

Rituals as Performative Tools for Persuasion: Henry II's 1174 Pilgrimage to the Shrine of St Thomas in Canterbury



Michele Seah*

University of Newcastle

In 1174, Henry II, king of England, undertook a pilgrimage to visit the shrine of St Thomas at Canterbury. This act was widely acknowledged as an additional penance by the king in expiation for his perceived guilt in the 1170 murder of Archbishop Thomas Becket of Canterbury, who had since been canonised as the aforesaid St Thomas. With some notable exceptions, the king's visit to this shrine has garnered little scholarly attention and been dismissed either as superficial and politically expedient or as wholly propagandist in intent. This article aims to explore the use of medieval pilgrimage as a performative tool for persuasion. It examines the king's pilgrimage and compares it with contemporary expectations of penance and penitential pilgrimage. While doing so, it references persuasion as a framework to re-visit and reassess the king's motivations for embarking on a pilgrimage to this particular location. It argues that the personal and the political dimensions cannot be considered mutually exclusive for medieval kings and that we can use religious rituals as an additional way of understanding how they managed their public personas and personal aspirations. Pilgrimage as performative ritual was a highly effective tool for persuasion that could be employed in the service of medieval politics and public relations. It thus offers additional entry points into our understanding of twelfth century politics and public relations, and the tools that could be used for their management.

On 29 December 1170, Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, and former Chancellor of England, was murdered in his cathedral by four knights of the

* I wish to thank the anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggestions. They were extremely helpful and useful.

household of King Henry II of England. Popular cultural tradition has it that Henry, in anger and frustration following years of sustained quarrelling with Becket, had bellowed the phrase 'Will no one rid me of this turbulent priest?', thus setting in motion an event that ended with the archbishop's death.¹ A widespread perception that the king was to blame either directly or indirectly for Becket's killing meant that it was broadly held that Henry could not be free of his guilt until he had performed appropriate penances.² A settlement was eventually agreed upon between the king and the papacy, which included a set of conditions that had to be fulfilled for the king to be absolved and reconciled to the church. Two public ceremonies were held at Avranches and Caen a few days apart in May 1172 to publicise the king's acknowledgement of his guilt and his acceptance of the conditions laid upon him. Two years later, in July 1174, Henry undertook a pilgrimage to Canterbury to visit the tomb of St Thomas, the now-canonised Becket. This journey has commonly been regarded as additional expiation for the king's part in the archbishop's murder and for some scholars, this event marks the end of Becket's story in relation to Henry.³

Neither the imposed penances of 1172 nor the king's pilgrimage in 1174 has been interrogated in detail in any biographical works on Thomas Becket and Henry

¹ Elizabeth Knowles, trans., *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, 7th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). See Frank Barlow, *Thomas Becket* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986), p. 235 for the contemporary words said to have been uttered by Henry.

² John T. Appleby, *Henry II, the Vanquished King* (London: Bell, 1962), p. 183; Anne J. Duggan, *Thomas Becket* (London: Arnold, 2004), p. 221; W. L. Warren, *Henry II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), p. 519.

³ Barlow, *Thomas Becket*, p. 270. For an overview of Thomas Becket's life, see Frank Barlow, 'Becket, Thomas (1120?-1170)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

II. For instance, Frank Barlow's and John Guy's well-regarded biographies of Becket consider the settlement at Avranches to be evidence of the king's political ability to extricate himself from difficult situations and the penitential pilgrimage as no more than a hypocritical, even duplicitous, gesture.⁴ Likewise, W. L. Warren's voluminous study of Henry II deals with the penances in a single sentence each, a clear indication that he viewed them as events that were either insignificant or closed cases.⁵ The underlying subtext in these non-treatments is that Henry's motivations in participating in these events could only have been underscored with propagandist intent.

Nevertheless, there have been key exceptions, such as Anne Duggan's work examining the king's penances within the context of his conscience, and Thomas Keefe's discussion of Henry's many pilgrimages to Canterbury beginning with the first in 1174.⁶ In contrast to those scholars who regarded the penances as purely political propaganda exercises, Duggan argues that the penances should instead be read as evolutions of Henry's conscience. While not wholly discounting the diplomatic aspects, she saw the differences in the king's actions during the events of 1172 and 1174 as manifestations of the king's spiritual journey, one that resulted in

⁴ Barlow, *Thomas Becket*, pp. 260–2, 269–70; John Guy, *Thomas Becket: Warrior, Priest, Rebel: A Nine-Hundred-Year-Old Story Retold* (New York: Random House, 2012), pp. 336–8.

⁵ Warren, *Henry II*, pp. 135, 531. Warren called Henry's actions at Canterbury in 1174 'unusual' and 'out of character' but did not include any further analysis.

⁶ Anne J. Duggan, 'Diplomacy, Status and Conscience: Henry II's Penance for Becket's Murder', reprinted with original pagination in *Thomas Becket: Friends, Networks, Texts and Cult* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 265–90; Thomas K. Keefe, 'Shrine Time: King Henry II's Visits to Thomas Becket's Tomb', *The Haskins Society Journal: Studies in Medieval History*, 11 (1998), 115–22.

'conscientious acknowledgement of guilt'.⁷ Keefe's work deals with the king's pilgrimage in 1174 within the context of the many pilgrimages that Henry made throughout his life. He leaves open the question of the king's religious conviction in deciding to undertake this first pilgrimage to Canterbury even as he suggests that Henry was 'practiced at manipulating popular religious belief for political purposes'. He does, however, agree with Duggan that by the end of his sojourn in the cathedral the king was convinced that his actions had found favour with God and that God's grace was with him.⁸ Two other noteworthy points related to the 1174 pilgrimage were made by Timothy Reuter and Matthew Strickland. As a very short aside to his exploration of symbolic acts in the Becket dispute, Reuter drew attention to the symbolic significance of the king's pilgrimage in 1174 in providing closure to the feud between the king and the late archbishop.⁹ Strickland, on other hand, also considered it to be an act of 'political theatre' but accompanied by a military purpose, namely, a review of the defences of the Kentish coast.¹⁰

The purpose of this article is to re-examine the king's pilgrimage to the shrine of St Thomas in 1174 with the aim of re-assessing the motivations behind this visit using persuasion as a frame of reference. As opposed to propaganda, which is a

⁷ Duggan, 'Diplomacy, Status and Conscience', p. 290.

⁸ Keefe, 'Shrine Time', pp. 116–17.

⁹ Timothy Reuter, *Medieval Politics and Modern Mentalities*, ed. by Janet L. Nelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 189–90.

