JOHN LYDGATE: MONK-POET OF BURY ST. EDMUNDS ABBEY

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by

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Introduction—Considering the “drveling monk”

[Lydgate is a] voluminous, prosaick, and driveling monk . . . and these stupid and fatigueing productions, which by no means deserve the name of poetry, and their stil more stupid and disgusting author, who disgraces the name and patronage of his master Chaucer are neither worth collecting . . . nor even worthy of preservation. (Ritson 87-88)

Joseph Ritson’s 1802 estimation of John Lydgate has had enduring effects on Lydgate studies. First of all, his comments provided a precedent followed by generations of later scholars for negative characterizations of Lydgate. Second, Ritson’s statements present an origin point for attack by scholars who would defend Lydgate against the charge of bad poetry (Renoir 7; Schirmer 258). However, I find an irony in this second group’s defense. Despite the obvious, to quote Derek Pearsall, “dyspeptic anticlericalism” in Ritson’s charge that Lydgate is a “voluminous, prosaick, and drivelimg monk,” no scholar has attempted to place Lydgate’s monastic profession at the forefront of a major study of this poet (John Lydgate 3). My dissertation takes such an approach.

The two most prominent angles for studying Lydgate are those of Chaucerian continuator and of Lancastrian propagandist. Lydgate’s birth around 1371 meant that his first and Geoffrey Chaucer’s last twenty-nine years overlapped, locating the younger poet in a time when Chaucer’s influence was being realized most prominently. Although there
is no evidence to suggest that the two knew one another, Lydgate did foster relationships with Chaucer’s son, Thomas, and granddaughter, Alice, the Duchess of Suffolk. The poems “On the Departing of Thomas Chaucer” and “Poems on the Mass,” written for Alice, show these connections. Even more prominently connecting Lydgate and Chaucer are allusions and stylistic connections to his predecessor that permeate Lydgate’s poetry. Lydgate’s *Siege of Thebes*, framed as a continuation of the *Canterbury Tales*, complete with Lydgate’s own self-drawn pilgrim persona, serves as the most obvious example. The *Siege of Thebes*’ prologue also contains a passage where Lydgate eulogizes Chaucer as the “Floure of poetes throught al Breteyne” (40). Less explicit Chaucerian influences also appear in Lydgate’s poetry. Linguistically, Lydgate made use of many words Chaucer coined, establishing them in the English language (Pearsall, *John Lydgate* 50-51). Stylistic influences that Chaucer had over Lydgate include an attitude of self-deprecation to his audience and sources. From Lydgate’s historical vantage point, this attitude of self-deprecation also defines his relationship to Chaucer (Lerer 3).

In addition to exploring Lydgate’s use of Chaucer, scholars have been interested in Lydgate’s service to the Lancastrian court. Lydgate’s first known connection to the Lancastrians dates from 1406–1408 when the future Henry V intervened on Lydgate’s behalf to allow the monk to continue studies at Oxford’s Gloucester College (Pearsall, *Bio-bibliography* 15). Henry V, his brothers, and his son all patronized Lydgate. Examples of their commissions include the 30,117-line *Troy Book*, the 5,932-line *Life of Our Lady*, and the short poems “The Title and Pedigree of Henry VI” and “On Gloucester’s Approaching Marriage.” Given the troubles that plagued the usurping
Lancastrian kings, some scholars have characterized many of these poems as propagandistic. Analysis of Lydgate’s poems show “fractures” in the texts that belie attempts to cover up efforts at Lancastrian consolidation of power (Strohm, *England’s* 194-95). Thus, Lydgate has earned a reputation as Lancastrian propagandist.

An important next step in such criticism has come from Scott-Morgan Straker’s “Propaganda, Intentionality, and the Lancastrian Lydgate.” Straker objects to the frequency with which the “propagandist” label is applied. Straker argues that, by labeling Lydgate in this way, scholars limit the range of attitudes Lydgate is capable of taking toward his subject matters (121). This reasoning importantly paves the way for lines of inquiry that diverge from the Lydgate-as-Chaucerian-continuator or Lydgate-as-Lancastrian-propagandist readings.

Turning from these major approaches to Lydgate’s poetry, Helen Cooper’s introduction to the recent book *Chaucer and Religion* partially explains the widespread scholarly neglect of Lydgate as a monk. Using Chaucer as the example, Cooper voices the volume’s major challenge in overcoming modern assumptions:

[It] remains almost part of our scholarly credentials not to treat religious conviction seriously. The assumption seems to be that whatever the medieval ego may pretend to itself about pious motivation, the medieval id always had its fist deep in the till, grubbing for money or for power. No doubt that was often true, and Chaucer generously confirms our suspicions; but he also reminds us, if we read him whole, that it is too easy just to transfer back into the past our own secular assumptions about what ‘really’ drove individuals. Devotion was not
always driven by financial self-interest; mystical experience was something more, or other, than neurosis. There is more going on in Chaucer’s works, and in his society, than is encompassed by his satire alone, and we need to learn to pay attention. (xi)

As Cooper makes clear, the challenge of balancing scholarly objectivity with the spiritual a priori of the Middle Ages is not an easy task. However, if the widening of this lens has become necessary for Chaucer, then we also must include Lydgate and his nearly eighty years of life, most of them as a monk in orders, under the influence of Bury St. Edmunds Abbey.

**Lydgate and Bury St. Edmunds Abbey**

As his name indicates, Lydgate was born in the village of Lidgate, a small community located less than ten miles from the borough of Bury St. Edmunds in Suffolk, England. As a large monastic house, Bury St. Edmunds Abbey was the major seigneurial power in the region. Its banleuca, or area of control, extended in a ten-mile radius, which, of course, included Lidgate. Thus, John Lydgate was literally born under the influence of Bury St. Edmunds Abbey. The abbey’s influence on John would only grow stronger as he grew older. By age ten or eleven, he would have left his home to live in the abbey’s almonry, where he would receive his basic education. Before the end of his teenage years, Lydgate rose to the order of acolyte, highest of the minor orders. He was ordained a priest before he turned thirty. The Benedictine house at Oxford, Gloucester College, offered Lydgate additional education. Later in his career, a nominal priorate at Hatfield Broad Oak apparently served to give him a sinecure to help finance his literary
activities. At the end of his life, the completion of Lydgate’s final work, the *Secrees of Old Philisoffres*, by Benedict Burgh, a fellow monk, indicates that Lydgate died within the walls of Bury St. Edmund’s Abbey, his long-time home (Gottfried 21; Pearsall, *John Lydgate* 160; Pearsall, *Bio-bibliography* 12-15, 39-40; Orme 278-79, Schirmer 90-92). Bury St. Edmunds Abbey was a major influence on Lydgate’s life, from cradle to grave. We must give this monastic institution due consideration.

This powerful influence of Bury St. Edmund’s Abbey over Lydgate is reflected in Lydgate’s religious poetry. I subclassify many of these poems as monastic poetry because they feature explicitly monastic characters and/or are tied directly to Lydgate’s home convent. Within this subgroup of religious poems, I find a particular pool of issues and themes. Foremost among them is a theme of grace. While *grace* encompasses many different meanings, Lydgate frequently deploys its sense of “divine or saintly help in a human endeavor” (*MED*). References to the word in this sense emerge repeatedly in Lydgate’s monastic poems, making monks agents of the Divine. Lydgate’s monastic poems are also marked by a sense of *fervency*, by which I mean “intense sincerity or devotion.” This fervency may be in homage to a saint, to Bury St. Edmunds Abbey, or even to the ideals of the Benedictine Rule. Related to the themes of grace and fervency is a final issue of *identification*, defined here as the “close alignment Lydgate draws between his brethren and St. Edmund, patron saint of their abbey.” Lydgate understands St. Edmund to empower the Bury monks through grace. In consequence, the abbey is privileged to act on behalf of the saint as his agent. Put another way, the Bury monks saw themselves and their order as Edmund’s *shrinekeepers*. They and their order
inherited the stewardship of Edmund’s relics. Their duty to and privilege was to intercede before the saint for people from all classes and locations in England.

