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Relic

Gregory Schopen

Scholars of religions have generally been more comfortable with ideas than with things, more comfortable with what they thought others thought than with what they knew they did. They have been particularly uncomfortable, perhaps, when people touched or rubbed or hugged or kissed things, especially when those things were themselves somewhat disconcerting—dead bodies, bits of bone or cloth, dirt or fingernails, dried blood. This unease itself may go a long way toward explaining why we still understand little about relics. And this lack of understanding may represent a serious gap since these bodies and bits of bone and otherwise seemingly dead matter have played a lively role in the history of several major religions, in religious architectures and arts, in religious practices, economies, and institutions. They have discomfited some and consoled many. They have challenged official doctrine, created conflict, and quite literally brought diverse types of people together. They have changed secular laws and even rearranged landscapes, and we still do not understand exactly how. Even the etymology of the term, which should be the easiest part of any discussion of relics; immediately lands us in both conceptual and crosscultural difficulties.

Whether it be the English word “relic” or the Sanskrit originals that it almost always translates, it is clear that etymologies and literal meanings can only represent a small part of what the terms mean. The English “relic” is derived from Latin relinquere, “to leave behind” the same Latin verb has also produced English “relinquish.” A relic, then, is something left behind. But the two Sanskrit terms that are taken to correspond to the English word relic do not mean this at all. The etymology of the most common of the two terms, śarira, is unsettled. Its most common usage, however, is not. In the singular it means “the body, bodily frame.” It is when it is used in the plural that it comes to have some of the senses of the English word relic. The other Sanskrit word that is usually translated by relic is dhātu. Its basic meanings are “constituent part,” “ingredient,” “element,” “primitive matter,” or “constituent element or essential ingredient.” It is, for example, the word used for a primary element of the earth: a metal, mineral, or ore; it is also the word used to designate what we call a verbal root. If Calvin, then, would have us believe that he believes that relics are humbug, that is well and good. We are simply dealing with his beliefs, and as a theological position they are as good or bad as any other. But as a representation of the beliefs of all those “rude and ignorant men or old women” who were going around kissing such things—and Calvin’s polemic established, if anything, that they were—as a representation, in short, of history and actual practice, we will not do, in spite of the fact that until recently, given the enormous influence of Calvinism and Protestantism on Western intellectual values, they often have. That they have probably needs little demonstration. If it does, two entries in what was—and in important ways remains—the most authoritative and learned encyclopedia of religion and ethics will suffice.

When the history of twentieth-century religious studies is written, Hastings’ Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics will undoubtedly be seen to have played a very important role. The first volume was published in 1908, the last in 1921. It therefore summarized the great richness of nineteenth-century scholarship and values, and set the agenda for much of the twentieth century. It is, then, a little...
disconcerting to see what it says under the heading “Relics,” and it is probably no accident, and certainly symptomatic, that the topic of Christian (here called “Western”) relics is treated together with what is called “Primitive.” The actual rubric is “Relics (Primitive and Western).” The entry was written by J. A. MacCulloch and contains a great deal of interesting material, with an equal number of unbecoming adjectives and phrases: the views of early Catholic fathers “differ little from the theory implicit in savage magic, as far as that concerns the use of relics”; he refers to “the extent and the absurdity of the cult,” “abuses,” “the credulity of the people,” “superstition,” and “many anomalies and absurdities,” all of which should have a familiar ring, as does his conclusion: “the admitted great uncertainty which surrounds any relic, the certainty of impudent fraud in the case of many, the gross superstitions and abuses to which they have given rise and which have attended the cult from early times, far outweigh any positive good which they may ever have done.” MacCulloch did not invent his vocabulary nor, it seems, did he arrive at it through a disinterested study of his sources. This is even more obvious in the second entry that follows immediately.