¹⁰ Matthew Strickland, *Henry the Young King, 1155–1183* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), p. 194.

concept that often evokes negative connotations arising from the modern political contexts within which it tends to be analysed, persuasion has been defined as ‘a communicative process to influence others’.¹¹ Persuasion allows the question of the conviction of the persuader to remain open and perhaps more neutral in a way that propaganda does not. It suggests an interactive process from which both persuader and persuadee stand to benefit, allowing for a degree of agency on the part of the persuadee.¹² Notwithstanding the size and immediacy of any target audience, the focus is on the attempt by the persuader to evoke a change in attitude or behaviour in said audience, albeit it must be admitted that the efficacy and success of the approach cannot always be ascertained. In essence the performative aspects of an act of persuasion are important features that aid us in contextualisation and help extend our understanding of the act itself.

This article compares the 1174 pilgrimage with contemporary general expectations of penitential pilgrimage, whilst examining the different elements and their symbolic significance. It re-considers both the personal and political motivations behind the pilgrimage by setting them against the historical context of the period without strictly demarcating them. In doing so, it demonstrates how the king’s pilgrimage can be viewed as an efficacious performative tool, not only as a means toward personal ends but also for the management of image and public persona.

¹¹ Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1999), p. 27.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 28.

Using persuasion as the framework shifts the focus on the king's motivations ever so slightly, allowing us to see how those motivations could have influenced or impacted his actions and yet retain the quality of not necessarily being malicious or involving a high degree of overt planning and audience manipulation. It also allows for a range of objectives from public to private. To a certain extent, Emma Mason's examination of an earlier pilgrimage undertaken by Henry II, this time to Rocamadour in Quercy, arrived at a similarly multi-faceted view of Henry's motivations for going on pilgrimage, notably without expressly attributing either propagandist or duplicitous intent to the king.¹³ This article aims to extend that exploration of the purposes behind the king's pilgrimages, this time focused on the 1174 pilgrimage, to provide additional entry points into our understanding of twelfth-century politics and public relations, and the tools used for their management. It can thus be placed among other studies that examine the exercise of medieval politics involving religious rituals.

King Henry II's pilgrimage to the shrine of St Thomas at Canterbury in 1174 was recorded in varying amounts of detail by many contemporaries, some of whom produced biographical works on Thomas' life.¹⁴ Of Becket's biographers, William of Canterbury, Edward Grim, Garnier (or Guernes) of Pont-Sainte-Maxence, and Herbert

¹³ Emma Mason, "Rocamadour in Quercy Above All Other Churches": The Healing of Henry II', in *The Church and Healing* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982), pp. 39–54.

¹⁴ See Michael Staunton, *Thomas Becket and His Biographers* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006) for an extensive examination of ten biographers of the most complete extant Lives of Thomas.

of Bosham wrote the most detailed accounts of this pilgrimage.¹⁵ But, as Reuter noted, the event was highly significant during this period¹⁶ and was at least mentioned by many other chroniclers including Gervase of Canterbury, William of Newburgh, Ralph de Diceto, Roger of Howden, and Jordan Fantosme.¹⁷ Although there are slight differences in specifics in these accounts, especially the longer ones, many are remarkably similar in essentials, and they assist in both re-constructing an image of the king's visit in 1174 (at least as it has been recorded) and gauging how the chroniclers' interpretations might influence our understanding.

By conflating the information contained in the different accounts and bearing in mind the possibility that some details were incorrect, or others omitted, a picture of the event in Canterbury can be formed. To begin with, William of Canterbury has it that the king dismounted at the leprosarium of St Nicholas. Henry then walked through the town to the tomb of the saint at Christchurch cathedral, pausing at the chapel of St Dunstan to shed his footwear and finish the remainder of the journey

¹⁵ Edward Grim, 'Vita S. Thomae, Cantuarensis Archiepiscopi', in *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket, archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. by J. C. Robertson and J. B. Sheppard, 7 vols. (London: Royal Society, 1875–85) (hereafter MTB), ii, pp. 445–7; Herbert of Bosham, 'Vita Sancti Thomae, Archiepiscopi et Martyris', MTB, iii, pp. 544–51; Janet Shirley, *Garnier's Becket: translated from the 12th-century Vie Saint Thomas Le Martyr De Catorbire of Garnier of Pont-Sainte-Maxence* (London: Phillimore, 1975), pp. 157–62; William of Canterbury, 'De adventu regis ad tumulum martyris Thomae', MTB, i, pp. 487–9.

¹⁶ Reuter, *Medieval Politics*, p. 189.

¹⁷ Gervase of Canterbury, *The Historical Works of Gervase of Canterbury*, ed. by W. Stubbs, 2 vols. (London: Royal Society, 1879–80), i, pp. 248–9; R. C. Johnston, ed., trans., *Jordan Fantosme's Chronicle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), pp. 140–3 (lines 1905–15); Ralph de Diceto, *Ymagines Historiarum, Historical Works*, ed. by W. Stubbs, 2 vols. (London: Royal Society, 1876), i, pp. 383–4; Roger of Howden, *Chronica*, ed. by W. Stubbs, 4 vols. (London: Royal Society, 1868–71), ii, pp. 61–2; William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*, in *Chronicles and Memorials of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II, and Richard I*, ed. by R. Howlett, 4 vols. (London: Royal Society, 1884–90) (hereafter *Chronicles and Memorials*), i, pp. 187–9.

barefoot. Edward Grim stated that the king took the harshest path through the town.¹⁸ He was said to have worn the ordinary clothes of a layperson and had prohibited all the usual festivities and acclamations attached to royal pilgrimages and visits to Canterbury. Concerning this last point, Grim claimed that the monks of Canterbury were sternly told by the king to refrain from both greeting him on his arrival in the city and escorting him to the cathedral.¹⁹ On reaching the cathedral, Henry prostrated himself before the church door and again when he was taken before the tomb of the saint. All the while shedding tears, he made a public confession of culpability and undertook to make material amends, both in his own words and through the bishop of London. He also begged the monks for their prayers and accepted discipline at their hands. The accounts by Edward Grim and Gervase of Canterbury asserted that such discipline took the form of whipping or flogging by the bishops, abbots, and lesser monks of Canterbury; Grim going so far as to outline that the king removed his outer clothing to receive five blows from each bishop and three blows from each of the eighty monks.²⁰ It is not known, of course, how much enthusiasm the bishops and monks displayed for the task at hand. After making offerings, Henry then spent the rest of the day and the night in prayer and fasting and attended mass the following morning before leaving the town. Interestingly, William of Canterbury listed in some

¹⁸ 'ubicunque asperior apparuit via' in Edward Grim, MTB, ii, p. 445.