With this strong sense of identification between St. Edmund and the Bury monks who act as his agents comes an expected emphasis on Edmund in Lydgate’s monastic poems. Five of Lydgate’s poems feature or include prominent references to the Bury patron saint: the *Cartae Versificatae*, “To St. Edmund,” “To St. Robert of Bury,” the *Lives of Ss Edmund and Fremund*, and the *Extra Miracles of St Edmund* (three continuations that tell of Edmund’s posthumous miracles in London and Bury). I include discussion of all these works in the following chapters, but with particular focus on the *Lives of Ss Edmund and Fremund*, followed closely by the *Extra Miracles of St Edmund*. These two works are nexus points where Lydgate’s service to his abbey intertwines with his services to the Lancastrian court and the larger Bury St. Edmunds community in which he lived. Untangling this web reveals that Lydgate’s loyalties to his abbey and its patron saint are at least as strong as those he has to the Lancastrian court. This overarching thesis sheds new light on Lydgate by demonstrating how our understanding of his poetry must include consideration of his religious affiliation, especially when an explicit concern with monks and their activities is involved.

The full life of Bury St. Edmunds Abbey encompassed many facets of existence for the brethren who lived there. For this reason, I see what might be called “spiritual devotion” (pursuit of metaphysical experience) and “political advantage” (the abbey’s use of secular power to protect its own interests) as necessarily existing in uneasy concert with one another. The mixture of Lydgate’s worship of the saint and service to his house
and order does at times cause piety to clash against politics, but to again quote Cooper in *Chaucer and Religion*, “Motives are rarely pure” (xiii). Throughout this study, I point to political agendas Lydgate and his abbot William Curteys attach to the monastic poetry, but with an understanding that those agendas plausibly stemmed from genuine spiritual conviction in the evolving mission of the Benedictine order. Political power can be employed in defense of spiritual ideals and spiritual ideals can be used to justify unpopular political decisions. Where one sphere broaches the other is not always easy to determine and the tension of their overlap points to the importance of Bury St. Edmunds Abbey as Lydgate’s sponsoring institution.

**Literature Review**

With the major themes of Lydgate’s monastic poetry in sight, I now turn to examination of existing scholarship. I deal first with discussions of Lydgate as a monk and then with statements on the *Lives of Ss Edmund and Fremund* and the *Extra Miracles of St Edmund*. As my starting point with Ritson suggests, Lydgate’s monastic profession is a fact long acknowledged by scholars, but its effect on his poetry has been overlooked. Book-length studies by Walter F. Schirmer, Alain Renoir, Derek Pearsall, and Lois Ebin all include discussion of Lydgate’s monastic background. In scope, each of these studies includes all of the genres in which Lydgate wrote, a method that forestalls particular attention to how his abbey influenced his writing. For example, Renoir comments specifically on the uneasy, post-Reformation perception of Lydgate’s monasticism as Roman Catholic, a factor that may have eventually led to Ritson’s anticlerical casting of Lydgate’s poetry in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Renoir 4-7). Yet,
despite this astute observation, Renoir does not himself give any focused attention to Lydgate’s religious poetry.

Lee Patterson, Robert J. Meyer-Lee, Shannon Gayk, and Kathryn A. Lowe also make special reference to Lydgate’s monastic profession. In “Making Identities in Fifteenth-Century England: Henry V and John Lydgate,” Patterson posits that Lydgate creates an identity for himself in the Prologue to the Siege of Thebes that elevates his authority as a poet. Part of this self-crafted authority comes from his status as a monk, which offers moral gravitas to those he supports with his poems. Although this insight is helpful, Patterson’s focus on the Prologue to the Siege of Thebes is chiefly concerned with Lydgate’s critique of Lancastrian war policies; Patterson does not explore deeper issues of monastic agendas in more overtly religious poems. Meyer-Lee elaborates on issues of monastic authority in Poets and Power from Chaucer to Wyatt. Meyer-Lee’s larger thesis seeks to place Lydgate as a major player in a developing laureate tradition. This tradition is wrought with tensions of the laureate seeking his own glory while using his independent authority to support a higher social authority. In the laureate’s view, poetry has a transcendent value, but faces the problem of needing a political sponsor to prove its utility. In Lydgate’s case, part of the authority he gains as a laureate poet stems from his monastic profession, which stands apart from the Lancastrian political authority he serves. Through Lydgate’s ratification as a member of a religious rather than political institution, the Lancastrians gained legitimacy to their contested rule. Thus, although they focus on Lydgate’s poetic and political roles, Patterson and Meyer-Lee nicely begin to show the intricate interplay of Lydgate’s roles of poet and monk.
Focusing more narrowly on monasticism, Gayk interprets two of Lydgate’s religious poems, “On the Image of Pity” and “The Dolerous Pyte of Crystes Passioun,” as deterrents to heterodoxy in her article “Images of Pity: The Regulatory Aesthetics of John Lydgate’s Religious Lyrics.” Both poems offer reflections on popular images in medieval art. However, by Lydgate’s use of the vernacular and allusions to established church doctrine, these poems steer devotees away from affective piety and back to the orthodox teachings of the monastery. Lowe’s article, “The Poetry of Privilege: Lydgate’s Cartae Versificatae,” also deals with a type of service Lydgate offers to his abbey. The Cartae Versificatae are a group of pre-Conquest and Conquest-era charters translated out of Latin into Middle English verse. Lowe discusses how Bury St. Edmunds Abbey frequently used the original Latin charters to claim exemption from episcopal oversight. She then dates the translation of these charters to a historical moment when the Lancastrian court’s financial problems threatened other royal privileges that Bury St. Edmunds Abbey had long enjoyed. Lowe’s and Gayk’s articles shed particular light on Lydgate’s loyalty and service to his abbey. Following their example, I examine the Lives of Ss Edmund and Fremund and the Extra Miracles of St Edmund.

In addition to the scholarship on Lydgate as monk, a number of studies on Lydgate’s Edmund works provide additional framework for my study. Given the subject matter of the Edmund legends, some discussion of monastic affiliation becomes part of many of these arguments. Schirmer’s, Pearsall’s, and Ebin’s surveys, although brief, provide some valuable contextual information, especially in the case of some of Lydgate’s shorter monastic poems. For many of these short pieces, no other studies exist.
Ruth Nisse’s essay, “‘Was it not Routhe to Se?’: Lydgate and the Styles of Martyrdom,” forms one exception to this paucity. Nisse discusses how, in the poem “To St. Robert of Bury,” Lydgate asks both the infant martyr Robert and St. Edmund to purify and restore Bury’s glory. She goes on to discuss *Edmund and Fremund* as creating an alternate history for England in which Lydgate’s purified abbey is more laudable than the Lancastrian double monarchy because of its allegiance to and empowerment by Edmund. This article helpfully recognizes Lydgate’s divided religious and political loyalties. Its emphasis falls on the stylistic concern of explaining how Lydgate drops his laureate pose over his service to his abbey.