The noted historian of India, Vincent A. Smith, wrote that second entry under the title “Relics (Eastern).” In fact it is almost entirely devoted to Buddhist South Asia and here too is the familiar litany: “rank superstition, open to every kind of abuse and fraud”; “superstitious veneration”; “disgusting extreme.” MacCulloch, writing about Christian relics, could call up Christian critics for his talk, and there was thereby at least a certain theological continuity, even if it had crept noiselessly into scholarship. The language at least came from a part of the tradition itself. Smith could do no such thing. Although sarira had had their challengers in the Indian Buddhist tradition, they had never had these sorts of rabid detractors. In fact, the only individuals who had ever said this sort of thing about Buddhist relics were outsiders—European travelers and missionaries. In this sense the sources of Smith’s evaluations are clear: They could not have been either Buddhist or Indian. Though some things have changed, these views—now perhaps in more cleverly disguised forms—are still sometimes with us, and both MacCulloch’s and Smith’s entries are cited, for example, in the new Encyclopedia of Religion as “still useful, although dated.” But the problems, surely, are more than simply chronological, and the language of abuse and stupidity surely is only one part of a complex set of conceptual clutter that, like their “virtues,” still clings to relics.

Without, of course, wanting to follow out their logical implications, both MacCulloch and Smith, for example, “explain” the use of relics as the result of natural “affection” or “instinctive reverence”: “reverence for the remains of the dead or the treasuring of some of their more personal belongings is natural and instinctive”; or it “is a natural exhibition of emotion.” Since, again according to both, this natural and instinctive reverence invariably leads to abuse, superstition, and fraud, we are invariably led to a rather unflattering anthropology, and there we sit. This unflattering anthropology is also almost as invariably associated with the appearance of a particular species of, or particularly specious, explanatory deus ex machina: need. People do and think these sorts of stupid things because various needs make them: the need for reassurance, the need for physical contact with what is thought sacred, the need to locate that curious commodity (the list is long). We are an alarmingly needy bunch. But that there is something to all of this is almost as certain as the fact that it so far has been badly expressed. To do better, however, is not necessarily an easy task.

There is both a startling precision and a maddening conceptual fuzziness in what Christians and Buddhists say about relics and sariras and both, it seems, are here to stay. Like it or not, when we are dealing with sariras and relics we are, it seems, dealing both with conceptions of something like what Bergson called “elan vital,” Dylan Thomas called “the force that through the green fuse drives the flower,” or your grandmother called “life,” and something that remains stubbornly material, something that is transmissible and has weight. The latter, for example, was already demonstrable—or thought to be so—in the time of Gregory of Tours. In his Liber in gloria martyrum, with regard to the tomb of St. Peter, he says,

But if someone wishes to take away a blessed relic, he weighs a little piece of cloth on a pair of scales and lowers it into [the tomb]; then he keeps vigils, fasts, and earnestly prays that the power of the apostle will assist his piety. [What happens next] is extraordinary to report! If the man’s faith is strong, when the piece of cloth is raised from the tomb it will be so soaked with divine power [imbuitur divina virtute] that it will weigh much more than it weighed previously. (van Dam 1983, 45–6)

That such hard-nosed empiricism is not just ancient, and that we are indeed dealing with “the force that through the green fuse drives the flower,” seems to be confirmed by the Boston Globe for 19 December 1972:

A medical man in Dusseldorf . . . claimed to have measured the weight of the human psyche. He placed the beds of his terminal patients on ultra sensitive scales and claimed that as they died he found that the needle dropped 21 grams. (MacGregor 1992, 16n.1)

We of course do not like this sort of thing much because it confounds our categories, but our preferences cannot—however humbling—prevent our sources from saying what they do. Indian Buddhist sources—epigraphical, canonical, and learned; early and late—are all but unanimous that relics are, if you will pardon the etymological pun, animate. What is probably the earliest actuallydatable reference to a Buddhist relic occurs in what is known as the “Bajjar Inscription of Menandros” (Schopen 1997, 126 and n.49) and may be as early as the second century B.C.E. Although it refers to what we now would call the deposition of a “relic,” it calls what we call a relic “the body of the Blessed
One Śākyamuni which is endowed with life [literally, breath] (“prānaṃ samatām / tvaṃ bhogavato sākamanuḥ”). Oddly enough, however, the cognitive fact that relics were alive should, by necessity, also put them at risk: If relics lived they could also, it seems, die and—more importantly—be killed. This seemingly necessary corollary is also found in Buddhist sources. First of all, the destruction of a stūpa or monumental reliquary was ruled a particularly heinous crime and, when classified, it occurred alongside several other forms of murder. Probably the most dramatic example of the latter is recorded in a collection of rules for monks belonging to the Mulasārvasvātīdāna Order.