¹⁹ Edward Grim, MTB, ii, p. 445. See also Nicholas Vincent, 'The Pilgrimages of the Angevin Kings of England, 1154–1272', in *Pilgrimage: The English Experience from Becket to Bunyan*, ed. by Colin Morris and Peter Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 12–45 (p. 16).

²⁰ Edward Grim, MTB, ii, p. 447; Gervase of Canterbury, p. 248.

detail the offerings made by Henry — four marks of gold and one silk covering for the tomb. In addition, the king assigned £40 *per annum* to the monastery, 'restored all that had been taken away', and promised to build a new monastery in honour of St Thomas.²¹ Other offerings were mentioned by Garnier who stated that Henry granted 20 marks to the leprosarium where he first dismounted (named Harbledown) and 100 shillings *per annum* to a hospital for poor people further along from Harbledown.²² William also added that Henry obtained a badge of a Canterbury pilgrim and visited other relics within Christchurch cathedral, details that are not included in the other accounts.²³ Gervase of Canterbury, on the other hand, had the king drinking water of the holy martyr (perhaps from a well) and receiving a gift of a flask that might have contained consecrated oil.²⁴ The king then went on his way, leaving Canterbury and returning to London.

This reconstructed depiction should not necessarily be taken wholly at face value. The sources I have mentioned here all portray a fairly elaborate display of contrition and humility on the king's part, and it is noteworthy that Garnier's version does not differ significantly from those of Becket's other biographers even though he was French born, unlike the other biographers, and wrote his life of Becket in French

²¹ 'restitque ei omnia quae sui juris errant' in William of Canterbury, *MTB*, i, p. 488. This part of the offering possibly refers to the following stipulation outlined in Warren, *Henry II*, p. 531: 'That the church of Canterbury should be put in full possession of all the property it enjoyed a year before Archbishop Thomas incurred his anger, and that all who suffered in the archbishop's cause should be restored to property and favour'.

²² Shirley, *Garnier's Becket*, p. 158.

²³ William of Canterbury, *MTB*, i, pp. 488–9.

²⁴ Gervase of Canterbury, p. 248.

verse. Michael Staunton and Janet Shirley, among others, have shown that while Garnier had never met Becket, he was meticulous in his research. He depended heavily on Edward Grim's and William of Canterbury's work, but his interpretations of events and issues come through in his life of Thomas.²⁵ The crux of the matter is that in these different records of the king's pilgrimage, the inclusion or non-inclusion of details reflect to a certain extent the chronicler's understanding and interpretation of their symbolic value and importance. Alice Taylor's work on homage in the Latin chronicles of eleventh- and twelfth-century Normandy established that rituals and ceremonies could be understood and interpreted in different ways by different observers, depending on their worldview, attitudes and, likely, their affinities. Taylor also noted that these interpretations thus influenced how such rituals and ceremonies were recorded, reflecting at the same time the objectives of the writers and how they wished their readers to view and understand what was being recorded.²⁶ An example of this possible ambiguity in interpretation can be found in the juxtaposition in many of the chroniclers' accounts of the pilgrimage in 1174 with the king's military successes against his rebel sons and their supporters. Garnier, for instance, summed up Henry's predicament as follows: 'In very pressing need, he went to the baron for help.'²⁷ Ultimately, the defeat and capture of the king of Scots, William the Lion, by the king's

²⁵ Shirley, *Garnier's Becket*, pp. x–xi; Staunton, *Thomas Becket and His Biographers*, pp. 32–4.

²⁶ Alice Taylor, 'Homage in the Latin Chronicles of Eleventh- and Twelfth-Century Normandy', in *People, Texts and Artefacts: Cultural Transmission in the Medieval Norman Worlds*, ed. by David Bates, Edoardo D'Angelo and Elisabeth van Houts (London: University of London Press, 2018), pp. 231–52.

²⁷ Shirley, *Garnier's Becket*, p. 157.

forces was an important precursor to Henry's eventual military triumph over the rebels.²⁸ The fact that Garnier and so many other chroniclers wrote of the king's penitential pilgrimage and positioned it side by side with William's military loss reflects the chroniclers' belief in a direct relationship between the two and supports a contention that they intended to tie the events inextricably together.²⁹ Yet, even though we can see that the chronological closeness was highlighted and harnessed to press the case for interconnectedness for their readers, it is still possible to read each chronicler differently. Those who were partial towards the king, such as Jordan Fantosme, framed their accounts to emphasise the king's willingness to humble himself and reconcile with Becket posthumously while the same details were evidence for the Becket partisans of the saint's benevolence and extension of God's grace even to those who wished him ill in life.

Returning to the pilgrimage in 1174, if we accept the veracity of specific details in the accounts despite the underlying problems of source interpretation, how did these details compare with the accepted critical elements of penitential pilgrimage in the twelfth century? To answer that question, we must first acknowledge that pilgrimage need not necessarily entail penance or penitential elements since there are

²⁸ See Strickland, *Henry the Young King*, pp. 197–205 for further details.

²⁹ Some writers, such as Roger of Howden, did not specifically mention the defeat of William the Lion but alluded generally to the military victories that fell to Henry and his forces soon after his pilgrimage to Canterbury in 1174.

different types of pilgrimage and it is not confined to the Christian tradition.³⁰ Yet pilgrimage, it is generally agreed, is essentially a journey undertaken as an act of religious devotion to a sacred place. According to Victor and Edith Turner, a pilgrimage is an act of veneration that should be considered a 'liminal' rite of passage, one that is figured as a large, bustling event in one's lifetime.³¹ This idea of pilgrimage tends to conjure images of long, difficult journeys; in the case of English pilgrims perhaps overseas to the continent to visit shrines such as that of St James of Compostela. However, other scholars such as Eamon Duffy and Colin Morris assert that a significant number, perhaps even most pilgrimages at least in medieval England, were local affairs that were more akin to commonplace trips such as going to the markets.³² Pilgrimages could become recurrent events, not unlike an annual outing home for Christmas, or a regular family tradition. The most common destinations were shrines and religious sites of significance, often those possessing a relic of some sort. As Morris affirmed, relics were viewed as *memoria* and were closely tied to a strong belief in the efficacy of miracles.³³ This alternative image is of a pilgrimage that was much less arduous an undertaking, involving perhaps a

³⁰ For a discussion of anthropological classification of pilgrimages, see Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), pp. 17–20.

³¹ See Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage*, chapter 1.