Arguments by Fiona Somerset, Karen A. Winstead, A. S. G. Edwards, and Jennifer Sisk further build the discussion of Lydgate’s relationship to the Lancastrian court in the *Lives of Ss Edmund and Fremund*. Somerset’s essay, “‘Hard is with seyntis for to make affray’: Lydgate the ‘Poet-Propagandist’ as Hagiographer,” sees Lydgate as building a hagiographical lineage of saint-kings for Henry VI. This alternate lineage helps Henry by circumventing the contentious rule of his Lancastrian lineage and modeling holy rule. In effect, Lydgate combines hagiography with a mirror for princes. Also concerned with good rule is a book chapter by Winstead, “Capgrave and Lydgate: Sainthood, Sovereignty, and the Common Good.” Here, Winstead sees *Edmund and Fremund’s* titular characters as presenting complementary but flawed kingships from which Lydgate intends Henry to forge a middle path for his own rule. Winstead further discusses this conjoining of two saints’ legends in one vita as a generic innovation. Edwards likewise discusses St. Edmund as a model for Henry VI that builds on the
existing norms of hagiography. For Edwards, the amount of elaboration Lydgate makes in his redaction helps to create metonymic parallels between Edmund’s legend and Henry’s political situation. Piety becomes more important than chivalry to Henry’s ability to rule. Finally, and like Somerset, Winstead, and Edwards, Sisk also is interested in how Lydgate develops genres in *Edmund and Fremund* as a way to advocate good rule. For Sisk, in her article “Lydgate’s Problematic Commission: A Legend of St. Edmund For Henry VI,” the examples provided by different kings in *Edmund and Fremund* variously follow the generic conventions of mirrors for princes, hagiography, and *miles Christi*. Lydgate’s strategy is not to advocate a particular model, although all these models reinforce an attitude of respect for monastic tradition, but rather to present options for Henry to look to in crafting his own rule.

In addition to Lydgate’s relationship with the Lancastrian court, his relationship with burghal audiences becomes the concern of John M. Ganim and Anthony Bale when they examine the *Extra Miracles*. In his essay “Lydgate, Location, and the Poetics of Exemption,” Ganim uses both *Edmund and Fremund* and the *Extra Miracles* to illustrate how metonymy in Lydgate’s poetry creates separate spheres of influence for competing authorities. By emphasizing Edmund’s saintly authority, Lydgate’s writing takes the place of a legal document exempting the abbey and other institutions from higher authorities. This technique also extends to the Bury St. Edmunds lay community in the *Extra Miracles*, where the environment created by the saint reflects a monastic ideal of living. Bale’s essay, “St Edmund in Fifteenth-Century London: The Lydgatian *Miracles of St Edmund,*” is concerned exclusively with the *Extra Miracles*. In it, he suggests that
the *Extra Miracles* were written in response to a revival of interest in Edmund’s cult, led by the gift of the *Lives of Ss Edmund and Fremund* to Henry VI. Bale traces the commission of the London-based miracle to noble patrons associated with the Lancastrian court. The two Bury miracles are regional displays of pride in the Edmund cult. As a whole, all these existing arguments on *Edmund and Fremund* and the *Extra Miracles* helpfully examine Lydgate’s service to his Lancastrian and lay patrons and his defense against them on behalf of his monastic interests. They also are very interested in matters of genre development and style. However, these scholars do not thoroughly explore the service Lydgate provides for his abbey by acting as its representative to the non-monastic world.

Two other works less specifically focused on Lydgate, but making important statements on medieval Benedictines, influence the present study: Robert S. Gottfried’s *Bury St. Edmunds and the Urban Crisis: 1290–1539* and James G. Clark’s *The Benedictines in the Middle Ages*. Gottfried’s book discusses the town of Bury St. Edmunds’ history of economic dependence on the abbey. He begins his study at the point where the local burgesses began to desire and work for independence from the abbey, tracing the various avenues through which they sought this independence. The final chapters culminate in discussion of various episodes of social conflict, sometimes violent, between the town and abbey. Clark’s book is also a history, although of the Benedictine order instead of Lydgate’s town. Clark’s thesis is that the Benedictine order did not experience a noticeably worse period of decline in the fifteenth century than it did during earlier periods in its history. Instead, the order evolved to fit the circumstances of
time and place. This adaptability is what accounts for the best and worst traits of the Benedictines. Although ranging far wider in historical and regional breadth than fifteenth-century Suffolk, Clark’s argument provides an important lens for seeing Lydgate in his context as a loyal servant of his abbey.

Chapter Summaries

In light of these existing arguments about Lydgate as a Benedictine monk and his various uses of the St. Edmund legend, my chapter layout is as follows:

Chapter 1 establishes a context for seeing Lydgate as a monastic poet. In it, I survey three subsets of Lydgate’s abbey poems in order to show how Lydgate’s investment in his abbey bridges a hazy line between political advantage and spiritual devotion. Causing this blur between the political and spiritual is the language of fervency and grace exercised through the Benedictine monks in these poems and the identification Lydgate displays between saints and the institutions that represent them. Such a blur of politics and devotion informs what it means to be St. Edmund’s shrinekeepers. The first subset contains the *Cartae Versificatae*. My discussion of these charters builds upon Lowe’s work by examining how Lydgate’s translation increased their accessibility to royal, ecclesiastical, and monastic audiences. A second subset consists of the prayers “To St. Edmund” and “To St. Robert of Bury.” These two prayers reveal the special pride and devotion Lydgate and his brethren felt toward their abbey’s patron saints. The final subset comprises three of Lydgate’s shorter saint’s legends: “The Legend of Seynt Gyle,” “The Legend of St. Austin at Compton,” and “The Legend of Dan Joos.” These
three vitae stand out because they model the relationships between monks and kings, laymen, and other monks.

Following the devotion Lydgate shows to the various saints in his monastic poems, Chapter 2 turns to the larger legend of St. Edmund and its historical development. In this chapter, I show how Edmund’s legend takes its birth from tenth-century Benedictine reform. It continues to reflect the fervent desire of subsequent generations of monks to see a holy king on the English throne. The pattern of a new redaction emerging around the time that a “bad” king dies and a young king accedes marks the development of the Edmund legend. Each redaction molds its presentation of Edmund to reflect its writer’s hopes for how the new king will conduct his rule. In comparison to earlier legends, Lydgate’s theme of grace becomes his key addition. This addition sets the stage for using *Edmund and Fremund* to gain renewed favor before Henry VI.

With the larger trend of monastic identification with the Edmund legend in mind, I turn in Chapter 3 to Lydgate’s *Lives of Ss Edmund and Fremund*. Here, I show how Lydgate argues that Henry VI needs prayers to St. Edmund from the Bury monks as the saint’s shrinekeepers in order to be a successful ruler. Henry VI’s four-month visit to Bury St. Edmunds Abbey in 1433–1434 was the occasion for this redaction, and Lydgate and Curteys use the visit as an opportunity to urge the twelve-year-old king to patronize the abbey. *Edmund and Fremund* accomplishes this goal through its author’s extensive discussion of grace. Lydgate again shows fervency for the work of his order as he depicts himself and his brethren as receiving grace from St. Edmund. As shrinekeepers, they intercede on behalf of others in directing saintly grace. Similarly, Edmund and
Fremund are both elevated as models of good kingship because they have received grace themselves. The converse of both these patterns is also true. Bad rulers are cursed, especially when monks oppose them and set their prayers against them, which may reflect both monastic morality and monastic politics. Thus, grace becomes a means for identifying saint, king, abbey, and monks with one another.

My discussion of monastic prayers as benefiting Henry’s reign continues in Chapter 4, where I turn from grace as considered in the text to four clusters of manuscript illuminations in Bodleian Library MS Harley 2278, the abbey’s presentation copy of *Edmund and Fremund* to Henry. These clusters revolve around a monastic visual identity stemming from depictions of Benedictines as “Black monks.” The illumination clusters focus on appearances of the coat of arms of Bury St. Edmunds, Lydgate and his fifteenth-century contemporaries, groups of Benedictines from the posthumous miracles, and Aylwin, St. Edmund’s legendary shrinekeeper. The depictions of Benedictine monks in service of the shrine further convey the sense of grace that Lydgate’s brethren have received from Edmund and the fervency of their mission to serve their patron saint and their king, Henry VI.

