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PEREGRINATIONS

INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF PILGRIMAGE ART



Saints and Geography

By Margaret Cormack, *College of Charleston*

Images, statues, and reliquaries of saints are valuable evidence for the art historian; their presence in a church, like the arrangement of church dedications in a landscape, may reflect pilgrimage or trade routes, mountain passes, political alliances, and various types of localized commercial activity. Knowledge of the dedication of a church – or of a miracle credited to a saint at a specific location – can provide evidence for the identification of paintings or other objects and can suggest reasons for the dedication of churches or chapels or for the purchase of statues. Miracle accounts are among the very few medieval sources that contain information about women, children, and the lower classes. They may also supply data about the environment and climate of the past. The dates of all these different types of material can provide evidence of intellectual, artistic, and social trends and of the speed with which innovation could spread.

Several initiatives to create comprehensive collections of dedications and make them available to the public have already been undertaken. Readers may be familiar with Steven Boardman's Database of Dedications of Saints in Medieval Scotland at <http://webdb.ucl.ac.uk/saints/> or with the Trans-National Atlas and Database of Saints' Cults (TASC) created by Graham Jones at <http://www.le.ac.uk/users/grj1/tascintro.html> as the culmination of a number of international meetings. The following articles examining the distribution of saints' cults are part of a project aiming to create an interactive website comparable to Boardman's to which other scholars will be able to contribute. They were presented at a conference on "Saints and Geography" held at Hólar, Iceland, in 2006 which was supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities; the Icelandic ministries of Culture, Justice and the Church; the British Embassy in Reykjavík; the German Embassy in Reykjavík; Sveitarfélagið Skagafjörður; the Þorlákssjóður of the Icelandic Catholic church; and the Icelandic Millennial Fund. The conference was held at the invitation of the Jón Baldvinsson, Bishop of Hólar, and hosted by Skúli Skúlason, Rector of the University at Hólar. The participants wish to express their thanks to all of these for having made that event possible. **(figs. 1, 2)**

Michael Costen's paper is based on a database containing dedications and other information, such as the dates of fairs and the locations of holy wells, pertaining to the cult of saints in the Diocese of Bath and Wells. On this basis he has identified three successive layers of dedications, including one attributable to the West-Saxon kings, reflected in dedications to St. Andrew, and one that is even older. His contribution includes four appendices: 1) a list of estates belonging to the Bishopric of Wells and the church dedications on those estates; 2) dedications of parish churches belonging to the Cathedral of Wells; 3) dedications of parish churches belonging to Glastonbury Abbey; and 4) dedications of parish churches on estates belonging to Glastonbury Abbey. His article also calls attention to the shrine of St. Cyngar at Congressbury, about which he has written previously. Among other items of interest emerging from his database are the numerous holy wells in the diocese. **(fig. 3)**



Figure 1 Hólar Cathedral, present building consecrated 1783. Steeple in commemoration of Bishop Jón Arason, 1950. Photo: Margaret Cormack.