A group of nuns had built a stūpa or monumental reliquary for the relics of a monk who had died, and had instituted a cult with regard to it. Another monk came along and, thinking it was a stūpa of the Buddha, paid worship to it. When he was informed of the stūpa’s “contents” he was furious—a rather unseemly state of mind for an arhat—took the stūpa down, and threw the “bones” away. When they were told what had occurred, the nuns did not understand it as the destruction of a structure but as the death of the monk whose relics had been enshrined. They said, “Our brother is from today truly dead! (bdag cag gi ming po deng galo sn la sin zhes ... )” He had, it seems, been murdered (see Schopen 1996). Similarly, in the much later Sri Lankan monastic chronicle called the Cūlaśravas, a group of Tamil invaders is said to have wrecked image houses and monasteries, destroyed sacred books, and torn down reliquaries, destroying relics that were “the very life of them” (“teem jñātām teem jñātanike ... ”). The language we find in the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra, the well-known early Buddhist canonical text dealing with the death of the Buddha. There the Mallas, the people in whose territory the Buddha had died, intend to carry the body “by the south and outside, to a spot on the south, and outside of the city.” The gods, however, have other ideas and the Mallas cannot lift the body. The gods want the body to be carried out “by the north to the north of the city, and entering the city by the north gate, let us [the gods] bring it through the midst of the city into the midst thereof. And going out again by the eastern gate ... to the east of the city ... ” (Rhys Davids and Rhys Davids 1910, 181). And so it is done. Although the directional symbolism here remains obscure, one thing is certain: to carry a dead body into the city would have been unheard of. Indian notions of death pollution were, if anything, even stronger than Roman. The narrative fact that this was what the gods not only insisted on but effected can only mean, it seems, that the body was not—on divine authority—to be classified as dead. Here too there is no breakdown of separation but a selective reclassification using old categories.

If Christian and Buddhist relics are defined by where they are put or allowed to enter, and by what people do in regard to them, they are also defined by what is said about them. And here too the language used is sometimes hauntingly similar. Buddhist sources—again early and late, inscriptive and learned—talk about sarira or dhaṭṭu as, for example, “infused with morality, infused with concentration, infused with wisdom,” infused, in other words, with the three things that define a living Buddha or saint. They are also described as “full of virtue” or “informed with universal benevolence” (“the Perfectly Enlightened One who is enclosed within the most excellent relic”) (Schopen 1997, chap. 8).
or it is said that worship directed toward the relic is the same as worship directed toward the living Buddha; or, finally, it is simply said that “when relics are present, the Buddha is present.”

For the language used by Christians in regard to their relics, we might simply cite some examples from Victricius of Rouen’s De laude sanctorum written at the end of the fourth century. Victricius was a bishop speaking of relics he had just received. For example, he says that the saints “inhabit forever the Holy Relics” (sacramentorum semper sacratas reliquias posse), that “in these relics perfect grace and virtue are contained” (in isis reliquias perfectam esse gratiam perfectamque virtutem); and that “he who cures lives. He who lives is present in his relics” (qui sanat, in reliquis egit) (Hilgarth 1986, 23–8; Mulders and Demeulenaere 1985; cf. Bynum 1995, 106–8; for later conceptions of relics, see Delumeau 1989, 228–33).

In both traditions, then, the relic is or has virtue, grace, benevolence, and life. It is also important to keep in mind that in both traditions virtue, grace, benevolence, and life are transmittable by touch or through less direct contact. In the passage cited above from Gregory of Tours, we saw that a cloth that comes into contact with St. Peter’s tomb is soaked with divine virtue, and much the same is said in the Georgian and Arabic versions of a text ascribed to John Moschos (McCulloh 1976, 183–4). In the Buddhist case the transmission is sometimes even articulated by a shadow. In the monastic code of the Mulasarvastivadin Order, for example, monks who are charged with sweeping the compound refuse to walk on the shadow cast by the stupa, and in the Sarvatathagatamuni-vajraparvan—a little much later—it is said that “those who are touched by the shadow of the stūpa, or sprinkled with its dust, will not go to an unfortunate destiny” (Suzuki 1955–61, vol. 7, 173.3.1). Something moves from A to B and B, it seems, is the beneficiary even if, in at least one very important case, B is supposed to be dead.