For Chapter 5, I turn from Lydgate’s *Lives of Ss Edmund and Fremund* and King Henry VI to his *Extra Miracles of St Edmund* and the townsfolk of the Bury St. Edmunds borough. A thesis similar to that in Chapter 3, that the monks are necessary intercessors for the townsfolk, governs this chapter. Drawing on the history of the town and particularly the Peasant’s Revolt of 1381, I point to a history of violence and social conflict to suggest that Lydgate writes the *Extra Miracles* in an effort to promote the
monks’ place in society to burgesses gaining increased economic power. In this burghal context, the monks’ prayers protect against both foreign enemies, embodied by the French, and the threats of daily existence, particularly those facing children. Only by trusting in the power and authority of the abbey, which acts as Edmund’s representative, can the townsfolk defend themselves against these threats. Thus, the townsfolk are called to hold a similar fervency for Bury St. Edmunds Abbey to that which Lydgate himself feels. Identification between Edmund and the monks (as the saint’s shrinekeepers) is again a key to developing the great authority Lydgate claims for the monks. Grace, although more subdued as a theme, also appears, connecting the Extra Miracles to Lydgate’s earlier Lives.

At times in this study, I refer to Lydgate as a “monk-poet” and an “abbey-poet.” I use these terms to emphasize the important overlapping roles his profession played on his life. The distinction between the two terms is slight. “Monk-poet” implies service to a larger Benedictine or monastic ideal while “abbey-poet” is more specific to Bury St. Edmunds Abbey. My terms “abbey poetry” and “monastic poetry” similarly distinguish Lydgate’s verse written in service to his house or order.

These terms are appropriate given Lydgate’s own historical moment. The often-used epithet “Monk of Bery” indicates that Lydgate and his contemporaries were keenly aware of the impact his profession played on his writing. Lydgate’s self-introduction in the Prologue to the Siege of Thebes is one place where the poet emphasizes the importance of his profession:

“I answerede my name was Lydgate,
'Monk of Bery, nygh fyfty yere of age, 
Come to this toune to do my pilgrimage, 
As I have hight. I ha therof no shame.’” (Lydgate, Siege 92-95) 

The final line of this passage, “I ha therof no shame,” is particularly telling in how it affirms Lydgate’s monastic identity, making clear that he sees the connection between his name and his profession as important to his person. The connection between Lydgate’s person and profession also appears in many of the introductions to his poems in the manuscripts of the fifteenth-century collector John Shirley:

Loo my freendes here beginneþe þe translacyoune out of Latyne in-to Englisshe of Gloriosa dicta sunt de te, &c. translated by Lidegate daun John þe Munk of Bury at þins[t]aunce of þe Busschop of Excestre in wyse of Balade. beholdeþe and redeþe I prey yowe. (MacCracken 1:315; qtd. in Pearsall, John Lydgate 31)

Shirley’s annotations reflect both how contemporaries thought of Lydgate and how the monk-poet presented himself to them. We should regard this observation as especially true because Shirley, as a collector and distributor of Lydgate’s work, possessed such a detailed knowledge of Lydgate’s work as to suggest that they knew each other personally (Pearsall, John Lydgate 74-75). Keeping in mind Lydgate’s religious identity as the monk-poet of Bury and taking it as a fervent force that actively shaped his poetry, I hope to open another avenue that will prove enlightening to understanding and rehabilitating Lydgate studies.
Chapter 1—Lydgate’s Abbey Poetry

As explained in the introduction, this study’s overarching goal is to elucidate Lydgate’s role of abbey-poet as he wrote the *Lives of Ss Edmund and Fremund* for Henry VI. His services to abbey and king pose questions of what spiritual advice for Henry and political goals for the abbey underlie the commission of this saint’s life. Answering these questions requires a review of the historical circumstances under which Lydgate lived when his abbot William Curteys commissioned *Edmund and Fremund* on behalf of the monastery. This chapter provides some of this historical context by exploring the web of fifteenth-century political, social, and spiritual interests. Specifically, as the Benedictine order spread throughout Europe, it provided many socioeconomic services such as education, trade, and municipal development in addition to its spiritual functions of prayer, hospitality, and charity to the poor. By the fifteenth century, the order was being called upon to enact spiritual reforms even as it was expected to continue interacting with secular society.

After detailing the social, political, and spiritual contexts, I examine some of Lydgate’s minor poetry to establish a wider precedent for him working on behalf of his abbey. I designate the poems that Lydgate wrote for his house as “monastic” or “abbey” poetry because they highlight key concerns that affected the Bury St. Edmunds brethren. As the historical context suggests, the sociopolitical and spiritual concerns of these poems are not mutually exclusive. Lydgate and Curteys may have attached political
agendas to the abbey poetry, but those agendas also stemmed from genuine spiritual conviction in the evolving mission of the Benedictine order.

The poems I examine in this discussion are grouped into three subsets consisting of (1) the *Cartae Versificatae*; (2) “To St. Edmund” and “To St. Robert of Bury”; and (3) “The Legend of Seynt Gyle,” “The Legend of St. Austin at Compton,” and “The Legend of Dan Joos.” The genre of charter, prayer, or saint’s life characterizes each grouping, respectively, but the basis for grouping these subsets emerges chiefly from shared themes of abbey advocacy, monastic devotion, and monastic exempla. I have selected these six poems as focal points because an exhaustive survey of Lydgate’s work for monastic issues is impossible given the size of his corpus. My selection makes sense in a number of ways: (1) the religious content of these poems is an obvious and logical starting point for discussion of monastic issues; (2) a focus on shorter poems skirts the thematic complexities of longer works in favor of a wider representation of works (and the longer *Lives of Ss Edmund and Fremund* is my focus in later chapters); and (3) a focus on some of Lydgate’s shorter religious poems covers a portion of his corpus that has not received as much scholarly treatment.

My choice of poems that scholars have traditionally called “religious” should not imply that Lydgate’s service to his abbey applies only to these genres of poems. Indeed, a poet like Lydgate, who has a propensity for didacticism and concerns for war and peace, illustrates the problems that can arise from thinking too narrowly about genre. The *Siege of Thebes*, often described as romance or epic, is a good example of how
religious concern bleeds into other genres. Here, in response to the death of the pagan soothsayer Amphiarus, Lydgate moralizes:

Lo, here the mede of ydolatrie,

Of rytys old and fals mawmetrye.

Lo, what avayllen incantaciouns

Of exorsismes and conjurisiouns? (4047-50)

Lydgate’s moralizations are very concerned with the propriety of Christian religion. His impulse for Christianized moralization makes for a critical difficulty in delineating between Lydgate’s “religious” and “secular” poetry. Moreover, the *Siege’s* major theme, the tragic destruction of war, is one that Lydgate strongly cautions his readers to remember: “wherefor ech man be war/ Unavysed a were to bygynne,/ For no man woot who shal lese or wynne” (4650-52). This theme is one we expect from a monk, and also is one that Lydgate ties directly to biblical allusion:

And as the Byble trewly kan devyse,

Hegh in hevene of pryde and surquedye,

Lucyfer, fader of envie,

The olde serpent, [t]he levyathan,

Was the first that ever were gan. (4660-64)

This allusion to the Bible blurs the line between “secular” and “religious” poetry, for it occurs in Lydgate’s “secular” *Siege of Thebes*. Thus, some interpretive challenges occur because scholars have purposed generic guidelines that Lydgate himself did not consciously recognize.
Lydgate’s shorter religious poems may not present problems as to genre, but they present other challenges. There is guesswork involved in dating many of them. Where possible, I give the historical context for a poem based upon its dedication, glosses, internal allusions, or the dating of other poems in the manuscripts in which it appears. Still, precise dating may be less pressing an issue with these poems because Lydgate had a lifelong affiliation with Bury St. Edmunds Abbey. This lengthy association suggests a somewhat stable attitude toward his Benedictine order and brethren. It is Lydgate’s overall attitude toward his abbey as it appears in his minor religious poetry that is my chief interest in this chapter.