³² Eamon Duffy, 'The Dynamics of Pilgrimage in Late Medieval England', in *Pilgrimage: The English Experience from Becket to Bunyan*, pp. 164–77 (pp. 165–6); Colin Morris, 'Introduction', in *Pilgrimage: The English Experience from Becket to Bunyan*, pp. 1–11 (p. 6).

³³ Morris, 'Introduction', pp. 4–5. The mortal remains of St Thomas were the relics at his shrine in Canterbury Cathedral in the medieval period.

fortnight's excursion to a local important shrine or one in a slightly further part of the country. Scholars such as Diana Webb have queried how long a journey had to be before it could qualify as a pilgrimage, but I would suggest that the length did not matter as much as the objectives of the trip and its destination.³⁴

Pilgrimages could be undertaken either voluntarily or on instruction by the church. Theoretically, a pilgrimage that was undertaken because it was imposed on the individual by church authorities as a penance qualified as a penitential pilgrimage because it had to include a level of rigour and difficulty sufficient to warrant redemption from sin.³⁵ This would differentiate it from voluntary pilgrimage since there was no compulsion on the voluntary pilgrim to endure additional harsh conditions or struggles as a sign of repentance and for the remission of sins. Nonetheless, Jonathan Sumption suggested that such a distinction did not truly exist in medieval Europe. Whether or not a pilgrimage had been mandated, the fact is that the medieval mind possessed a characteristic belief in the automatic remission of sins by the making of formal visits to particular shrines.³⁶ Indeed, a voluntary pilgrimage was motivated primarily by an inward movement of the heart, making it just as likely that the voluntary pilgrim was seeking religious redemption as much as the imposed-upon pilgrim. Given the degree of physical hardship involved, pilgrimage could be

³⁴ Diana Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England* (London: Hambledon, 2000), p. xiii.

³⁵ Garry G. Crites, 'Penitential Practices', in *Encyclopedia of Medieval Pilgrimage* ed. by Larissa J. Taylor (Leiden: Brill, 2010), https://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2213-2139_emc_SIM_00062 [accessed 17 February 2022].

³⁶ Jonathan Sumption, *Pilgrimage: An Image of Mediaeval Religion* (London: Faber & Faber, 1975), p. 103.

viewed as an *imitatio Christi*, a re-enactment of the sufferings of Christ that was believed to deliver personal redemption.³⁷ The pilgrim could, therefore, expect or hope for a substantial benefit to the self, whether it be healing, a sign of God's pleasure or His forgiveness for past sins and wrongdoing. Viewed this way, the very act of pilgrimage itself can be viewed as an act of persuasion, directed at and seeking to convince both God and society of the sincerity of the pilgrims and their motives.

What, then, were the elements expected of a pilgrim or from the act of undertaking a penitential pilgrimage? A key element was austerity. In keeping with the view that a pilgrimage was a solemn and serious event analogous to a re-enactment of Christ's sufferings, a pilgrim would have been expected to dress and behave in an austere and sober manner. Naturally, however, as pilgrims came from many different walks of life, there were likely to be differing degrees of austerity adopted by pilgrims with such different life statuses. Everyday dress and mode of travel of a peasant or someone from the lower socio-economic parts of society were likely to already be sober and ascetic to a large degree. On the other hand, a member of the nobility or a person of royal stature would be accustomed to dressing well and travelling in a leisurely and sumptuous manner. Austerity for the noble or royal pilgrim was much more of a step down in the world. A pilgrim of high status had more to give up in terms of materiality and, hence, adopting more sober clothing and more modest means of transportation was much more symbolic for such a person.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 92-3.

Their adoption of a humble stance would stand out even more in comparison with their usual status, even as their appearance of humility and austerity ostensibly resulted in their being indistinguishable from their fellow pilgrims.

Denial of the body in a variety of ways was another typical element in pilgrimages, especially pilgrimages of a penitential nature. This could take many forms, including fasting, flagellation, walking barefoot and the wearing of abrasive clothing (especially directly next to the skin). Pilgrimages conducted on foot, therefore, were very common.³⁸ Indeed, it could even be said that it was obligatory for sincere pilgrims to undertake the journey on foot since walking was considered the most virtuous method of travelling. Seen in this light, sombrely dressed pilgrims who made their journey on foot and even barefoot at least part of the way would have been especially esteemed. Fasting and flagellation, in addition, were important and common components of penance from the earliest days of Christianity.³⁹ They added to the rigour of pilgrimage while providing spiritual benefit. Again, pilgrims who viewed themselves as reliving Christ's experiences were more likely to adopt such practices in the hope of further ensuring personal redemption.

Another element of a pilgrimage that was usually considered essential was the giving of offerings, with votive offerings being the most well received.⁴⁰ Sarah Blick pointed out that votives were part and parcel of medieval pilgrimage and made it

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

³⁹ Crites, 'Penitential Practices'.

⁴⁰ Votive offerings were offerings made in fulfilment of a vow.

interactive.⁴¹ That the pilgrim was seeking a spiritual benefit is not contested but the votive offering was the physical manifestation of the pilgrim's promises in return for the benefits bestowed on them. Such offerings signified that an 'agreement' was being put into place, a contract of sorts between the pilgrim and the devotional deity. It created a relationship between the two that was summed up by Blick as a 'help me and I will do this for you' transaction.⁴² In general, the value of one's offerings tended to be commensurate with one's status. Money was the most common offering and jewellery was usually the most valuable.⁴³ However, candles, images and tokens would also have been proffered. Not all offerings were votive in their intent, and it was not a mandated requirement of pilgrimage. Moreover, not every pilgrim was in a financial position to make offerings and no one, least of all the monks at any shrine, would have been crass enough to directly mandate that a pilgrim had to make an offering. On the other hand, if a pilgrim neglected to make any offering at all, no matter how small, such an omission would certainly have been frowned upon and said pilgrim was certain to experience a chilly reception from the resident clergy.

King Henry's pilgrimage appears to have borne all the hallmarks of being one that entirely conformed to and possibly exceeded contemporary expectations. Duggan

⁴¹ Sarah Blick, 'Votives, Images, Interaction and Pilgrimage to the Tomb and Shrine of St. Thomas Becket, Canterbury Cathedral', in *Push Me, Pull You: Art and Devotional Interaction in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art*, ed. by S. Blick and L. Gelfand (Leiden: Brill Academic Press, 2011), pp. 21–58 (p. 21).

