

MARGARET

Queen of Sicily



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Appendix 6 THE PENDANT



Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art

The only contemporary image of Margaret known to us, which may indeed be a merely symbolic representation, is a gold reliquary pendant made by skilled goldsmiths in Canterbury, a center of this craft. This was given to her by Bishop Reginald of Bath, whose name appears on it: “Bishop Reginald of Bath consigns this to Queen Margaret of Sicily.” Clockwise, beginning from the cross at the middle-top of the border, this Latin inscription on the obverse reads: ISTUD REGINE MARGARETE SICULORUM TRANSMITTIT PRESUL RAINAUDUS BATONIORUM.

Seven tiny relics of Saint Thomas Becket were once preserved under a crystal. These are described in the inscription on the reverse side: DE SANGUINE SANCTI THOME MARTYRIS DE VESTIBUS SUIS SANGUINE SUO TINCTUS DE PELLICIA. DE CILITIO. DE CUCULLA. DE CALCIAMENTO. ET CAMISIA. "Of the blood of Saint Thomas Martyr. Of his vestments stained with his blood: of the cloak, the belt, the hood, the shoe, the shirt."

The majuscule characters are typical of the ecclesiastical engraving and inscriptions of the twelfth century; the lettering rendered in mosaic in the epitaph above Margaret's tomb in Monreale is very similar (see the photograph in this book).

Bishop Reginald "Fitzjocelin" (de Bohun) of Bath, whose ambivalent relationship with Thomas was described by Herbert of Bosham, probably presented this pendant to Margaret on the occasion of her son's marriage, in 1177, to Joanna, the daughter of King Henry II of England.

Becket was murdered in late 1170. He was canonized in 1173. Fashioned between 1174 and 1176, the gift was probably an acknowledgment of Margaret's support for Becket, specifically for giving refuge to his kinsmen in Sicily, and for her support of the Church generally. There is debate as to whether the image depicts Margaret being blessed by Reginald, or by Becket himself, though the latter is the majority view among scholars.

Measuring 5 x 3.1 x .7 centimeters (nearly 2 inches in height), the pendant is exceptional for the mere fact of its preservation. The great majority of English goldsmiths' work of this period was melted down over the centuries. Hallmarks were not used in the twelfth century; the gold purity of the pendant is approximately twenty-two karats, which is slightly less than that of gold coins minted during the same period.

The engraving is quite similar in style to various drawings and illuminations of its era. For comparison, particular refer-

ence is sometimes made to those of the unfinished Winchester Bible, and specifically its Ecclesiastes (fol. 268r). Forming the pattern of what were to be painted illuminations, the manuscript's drawings resemble the lines of the pendant's figures.

Margaret is shown bowing slightly for the bishop's blessing. Her gaze seems to be fixed on something she is holding in her hands, perhaps the reliquary itself. Not much can be inferred from this simple representation except that Margaret is depicted as rather slender and statuesque, nearly as tall as the prelate invoking the benediction.

Long and tortuous has been the reliquary's journey from Canterbury to Palermo and then around Italy, finally crossing the Atlantic during the middle years of the twentieth century. It is now part of the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, where it is usually displayed in the Treasury gallery at the Cloisters Museum in Fort Tryon Park in Upper Manhattan, catalogued under accession number 63.160. Part of a significant bequest made in 1963 to the museum by Joseph Pulitzer (1913-1993), who acquired it from the Italian collector and art dealer Piero Tozzi, it was first described at length by Thomas Hoving (op.cit.) in 1965.