Themes of Grace and Social Tension

To view Lydgate’s religious poems as serving the political agenda of his abbey raises the issue of spiritual conviction and sincerity in these verses. To this point, the scholarly view regarding fifteenth-century Benedictines often has been that the order as a whole had begun a downfall even to a point of corruption (Clark 255-56). Derek Pearsall presents this view in his 1970 biography of Lydgate:

The monastic life was still a career of total spiritual dedication to those who wished it to be so, though probably those who did would now be making their way into other orders such as that of the Carthusians; but, roughly speaking, it may be helpful to think of an abbey in the fifteenth century as something like Oxford or Cambridge colleges in the eighteenth century—wealthy, privileged, celibate, rich in books and heavy with tradition, learned and scholarly, though often in an antiquarian way, close in counsels of the great yet devoted to their own...
self-justifying interests and their own intricate manoeuvering; a rich soil, but fat with weeds. (John Lydgate 27)

Although Pearsall acknowledges that the monastic profession could still be a life of “total spiritual dedication,” he implies that a fifteenth-century abbey was tainted: “a rich soil, but fat with weeds.” Lydgate’s own abbey poetry shows spiritual fervency, that is, intense sincerity and devotion, that challenges so straightforward a view of corruption in the Benedictine order.

One of the most prominent ways a sense of fervency emerges is through the recurring language of grace that permeates Lydgate’s monastic poetry. The words “grace” and “gracious” appear frequently in these poems: five times in the Cartae Versificatae, ten in “The Legend of Seynt Gyle,” five in “The Legend of St. Austin at Compton,” four in “The Legend of Dan Joos,” six in “To St. Edmund,” and twice in “To St. Robert.” Several meanings of “grace” are present, and one of the most significant is “divine or saintly help in some earthly task” (MED). Examples of this usage are numerous. In “Gyle,” grace underlies the poem’s translation from Latin: “By Goddis grace, fortune, or aventure,/ Ther was to me brouht a lytell bylle” (26-27). Another instance, from “Austin,” appears with the assumption of Austin’s missionary work in England: “Thus he began by grace of Goddis hond,/ Wher God list werche may be noon obstacle,/ By his labour was cristened al this lond” (129-31). For a final example, in “To St. Edmund,” Lydgate says the saint’s posthumously growing hair and nails “be conserved yit in thyn hooly place,/ With other relyques, ffor a memoryall,/ Frute of this
marter growyng vp by grace” (57-59). In each of these instances, “grace” denotes divine or saintly intervention.

Grace as a means of empowerment appears elsewhere in medieval poetry, but it deserves special recognition in Lydgate’s monastic poems because it appears consistently. In the *Lives of Ss Edmund and Fremund* and in the *Extra Miracles of St Edmund*, Lydgate defines “grace” as a distinctly saintly gift granted to monks. The word “grace” appears ninety times in *Edmund and Fremund* and thirteen times in the adjectival form “gracious.” In the *Extra Miracles*, “grace” appears nine times. In all of these instances, the meaning of “grace” as “divine help” reflects Lydgate’s fervency. So too does the repeated usage of the word reflect fervency by suggesting the monk-poet’s internalization of its meaning. Chapters 3 through 5 return to this discussion of grace in *Edmund and Fremund* and the *Extra Miracles* in further detail.

Another spiritual motif in Lydgate’s monastic poetry is that of saintly identification. Throughout these poems, Lydgate creates strong relationships of loyalty between his monastic brethren and the saints he praises in the poem. The *Cartae*, “To St. Edmund,” and “To St. Robert” all invoke local saints as patrons of the Bury community. The relationship is symbiotic, emphasizing the presence and service of monks at Edmund’s and Robert’s shrines in exchange for the saints’ grace-filled intervention. As an example, “To St. Robert” several times makes statements to the effect: “Pray for alle folk that haue an apetyght/ To do reuerence on-to thy passioun” (31-32). The Bury monks, caretakers of Robert’s shrine, have just such an “apetyght,” and in the next stanza Lydgate mentions Bury specifically as the location of Robert’s shrine and chapel. Thus,
the monks are among those deserving of the saint’s protection and draw identity from that relationship.

Identification between monks, saints, and saintly authority also appears in Lydgate’s *vita* of “Gyle,” “Austin,” and “Joos.” The saints in these three short poems all are monks, which creates a basis for seeing each of them as exemplars for Lydgate’s brethren. Each models an important monastic relationship: Gyle with kings, Austin with a local community, and Joos with the Virgin Mary. Each of these patterns of identification bears remembering in later chapters where I show how Lydgate and his brethren relate to Henry VI and the local burgesses. The monks are Edmund’s agents, and they offer important services in return for their privileges.

### Fifteenth-Century Benedictine Politics and Spirituality

The tie between the Bury brethren’s political rule and their spiritual fervency gains clarity by examining the historical overlap between Benedictine and secular institutions. This overlap came to a peak in the fifteenth century. In his study on medieval Benedictines, James G. Clark repeatedly challenges the assumption that corruption increased among the Benedictines during the final centuries of the Middle Ages, stating that visitation records of violations should not be used exclusively to characterize the whole of the fifteenth century. Clark suggests that instances of minor infractions against the Rule had always been part of Benedictine history (62, 124, & 128). A number of explanations further justify this view, as Clark asserts:

The moderate regime of the [Benedictine Rule] was compatible with almost any condition or station of medieval life: under its governance were nurtured converts.
variously of status, genius, and vocation, be it personal or by proxy of parental oblation. Benedictine profession represented the first phase of a religious life which might progress to one of the reformed orders, or even eremiticism, but for a greater number it was the ultimate expression of a personal impulse for the service of God: as the twelfth-century author of the *Libellus de diversis ordinibus* opined, the Benedictine was a monastic everyman, a servant of God but not necessarily possessed of the ascetic or pastoral ambitions of their reformed or clerical counterparts. (62)

The Benedictine order’s success was defined by the moderate appeal written into its Rule. Coinciding with this moderate appeal was the Rule’s adaptability, which allowed it to spread throughout the diverse geographies and local cultures of Europe. In the early Middle Ages, monasteries’ presence in remote regions fostered local trade, municipal development, education, and charity. Both Bury St. Edmunds’ and Lydgate’s histories reflect the later effects of this influence. Bury is an example of a community that achieved great economic growth through the abbey’s influence. Lydgate’s history exemplifies that of a child provided with an elementary education at the abbey’s almonry school even before he went on to make his own profession. Although the later Middle Ages brought a shift in monastic life from physical labor toward administration, the charge of widespread corruption implies a more sudden change than ever occurred because the Benedictine order adapted to meet the cultural demands in which it existed. A complete return to Benedict’s original vision, which was sometimes called for, would
have been difficult because of changing cultural circumstances (Clark 60, 101, 132, 137, 139, 182; Pearsall, *Bio-bibliography* 13).

The evolution of the English Benedictine movement culminated in the fifteenth century in tensions that are evident in the lives of Lydgate and Abbot Curteys. Lydgate himself participated in periodic calls for a return to a more strict observance of Benedict’s rule. One source of reform came from Henry V’s 1421 call for a convocation of Black Monks to discuss reforms. According to the Benedictine chronicler Thomas Walsingham, a Carthusian prior and ex-Benedictine levied charges to the King against the Black Monks. A series of thirteen items, expressing concern over such things as the expensive trappings used on monastery horses, were brought before the convocation. Walsingham admits that there may have been some truth in the charges because some older members of the order had recently passed away and been succeeded by the younger, “less restrained” generation. Such a charge between older and younger generations is common to many times and cultures and is not always indicative of corruption so much as the clash of generational values. Regardless, more than 360 monks responded to the convocation summons—a sufficiently high number to indicate that the charges were being taken seriously. The Benedictines ultimately sent the charges into committees where they were critiqued and rewritten into seven articles that the monks agreed to observe (Clark 66, 92; Knowles 182-84; Pantin 98-100, 111).