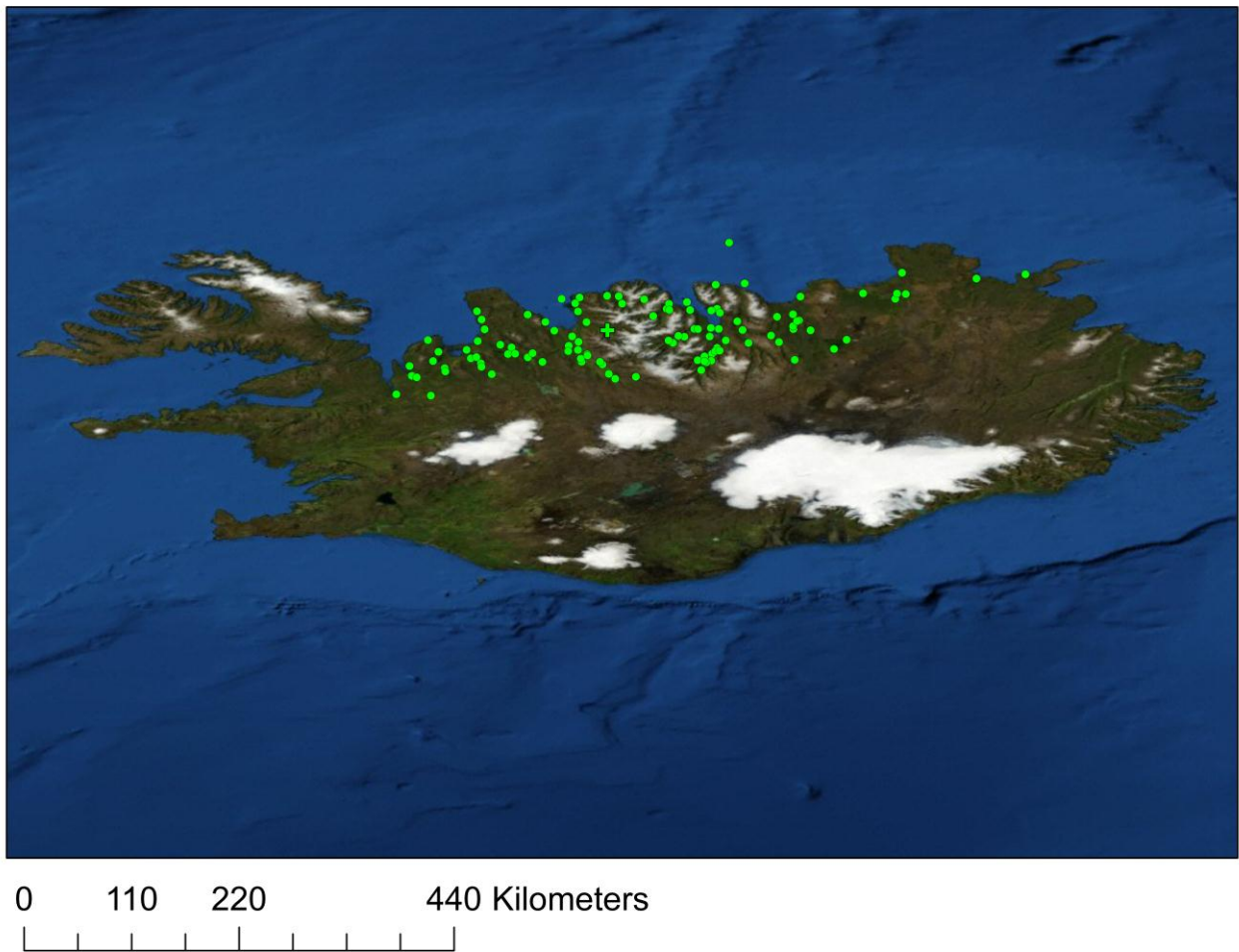


Figure 2 Religious sites in Hólar diocese *c.* 1400. Hólar cathedral is indicated by a cross. Map: Margaret Cormack.

Donald Prudlo's article and database are based on collections of miracles attributed to Thomas Becket and Peter Martyr. Prudlo examines the distribution of miracles and analyzes the reasons why the two martyrs' cults spread in the ways they did. It is worth noting that Peter Martyr, in spite of the "army of accomplished preachers" dedicated to spreading his cult, did not achieve the lasting popularity of Becket. (see **figs. 1, 2, 4, and 5** in Prudlo's article)

Cormack has long been occupied with the study of saints' cults in Iceland. After attending several meetings of the TASC group, with the aid of Norbert Winnige of the Max Planck Institut zur Erforschung multireligiöser und multiethnischer Gesellschaften (at that time the Max Planck Institut für Geschichte), she produced an interactive database for Hólar, the northern diocese of Iceland, which can be viewed at www.tasc.mpg.de/iceland_new/. Her contribution to this volume is a survey of the saints' cults attested in the diocese based on that database. (**fig. 2**) It includes references to statues and paintings as well as church dedications. She examines the development of several cults in detail and argues that images, not dedications, may be the most significant indicator of a saint's popularity.

