented to the people at the shrine as a token of the miracle. All those present hearing this and seeing Nicholas then glorified God and Saint Thomas, as the depositions state.

Having this moment in the spotlight in the cathedral amidst the benevolent attention of local clergy was likely a memorable event for a family of fishmongers. Furthermore, the proceedings at the shrine certified their experience: Nicholas was indeed miraculously resurrected and a beneficiary of divine grace. These details had a similar function for the inquisitorial committee: an increase in devotion was an indispensable outcome of a genuine miracle. The entire congregation glorifying God served as validation, and these details were duly recorded in the depositions. The narrative elements of personal reminiscing and judicial significance corroborated each other in the construction of an experience of the miraculous.

Pilgrimages were an essential element within lived religion: they offered a way to interact with the heavenly intercessor and to participate – and even to take an initiative – in religion. When connected to a miracle, they were a

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50 Jussi Hanska, *Strategies of Sanity and Survival: Religious Responses to Natural Disasters in the Middle Ages*, *Studia Fennica Historica* 2 (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2002), 33–41 and 49–63. The rituals of Rogation Day were to secure harvest to gain a prosperous year. The feast of Milburga, which Nicholas mentioned in his deposition, is 23 February; thus, he likely did not have the timing right.

corporeal way to tell of the experience to the surrounding community and to the pilgrims themselves, too. As bodily practices, they were highly personal yet visible and public at the same time.<sup>51</sup> Travel to the sacred place was an opportunity to reminiscence about the grace gained – sensory perception is important in forming and reinforcing memories – but pilgrimages as public rituals served also to anchor the date in collective memory.<sup>52</sup> Pilgrims themselves were tokens of gratitude and mementoes of divine grace, especially if the ritual was repeated annually, as it was by the Piscatoris family. According to Lucia, the entire family engaged in commemorative rituals after the revival: they made a pilgrimage once a year to the shrine of Saint Thomas. The repeated pilgrimage created an emotional tie to the past and bridged the past and the present. For Nicholas, Johannes, and Lucia, the annual pilgrimage was a way to live out their religion, to reminiscence and negotiate the meaning of their experience. Indeed, Nicholas may have been simple-minded, weak, and fragile, as defined by the inquisitorial committee, but he was also alive and participated in the rituals with his parents. He was a living heir in a society of high child mortality and a beneficiary of divine grace, a miraculé.

## 6 Conclusion

The depositions given in canonization processes reflect the participants' way of living out their religion; they shed light on devotional practices, the production of emotions and narratives of faith. The commingling of spirituality and social needs – the core of lived religion – is evident, for example, in the methods of resolving a difficulty: Nicholas prayed twice for help from the Virgin Mary and Thomas Cantilupe: immediately after he fell into the water, and then again at the moment of recovery. The other participants resorted to heavenly help as well, measuring the drowned boy for Saint Thomas – even if

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51 Pilgrimages were a persistent practice within Christianity and had multiple functions during the Middle Ages. The scholarship dedicated to them is vast. On their interconnection to miracles, see Lee Ann Craig, "Pilgrimage as Feature of Miracles," in Katajala-Peltomaa et al., *A Companion to Medieval Miracle Collections*, 164–85; and Christian Krötzl, "Miracles au tombeau – miracles à distance," in *Miracle et Karāma*, ed. Denise Aigle, Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études Sciences Religieuses 109; Hagiographies médiévales comparées 2 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 557–76.

52 On religious feasts and pilgrimages as markers of memory, see Kane, *Popular Memory and Gender*, 11; the role of senses to create memories was acknowledged in the learned treatises of the era and embodied experiences were seen as a means to remember the past: 83–85.

the situation seemed to be beyond help. After Nicholas's recovery, pilgrimage to the sacred place became part of their coping mechanism, a way to manifest their gratitude and to offer a counter-gift to the saint. For the Piscatoris family, this was not a one-time event but instead a permanent part of their relationship with the local heavenly patron. The repeated rituals and perpetual devotion were their way of living out their religion and reliving their memory of Nicholas's miracle.

Memory of the incident lived on in the community. It was so well known that the local priest was familiar with it even though he was not present in the parish when the accident occurred. The depositions offer a glimpse into the way memories of the incident may have lingered on. An important aspect of this was undoubtedly the repeated pilgrimages; as public deeds they were visible to other community members, a constant reminder of the incident and an emblem of the Piscatoris family's identity as beneficiaries of divine grace. Religion-in-action entailing both faith and practice guided the activities, directed their interpretation, and offered a rationale and justification for the event.

As collective reminiscing, narratives that were repeated time and again were also part of the experience. They seem to have some fixed elements at the family level, like the reddish-brown cow, the primus motor of the chain of events. Nevertheless, it is more than likely that the memories of that spring Saturday altered as the years passed. Memories do not stay the same; rather, as memory studies in the field of psychology claim, we recreate our memories each time we reminisce and narrate them. Narrative tradition, in turn, influences an individual's memories and enables cultural transmission for and within personal experience. The meaning of the experience was negotiated and recreated by the family that narrated the event and embarked regularly on a pilgrimage, as well as by the community that kept the memory alive and participated in spreading information about the event. The entire Christian culture contributed in creating the experience of the miraculous by providing the framework and significance for the chain of events.

Depositions cannot reveal the immediacy of experiences, but they offer an excellent window into internalized cultural conventions and the various negotiations of giving meaning. Reminiscing about a past event was also part of religion in action for the Piscatoris family; it was a way to renegotiate and affirm the experience. The experience of the miraculous in the depositions comes forth as a shared social phenomenon cutting across the individual, the communal, and the cultural.