Lydgate’s *Siege of Thebes*, written around 1421–1422, can be read as a response to these charges. His own pilgrim persona meets them by both strictly adhering to the Rule and defying Harry Bailly’s command to tell a comic rather than a moral tale
(Lydgate, *Thebes* 168; Bowers 11 & 20). Lydgate’s monastic self-depiction in the *Siege of Thebes* refutes anticlerical representations of monks that had grown increasingly more bitter since the early thirteenth century (Clark 282-83). Chaucer’s pilgrim Monk from the *Canterbury Tales* is one infamous example. Chaucer first reports, “whan he rood, men myghte his brydel heere/ Gyglen in a whistlynge wynd als cleere/ And eek as loude as dooth the chapel belle,” and then goes on to say “I seigh his sleves purfiled at the hond/ With greys, and that the fyneste of a lond” (GP 169-71, 193-94). The trappings of Chaucer’s Monk are clear violations of monastic poverty. In imagery at once contrastive and familiar, Lydgate reports in the Prologue to his *Thebes* that he rode, “In a cope of blak and not of grene,/ On a palfrey slender, long, and lene,/ With rusty brydel mad nat for the sale” (73-75). The antithesis of each of Chaucer’s points appears in Lydgate’s portrait. The monk-poet’s plain black robe, underfed horse, and poor-quality riding gear stand in sharp contrast to the well-fed and ornately bedecked Monk of Chaucer’s original pilgrim company. Thus does Lydgate show an awareness of anticlerical attacks on his order, and he refutes them.

Although possibly exaggerated in its bitter criticisms, anticlerical attacks after the thirteenth century probably do reflect the order’s shifts away from literal adherence to its 600- to 800-year-old Rule. Lydgate’s response to these anticlerical attacks can be taken as an effort at self-justification in a time when some popular fashions from the outside world were penetrating abbey walls. The gentry and burghal families emerging in the later Middle Ages were precisely the classes from which many fifteenth-century monks, and perhaps Lydgate himself, originated. These monks brought the upper-class
aspirations of their families with them, which could be in conflict with monastic values. However, to see this trend as the only means of degradation of the Benedictine order oversimplifies the pattern because forces from the outside world were also seeking out the monks. Nobles who availed themselves of Benedictine hospitality made lengthy visits to abbeys. Similarly, the prayers and pastoral services provided by the monks since ninth-century Carolingian reforms created precedents for the use of monasteries as pilgrimage sites, with some of the monasteries’ rich patrons even being willing to pay for membership in the confraternity to gain the benefits of shrines (Clark 168-69, 172, 177, 286-87). For all the concern Henry V showed over Benedictine reform in 1421, his own brother Humphrey, duke of Gloucester, and his son Henry VI fit into both of these patterns of penetrating the cloister during the royal visit of 1433–1434, which Lydgate’s *Lives of Ss Edmund and Fremund* commemorates.

On Lydgate’s part, the poetic prestige he achieved epitomizes the conflict between the cloister as defined by Benedict’s Rule and the encroaching outside world faced by many fifteenth-century monks. Lydgate’s commissions issued from all classes of society and often took him outside the Abbey walls. Notably, these commissions were both secular and religious, encompassing Lydgate’s life in and out of the cloister. The religious commissions led to expressions of Lydgate’s deep faith. In examining “On the Image of Pity” and “The Dolerous Pyte of Crystes Passioun,” Shannon Gayk finds Lydgate evoking points of theological and biblical doctrine as part of reflections on images of the *pieta* and *imago pietatis*. His use of the English vernacular in these poems suggests a concern with steering the laity away from the kind of affective devotion that
dangerously leads to heterodoxy. In another case, Lydgate wrote “Poems on the Mass” for the Countess of Suffolk, Alice née Chaucer. This work is an example of a mass book, or vernacular commentary on the Latin liturgy designed specifically to help devout laity better understand religious services (Duffy 118-19). Thus, in a world where monks were increasingly subject to anticlerical attacks and called to return to a more literal earlier interpretation of Benedict’s Rule, Lydgate’s poetry embodies many of the tensions between fifteenth-century calls for political involvement and cloistral piety.¹

Historical and national events, namely the Black Death and the Hundred Years’ War, also affected Lydgate and Curteys in their fifteenth-century cloister. The devastation wrought by the various outbreaks of the bubonic plague reduced many monasteries’ populations, including Bury St. Edmund, by sometimes more than fifty percent because of the close communal living conditions. These losses caused long-term shifts in monastic practice, for example, the allowance of profession and ordination at younger ages for novices. Such an early profession happened in Lydgate’s case, as is attested to in both his semibiographical “Testament” and in the record of his admission to the rank of acolyte. The “Testament” recounts a “conversion experience” at age fifteen. His elevation to acolyte, the highest of four minor orders in preparation for ordination,

¹ For modern readers seeking to understand this balance, stylistics are worth considering too. Schirmer comments that Lydgate “exaggerated the bombast and affectation present in fourteenth-century verse, so that to us his verse appears rigified, and too mannered for genuine religious poetry. The style of such poetry needs to be evaluated by criteria which we are unaccustomed to apply” (173-74). Ebin also provides helpful interpretation for the modern reader of Lydgate’s style: “The effect of [Lydgate’s extreme amplification and aureate style] is to impress the reader with the magnitude of the poet’s subject matter and move him to awe and admiration for the object or event the poem celebrates” (113).
occurred on March 13, 1389, when he was about eighteen (Pearsall, *Bio-bibliography* 13). This youthful pledging is a sign of the resurging vitality of the Benedictine order in the fifteenth century. Enthusiasm is especially evident in the generation of Benedictines coming in the wake of the plague because they were a highly productive group on the whole. Lydgate, with his massive corpus of writings, and Curteys, with an ambitious agenda of building and renovation in both Bury and at Gloucester College, can easily be counted among this number (Clark 268-72; Goodwin 69-72; Gottfried 3; Pearsall, *John Lydgate* 29, 32).

The Hundred Years’ War also placed a number of pressures on fifteenth-century English monasteries. The crown consistently required money to wage war, and the wealthy Benedictine abbeys were a good source of it. The abbeys were taxed and also appealed to for voluntary support. Abbot Curteys’ relationship with Henry VI is particularly notable in this regard. Extant letters from the young king to Curteys reveal many occasions on which the crown turned to Bury St. Edmunds Abbey for overseas financial support. Such occasions included military action in 1441 and 1444 and marriage negotiations in 1444 (Arnold 3:242-47, 262-71; Pearsall, *John Lydgate* 26). A tense, embattled atmosphere created by the prolonged war also may have had a psychological impact on monks throughout the realm. Even brethren became reactionary, keeping weapons in abbeys and sometimes erupting in violence against other monks, as happened in Bury in 1369 (Clark 275; Gottfried 217; Griffiths, *Reign* 376). Such events from the histories of Bury, Lydgate, and Curteys point to the tensions
inherent in monks living under the Benedictine ideal and also, by human necessity, interacting with the outside world.

In this fraught atmosphere, bonds of friendship between monks are also important to recognize when examining loyalties within Bury St. Edmund Abbey. Any abbey, not just an English, Benedictine, or fifteenth-century one, was a generational institution, fostering relationships within and across peer groups through the model of “brothers” under a “father” abbot and of a “social memory” among earlier members of each house. The genuine affection of these relationships appears through nicknames preserved for monks from various times and places: Odo of Cluny was called “Digger” because he always walked with his face bowed to the ground; “Luther” was the nickname for an apparently theologically liberal or upstart brother at Evesham on the eve of the Reformation; and “Ralph the badly tonsured” was a twelfth-century monk who had a seven-year period as novitiate before his profession (Clark 66, 75, 127, 225).

