

ses, bringing light into the darkness by incorporating fragments of dance. And the lines themselves have an almost physical quality: throughout the play they are projected above the actors' heads like some supervisory power, so that one alternately reads and listens to them. Rarely has Jan Lauwers formulated the beauty of pain so acutely as in *King Lear*. He will undoubtedly take that fundamentally human story further still.

PAUL DEMETS

Translated by Tanis Guest.

History

Truth or Legend? Thomas Becket in Flanders

When, in 1164, Archbishop Thomas Becket opposed the arrogations the English King, Henry II of the Plantagenets, placed on the English church, he incurred the wrath of both the royal court and the English clergy. Who did he think he was? Despite his modest origins, as the chancellor and friend of the King he possessed incredible power and luxury. Having been catapulted to the position of Primate of All England in the space of a few days, in the view of the bishops and abbots he had earned hardly any credit as the defender of their interests.

Thomas Becket fled England to plead his case with Pope Alexander III and the French King, Louis VII. Only after six years of laborious negotiations was he able to effect a return to Canterbury. One month later, on 29 December 1170, four of Henry II's knights struck him dead in the cathedral. The grave of this new martyr drew thousands of pilgrims to Canterbury for centuries.

Was Thomas Becket also known in Flanders during his lifetime? His first significant visit to the county dates from 1163, when, in full regalia, he was welcomed by Count Philip of Alsace as he proceeded to the Council of Tours. He had certainly maintained good relations with Chancellor Robrecht van Aire since the Treaty of Dover.

In November 1164 he landed as a refugee, tired and spent, on the beach at Oye. He found accommodation at the nearby town of Gravelines, and then went to the abbey of Clairmarais. After three days of lying low in the marshes, he was warmly received at St Bertin's Abbey in the town of St Omer. He quickly travelled on to France in the company of Godescalc, Abbot of St Bertin, and Milo II, Bishop of Terwaan (now Thérouanne). Count Philip, who had promised to help him in time of need, did not intercede.

During his exile in Pontigny and Sens, Count Philip of Alsace made several attempts to bring about a reconciliation with the English King. It was mainly his chancellor who pressed for this; in 1168 Becket called him '*his only friend in time of adversity*'. The diplomatic negotiations took place at a very high level and



Anonymous Flemish Master,
*Portrait of St Thomas of
Canterbury*. 17th century.
St Trudo's Abbey, Male. Photo
Stedelijke Musea, Kortrijk.

often in secrecy. When the agreement had finally been signed and Becket was able to return to Canterbury, he bade his Flemish friends farewell in the castle at Guines. He embarked for England from Wissat at the end of November 1170.

After Becket's death and canonisation (1173), pilgrims soon began to make their way to Canterbury, not only from England but also from the Continent. For example, in 1179 Philip of Alsace visited the grave of the English saint in the company of King Louis VII of France, who begged for a cure for his ailing son Philip August. On a broader European scale superb works of art were made in honour of this popular saint, and his relics became widely distributed. For example, the monastery of Dommartin got its hands on one of Becket's surplices, still stained with his blood. Pilgrims who could not afford the crossing to Canterbury went to this monastery to beg for his assistance.

Geoffrey Chaucer, who died in 1400, included various Flemish elements in his *Canterbury Tales*. 'The Pardoner's Tale' is set in an inn '*in Flaunders*', and one of the tales' most colourful figures is Sir Thopas, born in Poperinge.

Medieval pilgrims' badges with pictures of Thomas Becket have been found in Flanders and the Netherlands. In Ypres a splendid ampulla was found on which the saint's burial is depicted. Flemish miniaturists have illustrated Becket's murder in numerous books of hours, often destined for English customers. Ghent and Bruges were the leading centres of production of what are now world-renowned miniatures.

We know nothing of the origins of the veneration of a twelfth-century chasuble, maniple and stola in Groeninge Abbey in Kortrijk. Intensive examination of the fabric has been able to establish its date, but these relics are only mentioned in writings from the seventeenth century on. Is there a possible connection with the medieval Chapel of St Thomas which was once part of the fortress at Kortrijk, and which was demolished at the end of the fourteenth century? Chasubles of St Thomas were also venerated at the Abbey of St Nicolas des Prés near Tournai, in the Abbey of the Dunes and in the beguinage in Diksmuide. Their origins are unclear. The legend telling of St Thomas' dedication of the chapel at the count's castle in Male is attributed to Jan van Ieper or Iperius, a fourteenth-century chronicler at St Bertin's Abbey.