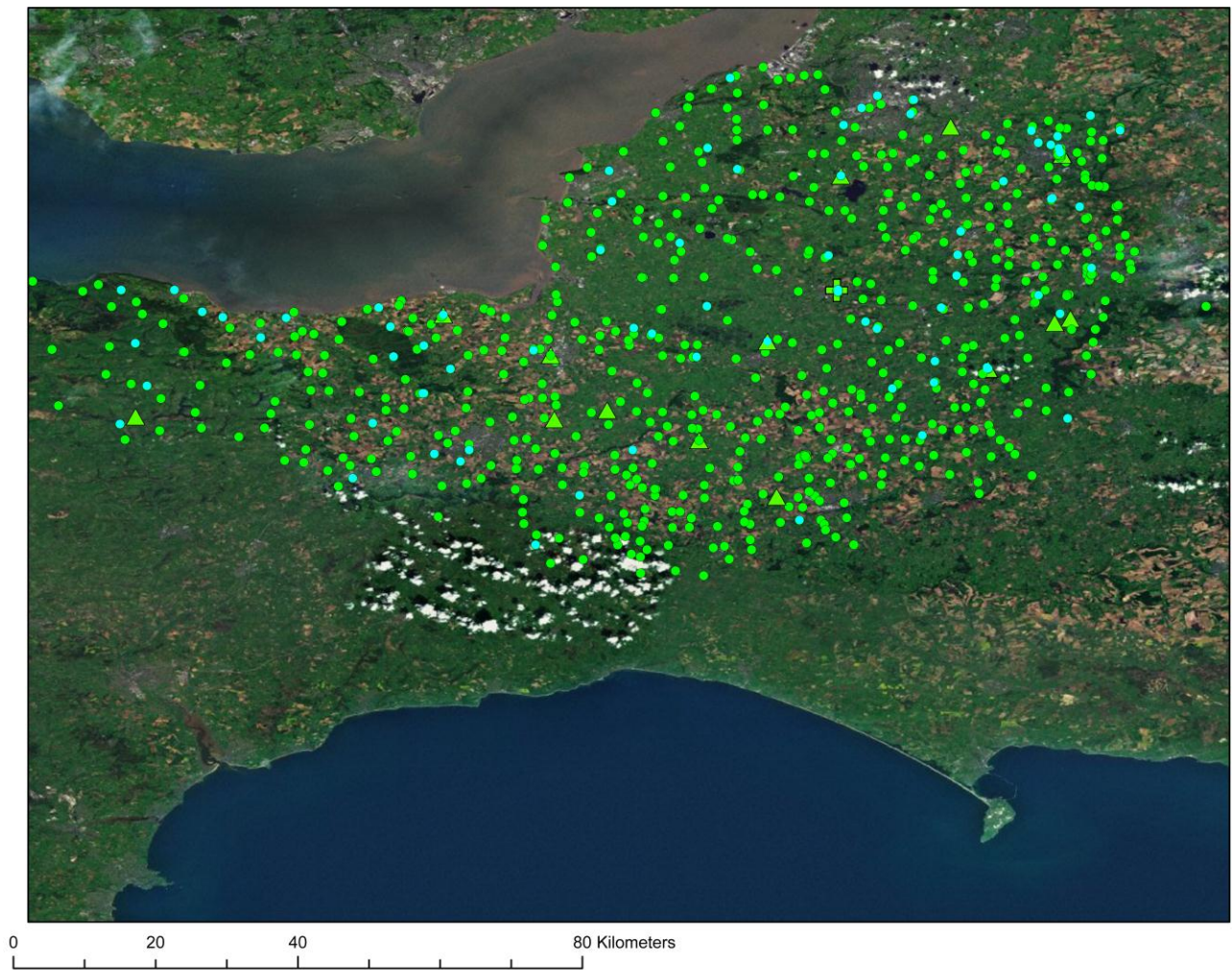


Figure 3 Religious sites in the diocese of Bath and Wells. The Cathedral is indicated by a cross, monasteries by triangles, and holy wells by blue dots. Map: Margaret Cormack, using a database created by Michael Costen.