Similar affections probably shaped the relationship of Lydgate and Curteys. Mention of Curteys by Lydgate as the commissioner of not just the Lives of Ss Edmund and Fremund but also the short religious poem “On De Profundis” suggests the abbot truly appreciated the talents and efforts of the poet of Bury. A reference at the end of “On De Profundis”—that it will go to Curteys’ “chirche to hang it on the wal”—indicates a monastic audience very different from the royal one for Edmund and Fremund. The range of audiences reinforces a sense that Curteys valued Lydgate not only as a tool for achieving the abbey’s ends, but also as a friend (Edmund and Fremund 108; “Profundis” 164-68). Further adding to this impression is the existence of MS Harley 2255, a
collection of Lydgate’s poems apparently compiled by Lydgate for Curteys. The manuscript incorporates the Bury St. Edmunds coat of arms amid satirical and misogynistic poems that make sense within a cloistral context (Pearsall, *John Lydgate* 77-78, 259; Schirmer 179). Within their context, these poems point to shared monastic values, developed through the close and sympathetic contact of friends helping one another makes sense of a tumultuous world.

Bury St. Edmunds’ immersion in medieval society and Lancastrian sentiments are reflected in Lydgate’s monastic poetry and Lydgate’s relationship with his abbot. Consequently, any political agenda behind these poems does not preclude a spiritual purpose and motivation. Rather, it complements such a purpose. I turn now to specific examples of abbey and monastic poetry.

**Abbey Advocacy in the *Cartae Versificatae***

The *Cartae Versificatae* represent one type of abbey poetry attributed to Lydgate. They are English translations of five Latin charters that were frequently used to defend royal exemptions granted to Bury St. Edmunds Abbey. The *Cartae* present this defense in spiritual terms. They invoke St. Edmund and a number of other saints for ratifying abbey privileges, but the highest authority they look to is God. The *Cartae* also rely heavily on the worldly authority of the various kings who commission them, but even in these cases kingly authority is infused with a divine origin. Thus, they rely upon a blend of secular and spiritual authority that most benefits the abbey. Given that the earliest of the Latin charters dates to 1028, it seems likely that it was influenced by Anglo-Saxon theologians who defined Christian kingship in terms of its service to society and its being
bestowed by God’s grace (Arnold 1.342; Ridyard 75). The prominence the translation gives for these ideas speaks to their continued usefulness for defending Bury’s exempt status.

The five *Cartae* are attributed to the English kings Cnut, Hardecnut, Edward the Confessor, William the Conqueror, and Henry I. Summaries of the first four follow.² Praise of Christ as the greatest of all rulers opens Cnut’s charter. The charter then turns to the king’s own decision to mandate Bury as a community of Benedictine monks and to spell out their privileges of exemption. The charter concludes with a list of witnesses who affirm Cnut’s decision. The charter of Hardecnut begins with a meditation on the transitory nature of life and the importance of maintaining the Church in light of life’s fleetingness. This meditation then serves as the justification for Hardecnut and his officials to confirm the privileges of the Cnut charter. Hardecnut’s charter also concludes with a list of witnesses. Edward the Confessor’s charter comes next. The shortest of the four, it invokes the charters of Cnut and Hardecnut and confirms the privileges laid out by its predecessors. William the Conqueror’s charter opens by recounting a dispute between Bishop Arfast and one of Bury’s earlier abbots, Baldwin. Baldwin used the earlier charters to successfully defend Bury St. Edmunds from becoming Arfast’s episcopal see. William then adds his support to that of other bishops and nobles in supporting Bury’s exemption by confirming the three earlier charters. Another witness list concludes this last charter. Although varying some in their opening techniques, the

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² I exclude the charter of Henry I from my overview and subsequent discussion for the practical reason that Thomas Arnold did not include it in my source text, the *Memorials of St. Edmund’s Abbey*. 
charters show great consistency in the purpose of preserving Bury’s exempt status and other royal privileges.

The practice of exemption made Bury one of the ten English houses that were free from episcopal (that is, local) oversight, reporting directly to the papacy. Although it was the papacy that granted exemption, the Bury monks looked to the king for support in upholding it. At the same time, however, competition for Bury’s material wealth by other landholders, the local burgesses, and the crown necessitated that actions be taken for maintaining the abbey’s independence from these secular quarters. To this end, the abbey used the charters to defend its interests. These five charters appear in Abbot Curteys’ register, British Library, Additional MS 14848, as Middle English verse translations, and they have been attributed to Lydgate. The appearance of all five Cartae Versificatae together suggests that the translations can be read as a complete unit even though each charter has its own distinct historical period. The addition of the word “And” at the beginning of Edward’s charter where it does not exist in earlier Latin copies also suggests Lydgate or some other copyist thought of the collective charters as a unit as he translated them. The later charters also freely reference the earlier ones, making each an extension of the previous ones. For all three of these reasons, I too treat the Cartae Versificatae as a unified work (Ganim 167-70; Knowles 248-49; Lowe 151, 154).

Although the Cartae Versificatae are recorded anonymously, scholars have made a strong case, based on style and date, for attribution of the versified translation to Lydgate. Both Thomas Arnold and Henry Noble MacCracken agree that, stylistically, the rhyme used in the charters is consistent with the rest of Lydgate’s work (Arnold
The existence of the charters in the *Curteys Register* further points to Lydgate’s authorship because of the known relationship between the monk-poet and his abbot and because that manuscript is dated 1440–1446, that is, within Lydgate’s lifetime. This dating of the *Curteys Register* also provides a historical and political context for the charters. The *Register*’s preface notes a series of episcopal challenges to Bury’s privileges that amount to violations of the abbey’s exemption; the last of these dates from the 1430s and occurred within Curteys’ own abbacy. This period also encompassed the 1433–1434 visit of Henry VI to Bury St. Edmunds Abbey. Thus, the translation of the charters took place during a period when the abbey needed support from the same crown that might seek to “requisition” funds. Lydgate’s translation, then, may have been a means of increasing access to the privileges endowed by the charters. Moreover, such a reminder of Bury’s privileges would have been timely in light of Lancastrian seizures of French priories in 1395, 1414–1415, 1442, and 1447. To have had Lydgate act as charter translator would have recalled his reputation before his Lancastrian patrons. When this act of translation is cast alongside the extension of confraternity membership to Henry VI and Gloucester, both the translation and the confraternity membership can be seen as part of an effort to solidify the abbey’s favor before the court (Clark 305-07; Lowe 151-52, 157-64; Pearsall 25-26).

Although this political context provides an immediate purpose for the *Cartae*, a more general historical context suggests they may also have served other purposes. Over

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3 As stated, Arnold edits all the versified charters but Henry I’s, and MacCracken includes the *Cartae Versificatae* in his description of Lydgate’s poetics in his edition of Lydgate’s minor poems. Lowe agrees with Arnold and MacCracken on attributing the *Cartae* to Lydgate.
400 folios of material compiled for the schooling of novices at Bury exist from the post-plague period, which encompasses Lydgate’s lifetime. Use of the versified charters for teaching abbey traditions and history to new brethren thus seems possible (Clark 82). This educational purpose widens the use of the charters beyond simple “propaganda” to “abbey advocacy” because the teaching of abbey history to novices involves acts of pride and necessity rather than manipulation. Moreover, in defending the abbey’s privileges, Lydgate works contrary to the power and financial interests of his Lancastrian patrons and episcopal authorities seeking to violate privileges that traditionally were granted to Lydgate’s house. Thus his work for the abbey can be seen as a defense of the monastic brethren whom he knew and interacted with personally. Abbot William Curteys is an example, and as I have shown, dedications to Curteys in several of Lydgate’s poems and MS Harley 2255 point to a friendship between the two men underlying the work Lydgate did for the abbey.

