AIM(S)

- To enable students to acquire a comprehensive knowledge of the Becket dispute and their relationship to a variety of historical concepts, interpretations and approaches.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this module students should be able to:

- demonstrate a comprehensive knowledge and critical understanding of the dispute between Henry II and Thomas Becket, and of its consequences;
- show a comprehensive knowledge and critical understanding of certain specific themes, problems, developments and aspects of relations between church and state in England in the 1160s and 1170s;
- show a critical awareness of relevant documentary source materials, such as the contemporary and later ‘lives’ of Thomas Becket, and of artistic materials such as manuscripts and stained glass;
- demonstrate a critical awareness of current scholarship and historiographical trends underpinning and shaping our knowledge of the Becket dispute and the rise of Canterbury as a cult centre.

CONTENT

In December 1170 an archbishop of Canterbury was murdered in his own cathedral church in an act that shocked and stunned the whole of Western Christendom. In one way the dispute between Becket and his king, Henry II, was a continuation of a dilemma which was universal in the eleventh and twelfth centuries: the need to define and delineate the jurisdiction of the power of the church and the power of the state. In another way it was distinctive because Thomas Becket had been the trusted servant of the king, and when he died he became a saint. The module is divided into two sections. The first deals with the origin of the dispute between the king and the archbishop, tracks its course, and examines its violent outcome. The second part of the module looks at the emergence of the cult of St
Thomas: the creation of a pilgrimage centre at Canterbury, which was to become one of the foremost shrines in Medieval Europe; the production of lives of St Thomas; the development of the representation of the martyr-saint over the centuries in art and literature; and at St Thomas of Canterbury in the twentieth century. The objectives of the module are to introduce you to the methodologies of studying the particular historical problems surrounding church state–relations in the Middle Ages and the place of pilgrimage in medieval culture.

ASSESSMENT

Coursework 100%

This module has two assessments:

One essay of 4000 words, worth 80%

One book review or document report of 1000 words, worth 20%

Sample assignments:

Essays:

‘No fiction dies so hard in English history as the well-known theory that, in their famous quarrel over the privilege of clergy, Henry II could argue a better case in canon law than Becket’. Do you agree with Duggan’s assessment that novelty characterized Henry II’s rather than Becket’s claims?

Why did the cult of Thomas Becket become so popular among pilgrims?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Essential

_The Lives of Thomas Becket: selected sources_, translated and annotated by Michael Staunton (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001)


Staunton, M., _Thomas Becket and His Biographers_ (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006)

Sumption, J., _Pilgrimage_ (London: Faber,1975)
Recommended


Brooke, Z. N., ‘Henry II and Thomas Becket’ in *The English Church and the Papacy*