A project that will incorporate these articles in a single, on-line database is under construction at www.saintsgeog.net. Please note that it is still in progress, and full data will likely not likely be entered before the end of 2012. The site will enable analysis and comparison of, for example, the development of the cult of Thomas Becket in the areas covered. Prudlo has outlined the expansion of the cult as indicated by the locations of miracles. (see **figs. 1, 2** in Prudlo's article) Those locations will be compared to the distribution of dedications in the diocese of Hólar (**fig. 4**) and the diocese of Bath and Wells. (**fig. 5**) We solicit comparable data from others working with either dedications or miracle collections. The resulting site will be made accessible on line, free of charge; with it, scholars will be able to examine the relationships among miracles, dedications, and works of art in their geographical, social, and religious settings. ●

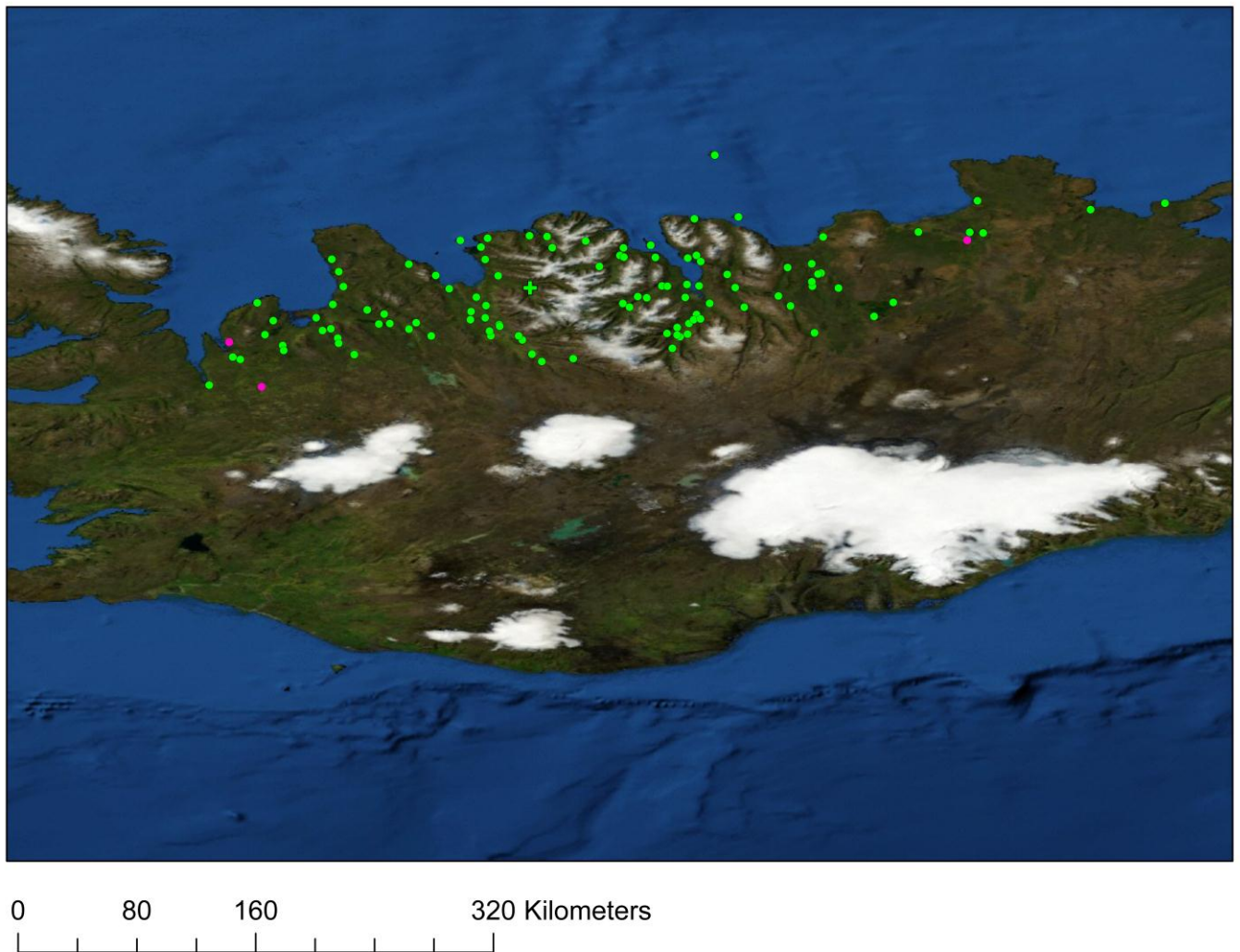


Figure 4 Churches and chapels in the diocese of Hólar *c.* 1400, with dedications to Thomas Becket indicated by pink dots. Map: Margaret Cormack.