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁴³ Ben Nilson, 'The Medieval Experience at the Shrine', in *Pilgrimage Explored*, ed. by J. Stopford (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 1999), pp. 95–122 (p. 109).

was in no doubt that the reasons behind this penitential pilgrimage were predominantly personal, stating that 'popular opinion could have been appeased by a formal visit to the tomb and the distribution of alms'.⁴⁴ For her, many of the penitential elements were over and above what was needed for a public gesture. Nevertheless, the presence of other elements in the king's pilgrimage such as Henry arriving barefoot and participating in the rite of flagellation is striking. The barefooted arrival, the scourging of the king's body and fasting added a heightened penitential note that publicly and more emphatically signalled the king's sincere intentions and wishes for redemption and the forgiveness of his sins. By assenting to the visitation of acts of desecration on his body, the king used these rituals to persuade onlookers of his humility and willingness to go above and beyond to gain redemption, or at least to be seen as being so willing. Similarly, the king's offerings were further tangible tokens of his sincerity and self-effacement while being necessarily commensurate with his worldly rank and status. Offerings made by the typical Becket devotee were tendered in return for help with mundane everyday problems including illness, business affairs and love lives. Many of those gifts and offerings, especially the votive ones, would not have been considered of great monetary value.⁴⁵ The richness of the king's offerings was, therefore, not just indicative of his royal status, they exemplified the prominence of the king's concerns and the importance of the affairs he sought

⁴⁴ Duggan, 'Diplomacy, Status and Conscience', p. 282.

⁴⁵ Blick, 'Votives, Images, Interaction and Pilgrimage', p. 25.

divine guidance and assistance for. Henry's assignment of £40 *per annum* to the monastery and his promises concerning a future monastic establishment in the saint's honour speaks to his acknowledgement of the wrongs he had done to Becket. So did his offering of gold marks and a silk covering for the saint's tomb. That he was facing domestic unrest and rebellion from several quarters (an issue I will return to shortly) was widely known and surely would have factored as the pre-eminent issue of significance in the king's frame of mind during his trip to Canterbury.

The fact that the king was taken before the actual tomb of St Thomas is another significant element in the story of this pilgrimage. Insofar as it is mentioned in the different contemporary accounts, the writers agreed that the king prostrated himself before the tomb in the crypt, confessed and asked pardon of the monks and was then flogged in that same location. Such proximity to the tomb of Thomas Becket appears to have been a typical occurrence for pilgrims to Canterbury. Anne Bailey notes that miracle accounts record many instances of pilgrims placing offerings on Becket's tomb, spending the night beside it and more besides. Such descriptions, Bailey asserts, have led historians to assume that such freedom of access was typical across all English shrines in the twelfth century, especially when compared to the later medieval period.⁴⁶ However, her work on pilgrimage practices in eleventh- and twelfth-century England suggests that a more nuanced view of the twelfth-century pilgrim's

⁴⁶ Anne E. Bailey, 'Reconsidering the Medieval Experience at the Shrine in High Medieval England', *Journal of Medieval History*, 47.2 (2021), 203–29 (pp. 1–2).

experience at English shrines may be more appropriate. The Canterbury pilgrim's free and easy access to the centre of the shrine, if one may so regard the saint's tomb, was not necessarily the norm at all or even many other pilgrimage destinations of the time.⁴⁷ If that is so, the king's access to the tomb of Becket takes on additional consequence and importance. It becomes an event of even more symbolic value, particularly to those of the king's subjects who had not made any pilgrimages to Canterbury and experienced such unfettered access for themselves. Being able to attain such proximity to Becket's tomb would, in his subjects' eyes, have elevated the king's pilgrimage, making it even more remarkable.

The elements discussed so far speak to the existence of a particular symbolic framework that underpinned how audiences understood royal pilgrimages. Timothy Reuter's examination of medieval politics posits the existence of a symbolic meta-language that underpinned how it was exercised, what forms of symbolic expression were used and how it was communicated and understood by its different audiences.⁴⁸ The features that I have examined thus far establish that a similar symbolic meta-language exists for penitential rituals. Austerity, denial of the body, the giving of offerings, and the freedom (or lack of it) of closeness to the centre of a holy shrine are some of the key elements of a pilgrimage in this period. But the expectations for a royal pilgrimage were likely to be higher than for the average penitent. A king, more

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 20–1.

⁴⁸ See Reuter, *Medieval Politics*, chapter 10 'Velle sibi fieri in forma hac: Symbolic Acts in the Becket Dispute'.

than an average pilgrim of lower or more modest means, needed to demonstrate his sincerity by doing more than others did. He had to be more outwardly austere, undergo greater denials of his body, and make much richer offerings to be seen to be as sincere. Henry's 1174 pilgrimage to Canterbury did just that and in doing so, he harnessed the symbolism to his advantage. Ritual can be a performance that encapsulates beliefs and gives expression to commitment. But it only works because of the existence of this meta-language.

Moreover, rituals can be polysemic.⁴⁹ A ritual is, as Geoffrey Koziol asserted, 'capable of multiple readings' and the fact that people can understand and draw upon and from rituals in so many ways is a testament to this characteristic.⁵⁰ The meta-language and symbolic framework provide the necessary for shared discourse and it cannot be dispensed with. Nonetheless, different meanings can be attributed to the same ritual by different audiences. The ambiguity in meanings is rooted in the situational context and the differing perceptions of the different audiences. These audiences draw diverse meanings from the ritual to satisfy what they need and desire from the event being witnessed. This does not mean that it does not matter how the ritual is conducted or that certain elements can be omitted from it without any consequences or changes in impact. This means that the language of the ritual can be understood in slightly different ways. Hence, this is why Henry's 1174 pilgrimage can

⁴⁹ Sarah Hamilton, *The Practice of Penance, 900–1050* (London: Royal Historical Society, 2001), p. 181.

⁵⁰ Geoffrey Koziol, *Begging Pardon and Favor: Ritual and Political Order in Early Medieval France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 307–11.

be perceived as ambiguous in its motivations and why the significance of the elements in this event, as recorded in different accounts, is worth debating.

Why might Henry have turned to this type of penance and what did he hope to achieve in undertaking such a journey? I have stated previously that both Duggan and Keefe were convinced that personal belief of the need to seek expiation for his guilt in the death of Thomas Becket lay behind the king's decision to go to Canterbury. Yet Henry could not have known conclusively that his journey and abasement before the shrine of St Thomas would find favour in God's eyes. Moreover, while personal conviction of his need for redemption may have been a primary driver, this need not mean that there were no other co-existing reasons, especially considering the political upheaval occurring during this period.