The case in point brings together, summarizes as it were, much of what we have already seen in regard to relics, but it does so in such a way as to make problematic both their meaning and our typical approach to the study of relic. The case concerns what in the Latin West came to be called burial or deposition ad sanctos; “near to, by, close by, a saint.” This practice produced a typical archaeological configuration succinctly described by Philippe Ariès:

Over the saint’s tomb a basilica would be built. . . . Christians sought to be buried close to this structure. Diggings in the Roman cities of Africa or Spain reveal an extraordinary spectacle concealed by subsequent urban growth: piles of stone sarcophagi in disorder, one on top of the other, several layers high, especially around the walls of the apse, close to the shrine of the saint. (1974, 16, 17)

This, again according to Ariès, “is what one finds in Tipasa, Hippo and Carthage. The spectacle is just as striking in Ampurias, in Catalonia . . . [and] . . . the same situation is found in our Gallo-Roman cities” (1981, 34). To these observations should be added the more recent remarks of Yvette Duval:

So very soon relics also attract the dead, and not just the holy tombs as in the first inhumations ad sanctos attested in Africa and Italy: moreover the same terms—memoria, then reliquia—designate the “remains” whether they are the whole or a part of the body or just contact relics of the second degree. . . . The dead are said to be buried “near the martyrs” even when, after the 4th century, only a little of their ashes or tiny relics are alone deposited under the altar of the edifice that shelters the burial. It is necessary to emphasize, finally, that one also buried someone ad sanctos around places that were sanctified by the life (or the death) of the martyrs and saints, but that had never contained their tombs or even their material relics . . . these places which were sanctified by only the presence of the martyrs and saints during their passage on this earth (locus sanctus) and were charged with their virtus. (Duval 1988, 56–7; cf. Bynum 1995, 200–25)

Duval also points out that burial ad sanctos was a “mass phenomenon,” but also “a ‘praxis’ fully participated in by the highest authorities of the church.” This is what the highest authorities did. It is not, however, what they talked about. Apart from stray references in literary sources, Augustine alone among the church fathers wrote a small treatise—De cura pro mortuis gerenda, little more than a long letter in response to a question by Paulinus of Nola who himself had buried his own son near the saints of Accola—dealing with the problems this practice created. The De cura has been variously described. MacCulloch says the treatise was written “in support of the practice” (Hastings 1908–21, 657); Brown (1981) refers to it as a “clear answer.” But neither seems to be entirely true. More than anything it seems to be hesitant, at times tortured. Augustine says, for example, “If . . . supplications which are made with true faith and devotion for the dead should be lacking, there would be no advantage to their souls, I think, however holy the places be in which their lifeless bodies are buried!” (Lacy 1955, 359). But later he says, “This question as to how the martyrs aid those who certainly are aided by them surpasses the powers of my intelligence” (379). These latter sentiments are in fact something of a leitmotif running throughout the work: “Somehow or other . . . “I might believe that this is done by the workings of angels.” “In what way such things happen I do not know.” “This question is so deep that I cannot comprehend it, and so complex as to defy all my efforts to scrutinize it successfully.” Augustine here, perhaps uncharacteristically, is struggling. He has a problem, and so do we.

Part of our problem is that Augustine’s De cura is the only extended discussion that we have, and part of our problem is that—as in this case—the religious elite, those who wrote for and of the tradition, did not always write about
what they and others did. We often know—again as in this case—what religious people did, not from learned treatises and official writings, but from archeology and epigraphy. It is on the basis of Christian archeological and epigraphic sources that Duval “knew” that burial *ad sanctos* was a “mass phenomenon . . . fully participated in by the highest authorities of the Church,” knew, in fact, what people did (see also Duval and Picard 1986). And here we have several more problems.

Those sources that allow us to see at least something of what religious people did are the same sources that until recently have not been allowed a full voice in the histories of religious traditions. We can track this slow and sometimes grudging development in the historiography of Christianity, for example, in W. H. C. Frend’s recently published *Archaeology of Early Christianity* (1996). Frend notes that Harnack, still a name to be reckoned with, used little archeological material in his “monumental” Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten, and says that Benjamin Kidd’s *History of the Church to A.D. 461*, published in three volumes in 1922, “remains the last (if not also the greatest) history of the early Church that relied almost exclusively on patristic texts” (213–4). “Henceforth,” Frend says, “no study of early Christianity could afford to neglect the wealth of evidence from archaeology.” The definitiveness of this remark, however, is considerably blunted by others: “Even Hans Lietzmann, archaeologist at heart though he was, kept closely to his literary texts in his *Geschichte der alten Kirche*, published in 1930 and 1936” (251). “The year 1961 had seen the first textbook designed to correlate literary with archaeological remains. . . . his [M. Gough’s] *The Early Christians* was a pioneering work, a pointer to future writing of early Church history, which integrated literary and archaeological studies” (327). In fact, it is only in reference to work published in the 1970s and 1980s that Frend can finally say “Archaeology and literary studies are now seen as inextricably linked” (362).