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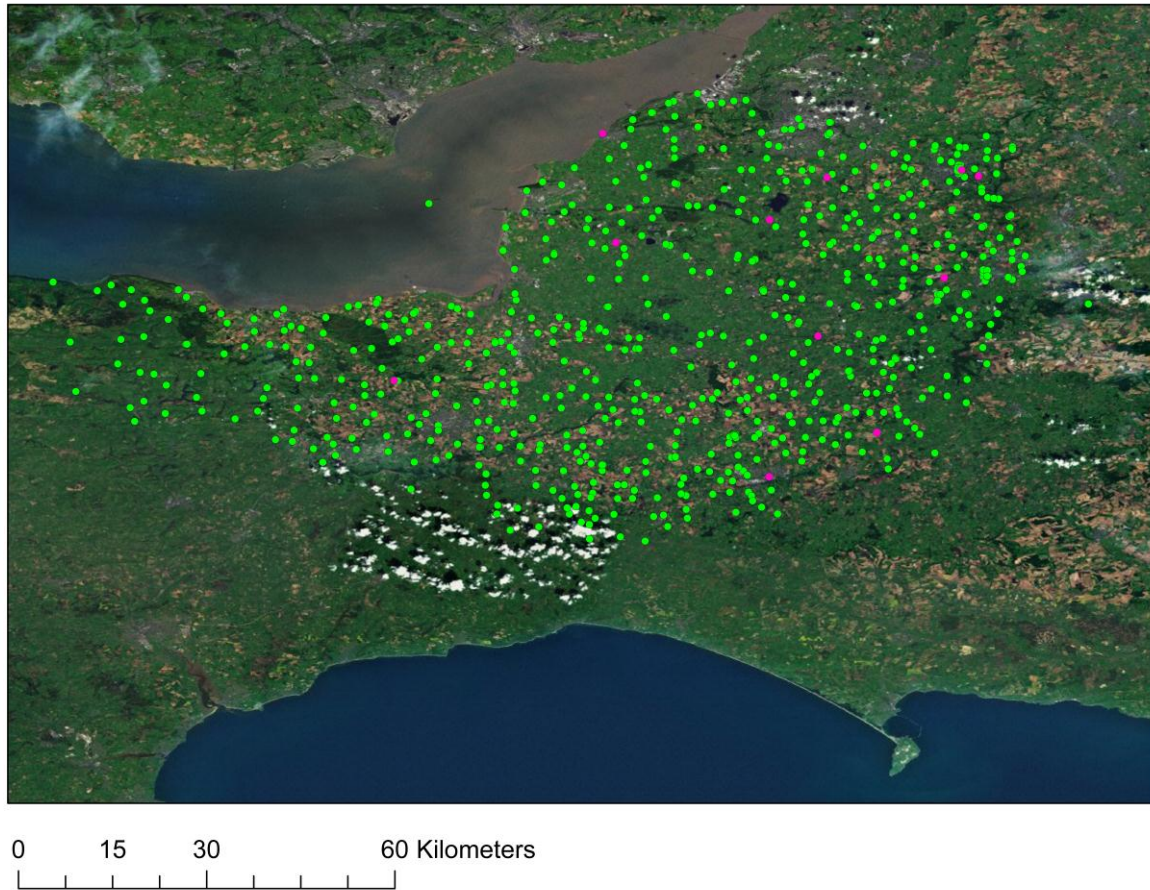


Figure 5 Sites of religious significance in the diocese of Bath and Wells, with dedications to Thomas Becket indicated by pink dots Map: Margaret Cormack, using a database created by Michael Costen.