One of the most significant political challenges that Henry faced in the early 1170s was the great rebellion of 1173–74 involving many of his family members and subjects as well as key foreign rulers. As the source of major political upheaval in his dominions, it was his primary focus during that period, occupying much of his energy and attention. The rebellion began with the outbreak of a quarrel between the king and his eldest son, known to us now as Henry the Young King, over the latter's discontent at possessing nothing more than titular control over Normandy, England and Anjou, despite having been crowned. Henry's refusal to accede to his son's demands for actual rule in at least one of those dominions fomented an uprising in which the major antagonists were the younger Henry and his brother Richard,

supported by their mother Queen Eleanor, King Louis of France and William the Lion, king of Scotland. They were joined by a great many nobles, including the counts of Boulogne and Flanders, Count Theobald of Blois and several English earls. William of Newburgh noted that while many great magnates openly joined the rebellion, some of those who remained on the king's side were also suspected of wavering in their allegiance to him.⁵¹

The Battle Abbey chronicler and Edward Grim were among those contemporary writers who believed that the rebellion was God's vengeance on the king for his part in the saint's death.⁵² This view was echoed more publicly during the first celebration of the canonised archbishop's feast day on 29 December 1173.⁵³ The Office composed for the public readings narrated the events in the life of the saint including his martyrdom and described the current situation as a time when 'people rose up against people and kingdom against kingdom; even the realm was divided against itself'.⁵⁴ This phrase may well have directly alluded to the conditions of the times, being, as it were, some months after the outbreak of hostilities between the king and the rebels. Hence, it is likely that the king was still strongly associated with

⁵¹ William of Newburgh, *Chronicles and Memorials*, i, pp. 171–2; Warren, *Henry II*, p. 123. See Strickland, *Henry the Young King*, chapters 8 and 9 for a detailed examination of the 1173–74 rebellion.

⁵² *The Chronicle of Battle Abbey*, ed. by Eleanor Searle (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), pp. 275–7; Edward Grim, *MTB*, ii, p. 445.

⁵³ Pope Alexander had canonised Becket on 21 February 1173. 'Bull of Pope Alexander III, dated 12 March 1173', *English Historical Documents Volume II 1042–1189*, ed. by David C. Douglas and G. W. Greenaway (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1953) (hereafter EHD II), pp. 774–5.

⁵⁴ As quoted in Anne J. Duggan, 'The Cult of St Thomas Becket in the Thirteenth Century', reprinted with original pagination in *Thomas Becket: Friends, Networks, Texts and Cult*, p. 34.

Becket's murder despite previous restitution in the form of the penances imposed in May 1172. Certainly, Henry the Young King appears to have believed that this perception still lingered. He had undertaken a pilgrimage to the increasingly popular shrine of the late archbishop in the latter half of 1172, a visit that was recorded by an anonymous chronicler who asserted that 'St Thomas had remitted all his anger and vengefulness ... towards the new king.'⁵⁵ His confidence in the saint's favour and, conversely, his belief that his father lacked that same favour, is demonstrated by how he disputed several episcopal elections, some of which involved loyal servants of Henry II. Richard of Ilchester and Geoffrey Ridel were two of these men, and in accusing them of being involved in Becket's murder the young Henry was, by imputation, reviving and reinforcing his father's perceived role in the same murder.⁵⁶ Henry II's role in the death of Becket was not the primary cause for the rebellion of 1173 but it was undoubtedly used by the rebels as a justifying factor.

Besides the domestic and political troubles facing Henry, there was the issue of the cult of St Thomas. This cult had progressively grown in the aftermath of Becket's murder and it presents an additional perspective through which to view Henry's decision to go on a pilgrimage to St Thomas' shrine in Canterbury.⁵⁷ Contemporaries

⁵⁵ Strickland, *Henry the Young King*, pp. 117–18.

⁵⁶ Strickland, *Henry the Young King*, pp. 155–6.

⁵⁷ For a comprehensive treatment of the historiography of this cult, see Kay Brainerd Slocum, *The Cult of Thomas Becket: History and Historiography through Eight Centuries* (London: Routledge, 2019). For the development of the cult and its impact within the Plantagenet orbit of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, see *The Cult of St Thomas Becket in the Plantagenet World, c.1170–c.1220*, ed. by Marie-Pierre Gelin and Paul Webster (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2016).

such as William Fitzstephen and John of Salisbury noted the occurrence of miracles early on following the murder.⁵⁸ Other writings such as the collections of miracles compiled by Benedict of Peterborough and William of Canterbury point to the cult's rapid growth in popularity, with people coming from all corners of England and even from lands abroad to visit the tomb of the blessed St Thomas.⁵⁹ Becket's canonisation also added to the growing perception of him as a figure of saintly justice whose resistance to his king had led him to political sainthood. He was canonised in 1173, only a little more than two years after he had been killed, and Duggan called it one of the most rapid canonisations in medieval church history.⁶⁰ For the faithful, Becket's new status as a saint and the fame of the cult was a sure sign that Becket and his cause had found favour in the sight of God. To the king, it may well have begun to look as if divine judgement had been delivered against him so that on both personal and political levels, he needed to re-situate himself and his kingship. Naturally, Henry the Young King and his fellow rebels would have viewed the rise of the cult as an irresistible opportunity to harness divine support by claiming it as their own. They proceeded to do so, as evidenced by instances such as the earl of Leicester's invoking of St Thomas' aid for his military assault against the castle of Haughley and a song

⁵⁸ William Fitzstephen, MTB, iii, pp. 149–50, 151–2; Letter 305 'To John of Canterbury, bishop of Poitiers', *The Letters of John of Salisbury, Volume Two: The Later Letters (1163–1180)*, ed. by W. J. Millor and C. N. L. Brooke (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), pp. 724–39 (pp. 736–7).

⁵⁹ Benedict of Peterborough, MTB, ii, pp. 156–7, 224–5; The Lambeth Anonymous, '*Quomodo vere martyr apparuit*', MTB, iv, pp. 140–1; William of Canterbury, '*De puero quem paries obruit*', MTB, i, pp. 206–7; William of Canterbury, '*De Hiberniensi furante ampullam*', MTB, i, pp. 308–9.