In the sixteenth century Henry VIII established Anglicanism in England and forbade the veneration of St Thomas of Canterbury. By contrast, Catholics who had fled from England brought their saint to the attention of the Flemish, supported in this by the Counter-Reformation. Several fine seventeenth-century portrayals of St Thomas of Canterbury are still preserved, one in St Trudo's Abbey in Male. He is depicted in a bishop's robes and usually with a sword across his skull. At the abbey in Hemiksem his portrait was included in a gallery of Cistercian saints.

The veneration of the saint flared up for a third time in the nineteenth century, when there was a marked revival in Christianity after the anticlimax of the French Revolution. The foundation of countless monasteries, and new churches and church ornamentation brought new popularity to several saints, such as St Rock, who was invoked against the plague and infectious diseases. The cult of St Thomas of Canterbury persisted in several places, including La Motte-au-Bois, Diksmuide and Male. His veneration at La Motte-au-Bois also had its roots in the Middle Ages, when a castle of the counts of Flanders was established there. And as far as Kortrijk is concerned, in the nineteenth century it was discovered that the Goethals family possessed a few fragments of a thirteenth-century illustrated life of St Thomas. The manuscript is attributed on stylistic grounds to the English monk Matthew Paris and was quoted by Thomas Stapleton, a sixteenth-century Catholic scholar who had fled England and worked in Douai and Leuven. It was only recently that the present owner lent these extremely valuable parchments to the British Library, where they form part of Loan no. 88.

GREET VERSCHATSE

Translated by Gregory Ball.

Thomas Becket in Flanders: Truth or Legend? was the title of an exhibition held in the chapel of Groeninge Abbey in Kortrijk in Spring 2000. A scholarly catalogue was also published (Project leader: I. de Jaegere). St Thomas' medieval chasuble is on permanent display in the dormitory at Groeninge Abbey. Information: Stedelijke Musea / Broelkaai 4 / 8500 Kortrijk / Belgium / Tel.: +32 56 240 870 / Fax: +32 56 240 871 / e-mail: musea.stadkortrijk@kortrijk.be

FURTHER READING

BACKHOUSE, J. and C. DE HAMEL. *The Becket Leaves*. London, 1988.

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From Boer War to South African War

A century ago, the whole world was following events in South Africa with intense interest. Two small Afrikaner Boer republics were fighting there for freedom and justice against the British Empire. They refused to bow to imperialism, to the arrogance and tyranny of a world power. The Boers displayed great courage, achieving unexpected victories against their much more powerful enemy. They were heroes, who were ultimately brought to their knees only by concentration camps and the threat of genocide.

The image of South Africa has been determined for generations by such memories of the Boer War. Until, that is, apartheid undermined the credibility of the Afrikaners and a new image of their past emerged. How does the new South Africa of today remember the war of 1899-1902?

For Afrikaners of the time and for a long time afterwards, the Boer War was their second war of liberation in the unequal struggle against Great Britain. The British Empire was accused of a century of injustice. The British had arrived at the Cape as protectors in 1795, but this was quickly forgotten, and after the Napoleonic era the Cape remained in British hands. A process of forced Anglicisation of administration and education, of the Church and the judiciary followed. The colonial masters also turned the social order on its head, by placing the servant above the master. As a result, from 1834 onwards thousands of Boer families, their meagre possessions piled on ox-carts, set off with their sheep and oxen into the untamed wilderness of Africa. Their Great Trek was the exodus of a people in search of freedom and independence. The Voortrekkers endured all manner of dangers in the vast interior, facing attack by wild animals, unknown diseases and fearful natural phenomena. They also encountered resistance from native tribes: place names such as Blood River and Winburg speak volumes. No sooner had they acquired some space, freedom and security for themselves, however, than jealous Britain annexed their Republic of Natalia.

Once again the Voortrekkers took to their ox-carts. They carried all their worldly possessions over the steep Drakensberg mountains and established the Orange Free State and Transvaal Republic on the end-