It is hard to believe that this long exclusion, and then the slow and grudging admittance of archeological and epigraphic sources into the study of Christianity, is completely unrelated to theological controversies within the tradition itself. Archeological and epigraphic sources tell us, after all, what people did, but this was almost precisely what the Protestant reformers who were concerned with locating “true” religion in sacred texts were trying to exclude from their definition of religion. What people did and had been doing was in fact a large part of the Protestant problem: what had “been practiced in some ages, and is now practiced wherever Popery prevails,” and what “have been admitted into the general belief and practice” (both from Calvin). Suffice it to say that the Protestant position won, and, although it has been diluted, residual, and secularized, “a basically Whiggish and ultimately ‘Protestant’ view of things is still a potent influence on our thinking” (Scarisbrick 1984, 1), and especially on Western intellectual understandings of what religion is. Since these understandings excluded from the definition of “true,” what we would probably now refer to as “real,” religion those things that people did, would it be surprising if those sources that told us about such things were to be marginalized? (cf. Geary 1994, 30–45).

All of this, and the meanings of relics and burial *ad sanctos*, might merely be considered a bizarre and long episode in the history of Christianity but for one thing: we have seen other religions—as indeed we only can—through our own eyes. And that has often meant that for a long time we might not have seen some things at all.

When what was considered early Buddhist literature was first read, it contained so little about disposal of the dead that it was almost assumed that Indian Buddhists did not do it. Buddhist scholastic literature also did not address the question. Since Buddhism was identified as a religion, and since religion was by then all but assumed to be located in texts, and especially sacred texts, this almost clinched it. The fact that even very early archeological work at Buddhist sites suggested otherwise counted for very little because, as in the Christian case, archeological material could only show what Buddhists did, and it had already been culturally decided in the West that that was at best marginal to “real” religion. Though the archeological evidence constantly increased, its admission into the study of Indian Buddhism has been even slower and more grudging than in the case of the Christian West (see Schopen 1997, chap. 1). However, it too revealed a typical and repeated configuration, and it was almost exactly the same as that found in Tipasa, Hippo, and Carthage, in Ampurias and Catalonia, and in our Gallo-Roman cities.

As at Christian sites, so too at Buddhist sites the presence of a relic permanently housed in ever more elaborate *stūpas*, or spots sanctified by the former presence of the Buddha, also usually marked by a *stūpa*, drew to themselves an equally disorderly array of secondary deposits, several layers high, of mortal remains. Though often poorly excavated, poorly reported, or both, there can be no doubt about the basic pattern. What remains unsure is the lower chronologically limit of the practice (although it appears to have been in full swing at early sites like Sāñcī and common even in Sri Lanka in the first few centuries of the Common Era) and its extent: it may have been far, far more common than at first thought (see Schopen 1994). Although this pattern has only recently been brought into something like focus, it had not gone entirely unnoticed. C. Duroiselle, for example, had said long ago in speaking about Buddhist Burma that the Burmese have “a curious custom, which is similar to that which is in vogue in Christian countries, of turning the sacred precincts of a pagoda [stūpa] into a cemetery” (1915, 147). It is indeed curious and from several points of view.

What we have bumped up against here are two religious traditions that differ radically in formally expressed and “official” doctrine, in worldview and
orientation, and very largely in institutional organization. Still, they share similar understandings of a relic and their sacred sites reveal the same archaeologically determinable spatial configuration or distribution of mortuary deposits crowded around that permanently housed relic. What are we to make of this since in neither tradition has the practice that produced these configurations been subjected to emic exegesis, discussion, or rationalization. We can, I think, only describe in culturally specific terms, insofar as that is possible, what is there. But that itself turns out to be interesting.