⁶⁰ Duggan, 'The Cult of St Thomas Becket', p. 22, note 1.

written for the earl presenting St Thomas as supporting the young Henry as the new king.⁶¹

Given the disturbing events of this time, it is unsurprising that the king should have felt the need to take direct action in appealing to the divine. A pilgrimage to a shrine at this time, and particularly to the shrine of St Thomas himself, would surely have appealed to Henry in terms of countering lingering perceptions of his role in the archbishop's murder. Duggan refers to the king's pilgrimage as a 'willing performance of the full penitential ritual', an indication that she viewed the king's journey as one made voluntarily and primarily focused on his personal needs.⁶² Political necessity does not figure as a key reason for Duggan but, conversely, Barlow regarded Henry's pilgrimage as entirely political in its objectives. Nevertheless, for him too, the king's decision was a freely made one, albeit focused on repairing his reputation.⁶³ Yet it is possible to view Henry's decision to go on a pilgrimage to Canterbury as being not entirely voluntary. Only two years had passed since 1172 when the king had acknowledged his guilt publicly and accepted the set of conditions laid upon him by the pope. The rise of the rebellion had resulted in persistent public and political pressure on the king to atone further for Becket's murder, not only because it was viewed as God's continuing anger towards Henry for Becket's death but also for the possibility that the rebels would claim St Thomas for themselves and

⁶¹ Strickland, *Henry the Young King*, pp. 173–4.

⁶² Duggan, 'Diplomacy, Status and Conscience', p. 283.

⁶³ Barlow, *Thomas Becket*, p. 269.

their cause, a possibility that came to pass as it happened. As such, the king had very little choice but to act and embrace the cult of St Thomas sooner rather than later.⁶⁴ To neglect to do so would have been to risk being dangerously placed in opposition to its popularity. In essence, the king needed to gain divine support in his struggle against the rebels and he also needed to come to terms with the burgeoning cult of his erstwhile archbishop. One method of doing so was to associate himself and his kingship with Becket's cult in a more positive manner. A pilgrimage was the perfect vehicle to show that he shared his people's devotion to their home-grown martyr and saint and persuade them that he had been forgiven by the same. It not only gave the king an opportunity to lay to rest once and for all the notion that there was any remaining animosity on his part towards Becket but also enabled him to strengthen anew the bonds between himself and his people in the face of possible fissures because of the Becket killing.

Henry was not alone among medieval kings in seeking to accrue benefits to his kingship through such an association. J. W. McKenna's study of the cult of Archbishop Scrope in the fifteenth century located the beginnings of intentions to use popular religious cults for political purposes before the fourteenth century. He suggested that the manipulation of popular religious fervour for political gain could be traced as far back as Angevin England and became a tradition of sorts, that is, that such political saints could be called upon by opponents of the crown because of what they stood

⁶⁴ Sumption, *Pilgrimage*, p. 99.

for.⁶⁵ In addition, Gabrielle Spiegel's investigation into how the French Capetian kings worked to identify their house and the French national persona with the cult of Saint Denis confirms that such an association could bolster the image of the king positively and buttress his legitimacy.⁶⁶ One could argue, as Martin Aurell did, that Henry's efforts to associate himself and his kingship with the cult of St Thomas were wholly in keeping with his *modus operandi* concerning the cultivation of good public relations. Aurell demonstrates, as an example, Henry's efforts to obtain the canonisation of Edward the Confessor (with whom the Plantagenets had a dynastic link) and later the translation of St Edward's relics to Westminster to enhance the standing of his dynasty and family.⁶⁷ Hence, similarly, it was political persuasion of the highest order that Henry was undertaking in the case of the cult of Thomas Becket. He harnessed the widespread enthusiasm generated by the cult and joined his piety to it in a public demonstration of personal rehabilitation, which would further boost his status and the legitimacy of his kingship. The fact that he continued to undertake regular pilgrimages after 1174 serves to bolster the argument that he recognised the possibilities of the use of pilgrimage as a tool for sustained political persuasion. His gesture of piety and humility at Canterbury enhanced his standing as king and

⁶⁵ J. W. McKenna, 'Popular Canonization as Political Propaganda: The Cult of Archbishop Scrope', *Speculum*, 45.4 (1970), 608–23 (pp. 608–9).

⁶⁶ Gabrielle M. Spiegel, 'The Cult of Saint Denis and Capetian Kingship', *Journal of Medieval History* 1.1 (1975), 43–69 (pp. 61–3).

⁶⁷ Martin Aurell, *The Plantagenet Empire 1154–1224*, trans. David Crouch (New York: Pearson/Longman, 2007), pp. 83–94, 135–6.

providence in the form of military victory culminating in triumph over his opponents gave Henry the support he needed to complete the persuasion.

At the same time, Henry's general attitudes towards pilgrimage may also have played a part in his decision. Alan Forey's study of Henry's crusading penances concluded that the king's failure to wholly implement the penances imposed on him in 1172 indicated a lack of genuine penitence on his part, all the more so since crusaders considered themselves pilgrims seeking a shrine.⁶⁸ In addition, contemporary writers such as Gerald of Wales tell us that the pope, in response to Henry's request, allowed him to substitute the founding of three monasteries for his vow to go on crusade as included in the settlement of Avranches.⁶⁹ However, Elizabeth Hallam pointed out that the three foundations made in substitution for his crusade vow did not constitute the total of royal foundations financed by Henry.⁷⁰ She suggested that the records showed that his generosity in this respect was in line with typical patterns of royal patronage.⁷¹ This implies that while the king's founding of monasteries as a substitute is indicative of a lack of enthusiasm for the crusading penances, Henry was not unmindful of the need to fulfil his penitential vows and may simply not have been in a position to undertake a crusade of the magnitude originally

⁶⁸ Morris, 'Introduction', pp. 1–2.

⁶⁹ As discussed in John T. Appleby, 'The Ecclesiastical Foundations of Henry II', *Catholic Historical Review*, 48.2 (1962), 205–15 (pp. 205–6).

⁷⁰ Elizabeth Hallam, 'Henry II as a Founder of Monasteries', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 28.2 (1977), 113–32 (p. 114).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 115, 132.

required of him. Furthermore, pilgrimage was a family tradition on all sides for Henry. Both his Angevin grandfather Count Fulk and his Norman great-grandfather Duke Robert undertook penitential pilgrimages to Jerusalem at some point in their lives, and Henry himself was no stranger to pilgrimages.⁷² Nicholas Vincent cited several such visits made by Henry to various shrines in his dominions; for example, a journey made to Reading immediately before starting a campaign against the Welsh in 1163 and another in 1166 to Mont-St-Michel to give thanks for victory against the Bretons.⁷³ He also travelled in 1170 to Rocamadour to offer thanks to the Virgin for his recovery from illness. After 1174, his pattern of pilgrimages continued with yearly visits to Canterbury, an occurrence that further validates his adherence to and continuation of a family tradition.

It is also worth bearing in mind that Henry almost certainly contemplated how he and his reign would be remembered in history. In about 1160, Henry commissioned a history of his ancestors to be written by Wace, a Norman cleric, in Old French. Wace was later replaced by Benoît de Sainte-Maure in 1174. It was the first time that a medieval European monarch had commissioned such a work in the vernacular rather than Latin, which was the language typically used in chronicles and historical writings until then.⁷⁴ This commission suggests two significant points. The first is that Henry

⁷² Vincent, 'The Pilgrimages of the Angevin Kings', p. 13.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 22–5.

