

Abstract

In 1250 the chronicler Matthew Paris had noticed a boom in English sanctity where ‘it seemed therefore to be a time of renewal, in which everyone was made full of the spirit of all the saints’. This revival of saintly virtues continued in motion until 1320 with the canonization of Thomas de Cantilupe. What is neglected, however, is that this resurgence of saintly religiosity was manifested almost wholly in the canonization of *sancti episcopi* – holy bishops. Between the martyrdom of Thomas Becket and the canonization of Thomas de Cantilupe, England and Ireland accounted for more than sixty percent of bishops canonized within all of Christendom, a trend which calls out for consideration, since many scholars have noted it, yet never sought to explain it fully. This dissertation uses many of the primary sources available in order to examine three of the bishops who were canonized during the period (Thomas Becket, Wulfstan of Worcester and Thomas de Cantilupe) in order to see if they conformed to or exhibited any cohesive ‘model’ of sanctity. It also examines Stephen Langton, one of the bishops around whom a local cult developed, but who did not receive a process of canonization, in order to show how bishops changed how holiness could be perceived and exhibited. It asks why so many of these men attained holiness in England, whereas in the rest of Christendom other types of saint took precedence. Ultimately, as with any work on the saints of medieval England, this study shows how the borders between the living and the dead in the Middle Ages were always blurred, and how the ordinary people of the time sought solace in the cult of the saints.