There is at the center or focal point of both configurations usually a relic or tomb or stūpa. These are all considered to be or contain the holy person: “He who lives is present in his relics.” “When relics are present the Buddha is present.” The center is culturally alive, and it is permanently and architecturally located—it does not move. Its life is transmittable by contact, closeness, and shadow. In both cases mortuary deposits are permanently and definitively placed within its range. They too do not move. In the Buddhist case, for example, mortuary remains are permanently—dare we say eternally—in the shadow of the presence of the Buddha. If the bones and ashes and broken bodies in these deposits are also alive—and must not be to be affected by the shadow—then we have a materially constructed, articulated, and assured permanent state of, if not “salvation,” then heaven or paradise: the conventionally dead have been permanently placed in the presence of the Holy.

Duval in her important study has come close to these kinds of conclusions. She has suggested that burial ad sanctos “is evidently based on the certitude that the dead body is not entirely exanimum [dead], it has been ‘in-formed’, modeled by the soul which during its lifetime had given it form, and after death it guards the imprint of its soul (vestigia animae suae).” “One is here,” she says, “far from the doctrine hammered out by Augustine” (xl), but that is another matter. She also says in regard to the “themes” expressed in Christian epitaphs that “One sees without going further, that these themes, certainly tied to the material situation of the tomb and the relics nearby have a resonance that is above all spiritual; they refer to the links in the hereafter which are prefigured by burial ad sanctos and which, by so doing, it favors” (134). We need only add that in the mind of the believer, burial ad sanctos may not simply favor it. It may effect it.

And what of the fact that all of this would seem to fly in the face of formal doctrine, both Buddhist and Christian? It may well be that scholars of religion have not yet sufficiently distinguished formal doctrine from belief. In may well be that large numbers of religious men and women knew little and cared much less for formal doctrine than have modern scholars. It may well be that religious women and men—even those who did not know they had a metaphysics—followed Emerson’s suggestion: “In your metaphysics you have denied personality to the Deity: yet when the devout motions of the soul come, yield to them heart and life, though they should clothe God with shape and color. Leave your theory, as Joseph his coat in the hand of the harlot, and flech” (Gilman 1965, 269). It may well be that many did just that, and so might we.

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Religion, Religions, Religious

Jonathan Z. Smith

In the second earliest account of the “New World” published in English, A Treatise of the Newe India (1553), Richard Eden wrote of the natives of the Canary Islands that, “At Columbus first comming thether, the inhabittantes went naked, without shame, religion or knowledge of God.” In the same year, toward the beginning of the first part of his massive Crónica del Perú (1553), the conquistador historian Pedro Cieza de León described the north Andean indigenous peoples as “observing no religion at all, as we understand it (no ... religion alguna, a lo que entendemos), nor is there any house of worship to be found.” While both were factually incorrect, their formulations bear witness to the major expansion of the use and understanding of the term “religion” that began in the sixteenth century and anticipate some of the continuing issues raised by that expansion: (1) “Religion” is not a native category. It is not a first person term of self-characterization. It is a category imposed from the outside on some aspect of native culture. It is the other, in these instances colonialists, who are solely responsible for the content of the term. (2) Even in these early formulations, there is an implicit universality. “Religion” is thought to be a ubiquitous human phenomenon; therefore, both Eden and Cieza find its alleged absence noteworthy. (3) In constructing the second-order, generic category “religion,” its characteristics are those that appear natural to the other. In these quotations this familiarity is signaled by the phrases “knowledge of God” and “religion ... as we understand it.” (4) “Religion” is an anthropological not a theological category. (Perhaps the only exception is the distinctively American nineteenth-century coinages, “to get religion” or “to experience religion.”) It describes human thought and action, most frequently in terms of belief and norms of behavior. Eden understands the content of “religion” largely in the former sense (“without ... religion or knowledge of God”), whereas Cieza articulates it in the latter (“no religion ... nor ... any house of worship”). The term “religion” has had a long history, much of it, prior to the sixteenth century, irrelevant to contemporary usage. Its etymology is uncertain, although one of the three current possibilities, that it stems from the root *leig meaning “to bind” rather than from roots meaning “to reread” or “to be careful,” has been the subject of considerable Christian homiletic expansion from Lactantius’s Divine Institutes (early fourth century) and Augustine’s On True Religion (early fifth century) to William Camden’s Britannia (1586). In both Roman and early Christian Latin usage, the noun forms religio/religiones and, more especially, the adjectival religious and the adverbial religiousmente were cultic terms referring primarily to the careful performance of ritual obligations. This sense survives in the