⁷⁴ Charity Urbanski, *Writing History for the King: Henry II and the Politics of Vernacular Historiography* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), pp. 1–2.

was surely aware of historical writing and the fact that they could influence how he and his dynasty might be remembered in the future. Staunton outlined how Henry's genealogical credentials were keenly investigated and his career followed by the chroniclers and writers of the age, firstly as duke of Normandy and later, after he became king of England in 1154, having amassed a slew of territories under his rule. For example, Osbert of Clare, prior of Westminster, set out Henry's genealogical record as a ruler of many peoples at the head of a ninety-line poem. Within this poem, Osbert urged the soon-to-be king of England to live up to his promise as the scion of past kings of England and Jerusalem.⁷⁵ Similarly, Aelred, abbot of Rievaulx, prefaced a lament to King David of Scotland with an epistle to Duke Henry, which, among other things, hailed the nobility of his bloodlines. Given the laudatory tone of such works, their authors surely meant for them to be read by the duke himself. The second point is that Henry commissioned the work in the vernacular. Such a break with tradition indicates that Henry had in mind not just a learned audience of clerics and the literate in high culture but also those who might have been literate but been more comfortable with the common patois. He had an eye for history and the public image and representation of himself and his family, to be sure, but he intended to reach a wider audience than before and that is an important point to remember about Henry's pilgrimage to Canterbury.

⁷⁵ Michael Staunton, *The Historians of Angevin England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 30–1.

Seen against the backdrop of the political situation and the rise of St Thomas' cult, it is completely logical that Henry should have embarked upon a pilgrimage to Canterbury on his arrival back on English soil in the summer of 1174 and the publicity inherent in royal pilgrimages was crucial in this scenario. The reality was that royal pilgrimages generally were much more ostentatious events than those performed by ordinary laypersons.⁷⁶ The fact that Henry took the trouble to ban the usual fanfare shows that he was conscious of the possible impact of his visit to Canterbury at that time. The prohibition may even have been an attempt (sincere or otherwise) on Henry's part to appear more humble and to add a further note of remorse and sincerity to his pilgrimage. Yet despite this apparent attempt at keeping a low profile, there could not but exist a high degree of publicity attached to this occasion. William of Canterbury related how the king 'made his way on foot from the chapel of Saint Nicholas which was two stades from the city'.⁷⁷ Such a distance would have afforded the townspeople ample opportunity to witness the approach of the king and word must have spread quickly of so momentous an occurrence even without the pomp that commonly announced the visits of illustrious persons. The popularity of St Thomas' cult was such that large numbers of pilgrims were also likely to have been found in the city. It was therefore almost certain that many pilgrims as well as local

⁷⁶ Vincent, 'The Pilgrimages of the Angevin Kings', pp. 16–17.

⁷⁷ William of Canterbury, MTB, i, p. 488: '*Nam ab aedicule beati Nicholai, quae stadiis duobus distat ab urbe, pedestre iter aggressus est*'. The word 'stade' originated from the Greek 'stadion' and is equivalent to the modern length of approximately 160m to 200m.

townspeople, were on hand to witness the king's approach to Canterbury. People took note of the king's actions and given that it conformed in many ways with the actions of a devoted and reverent pilgrim, the king's pilgrimage to Canterbury can only have enhanced his reputation and his image. Henry's pilgrimage may have been ostentatiously penitential, but its performative aspects were the very reason it worked in a public setting.

As to who the audience of this performative ritual was, there are many possibilities. Henry was undoubtedly aware that a pilgrimage could have many audiences, although a pilgrimage to Canterbury might be expected to have attracted an overwhelmingly domestic (relative to the king's dominions) audience. His English subjects were a key component of this audience but, given the growing presence of Canterbury on the pilgrimage stage, so too were his subjects and other pilgrims from continental Europe. Naturally, historical writers and chroniclers of the age were important spectators, as were the papacy and other political observers, especially in light of the Becket dispute that culminated with the archbishop's murder. In the personal sense, Henry would have had God on his mind as well. If it is true that Henry was motivated primarily by his personal need for redemption and reconciliation with his Maker, as Duggan maintains, then God may well have been his primary audience. Yet whether the king was motivated primarily by political or personal reasons is, to some extent, a moot point in this examination of the use of pilgrimage as a performative tool for persuasion. The key point here is how different audiences

perceived and read the publicity and possible intent behind it in the king's pilgrimage and what factors this depended on.

By analysing pilgrimage as a performative ritual against the framework of persuasion, this article has demonstrated that it is possible to reconcile both personal motives with secular and political reasons. Henry's personal motives were not necessarily strictly distinct from his political motives. Henry the man might have sought to further show the extent of his penitence both to God and to the church. But as the king, he could not have failed to take more secular and down-to-earth reasons into consideration. The penitential pilgrimage to Canterbury in 1174 was directed at a wide audience. Consideration of the specifics of this penance has enabled us to observe that publicity was a vital aspect. The visual display was a performance to the extent that it was designed, possibly unconsciously, to impress upon its audience the idea of humility and persuade it to believe in the continued and genuine contrition on the king's part, assisted this time by additional significant touches of self-effacement such as volunteering to be flogged. By presenting a humble and contrite image in the performance of this penance, he also more closely associated his kingship with a popular and prestigious cult. In doing so, he furthered his aim of enhancing his status and entrenching the legitimacy of his kingship, not just in the eyes of his subjects, but also in the eyes of God. The performance of the pilgrimage to St Thomas' shrine at Canterbury was meant to signal that Henry shared his people's reverence and respect for the saint. Furthermore, if chronicle accounts of the 1173–74 rebellion can be read

as suggestive of possible fractures in the bond between the king and his people, it can be argued that Henry employed the use of pilgrimage to strengthen or perhaps repair this same bond. In doing so, he also strove to demonstrate both to his subjects and the wider European world that he was a truly Catholic king and that he had the Church and God on his side. As a ritual that fitted into the societal fabric of the age, the penitential pilgrimage was used by the king to 'converse' with a multi-layered audience. It was also used as a communication tool to manage his image and reshape his representation. His good fortune to be presented with the coincidence of the defeat of the king of Scots with the end of his pilgrimage cemented the results of embarking on this ritual.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).

Any images contained within this article that are reproduced with permission are specifically excluded from the Creative Commons License. They may not be reproduced under any circumstances without the express written permission of the copyright holders.