Adopting this advocate’s stance, Lydgate seeks to ensure the acceptance of monastic privileges by his royal and ecclesiastical audiences. Lydgate approaches this goal by invoking the spiritual authorities to which Bury St. Edmunds Abbey had access. Divine and saintly authorities overarch the privileges granted to the abbey, especially in the opening lines of Cnut’s charter:

In [the] name of hym whiche that is monarke
of hevene and erthe, mankyndes savyour,
of clerkes callyd sovereyn polyarke,
and of mankynde chef lord and governour;
of creaturis the mighty creatour,
to whos lordschyp, most excellent and devyne,
hevene, erthe, and helle of duete muste enclyne. (Cartae 215)

This opening stanza places the whole of creation, “hevene, erthe, and helle,” under God’s control as “polyarke.” Such a statement encompasses everything that will come, creating an inevitability about Cnut’s mandates. This inevitability is even more apparent through the opening of the next stanza: “To whos power alle powers muste obeye,/ and do servise to his magnificence” (Cartae 215). These lines stand out particularly through their declaration that “all powers muste obey” God’s power, suggesting that Cnut’s will must be a reflection of God’s. The opening of Hardecnut’s charter shows how this divine sanction is a continuing concern in the Cartae:

First in the name of the holy Trynyte. . .
undyr whos myghty and strong proteccioun
here folwyth in ordre and pleyne descripcioun
of the fre fraunchyse which Hardecanut the Kyng
gaf to seynt Edmond here in his lyvyng. (Cartae 221)

The sentiment once again is that Divine will, “undyr whos mighty and strong proteccioun,” forms the starting point for the exercise of all other powers, including those of kings, and respect for those powers traces directly back to God. It is the Divine Right of Kings. Even as the subject matter of the charters narrow to focus on the land gifted to Bury St. Edmunds Abbey, divine power encompasses the decrees made.
These lines from Hardecnut’s charter also reflect the place of St. Edmund as the charters’ constant object of devotion who possesses his own saintly authority. The lines, “the fre fraunchyse which Hardcanut the Kyng/ gaf to seynt Edmond here in his lyvyng” show the transferal of royal power to the saint himself. Such a power transfer points to the worth and status that the saint already possesses, and while “here in his lyvyng” emphasizes the medieval belief that saints were imminent, active forces in the daily lives of their followers.

Another example of saintly devotion to Edmund appears in Edward the Confessor’s charter but in an interesting way: through blood relationship. In several places, the charter proclaims from Edward’s perspective “seynt Edmond, myn owne cosyne dere” (Cartae 229). These references to kinship emphasize the grounds of loyalty between one another for Edward and Edmund, intensifying the importance of upholding Bury’s privileges. As cousins, Edmund and Edward would naturally support each other. Later kings honoring Edward’s support will garner support from Edmund for themselves as well. Another example of kings showing desire for a special relationship with Edmund appears in Cnut’s charter. At one point, Cnut lists earlier kings whose devotion to St. Edmund provides precedent for his own. These earlier kings include Edmund of Wessex, who “to seynt Edmond had more affeccioun./ because only he hadde the sylve name” (Cartae 218; Hollister, Stacey, & Stacey 84). Edmund of Wessex could claim special relationship to St. Edmund of East Anglia through their shared name, so Cnut hopes to also benefit by looking to Edmund of Wessex’s example of devotion.
Edmund of East Anglia is not the only saint to provide sanction to the *Cartae*, and the strongest confirmation of the Bury exemptions appears through statements about other saints. Edward the Confessor, as a saint himself, is one of these confirmers:

> And all the peple that schal this chartre rede,
aforne considrethe by grete avysnesse,
toffende Seynt Edward loke that ye ha drede,
breketh nat the ffraunchyse of no wylfulnesse,
which that he gaf thorghe his holynesse
to his hooly cosyn Seynt Edmond in substance,
list God of ryghte wyl do thereon vengaunce.  (*Cartae* 231)

The warning in this passage is not “Toffende Seynt Edward.” Edmund’s relationship to Edward is again stressed, but equal if not greater warning against violating saintly authority is connected to Edward. A confederation of saints on behalf of Bury St. Edmunds also appears in the witness list of William the Conqueror’s charter:

> Here is to bene remembryd specially,
that men devoutly taken hede and se,
among these bysshoppys rehersyd by and by
there were of them holy seyntys thre;
Lanfranc was oon, and Wolstan eke, parde,
Robert of Herford, for which, yif it be so soughte,
God in ther lyves hath myracles wroughte.  (*Cartae* 236)
This careful naming of three saints also stresses the divine sanction of William’s charter. The fact that this emphasis on saints appears among a list of mortal witnesses is also significant because it redirects a reader’s attention back toward the divine even as the earthly authorities confirm the granted privileges.

In addition to invoking these divine and saintly authorities, the charters also show keen awareness of how the power of earthly authorities intersects with that of the divine. The main action of each charter is for a reigning king to confirm Bury’s material privileges. All but Edward’s charter conclude with extensive witness lists comprised of both secular lords and ecclesiastics who verify that the privileges will be enforced. The pro-abbey actions of all these kings, nobles, and churchmen importantly provide positive models for Lydgate’s readers to emulate. However, the significance of the kings’ actions runs much deeper. As seen, Cnut’s charter begins with praise of Christ and consequently places everything that follows within a divinely ordained context. This divine ordination is not just an abstract principle, for Cnut’s charter places Cnut’s power in direct relationship to Christ’s:

For whos love that boughte us with his blode,

ageyn al enmyes froward vyolence

by him supportyd, that is most strong and good,

and of his mercy by the grete influence,

I, Kyng Cnutus, of royal provydence,

as sovereyn lord of many a nacioun,

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4 Bishop Arfast of William the Conqueror’s charter forms an exception as a negative example. His attempt at making Bury his episcopal see is resoundingly defeated.
am ful conclud in myn oppynyoun [to patronize Bury].  (Cartae 216)

Cnut’s emphasis on Christ’s redemptive sacrifice, support, and mercy toward humanity forms the transition point at which he mentions himself for the first time in the charter. Thus, the Divine Right of Kings appears as a force that shapes Cnut individually. The constant references the other charters make back to their predecessors further create this impression of divine influence channeling originally through Cnut. As an example, William’s charter includes the statement:

by Kyng Knutis wyl and ful sentence,

and by Senyt Edwardis hooly provyдence,

the monkis there, as they han here devysed,

from bisshopis power for ever schal be fraunchised.  (Cartae 234)

In this example, Cnut and Edward are both revered as sources of holy inspiration. The absence of Hardecnut, though he is similarly revered in Edward’s charter, also points to the high esteem for Cnut’s charter as the most ancient precedent for confirming Bury St. Edmunds Abbey’s privileges.

By embodying divine influence, Cnut and the other kings wield spiritual power of their own. This spiritual power comes through most clearly in the first charter when Cnut condemns those who would violate his mandates:

I wyl he be dampnyd and atteynt
to captyvyte of peynys infernal,
never to have part with God nor with no seynt
exyled fro fredam above celestial,
with fyry cheynys to ly bounde as a thral
doun with Sathan, by eternal wrak,
by cause that he my fraunchyse brak. (Cartae 219-20)

Cnut damns outright anyone who violates the abbey’s liberties. There is no qualifying “may”; the damnation is on Cnut’s own spiritual authority. This wielding of spiritual judgment also appears in the other charters. Hardecnut’s contains the passage:

And who that evr of fredamys tofor-told
falsly presumythe to breken this decre,
my wyl is this, by sentence and manyfold,
bavys of bysshopes and clerkys that here be,
for this offence and his contrariouste
that he be cursyd, perpetually to dwelle
with the fals traytour Judas depe in helle. (Cartae 227)

Equation with Judas Iscariot is severe condemnation indeed. Both the condemnations by Cnut and Hardecnut speak of their “wyl,” making the curses actual sentences that their divinely inspired authority alone can put into effect.

While these passages on damnation depict the spiritual authority of Cnut and Hardecnut, they are but two instances of how Lydgate shaped the Cartae Versificatae through his translation. The word “dampnyd” in the Cnut charter is unique to Lydgate’s translation. The Latin original reads “sit addictus captivitati aeternae” [may he be bound to eternal captivity] and does not carry nearly the same force (Arnold 1:343). The force added by Lydgate’s “dampnyd” shows the monk-poet’s own influence on the spiritual
terms of defense in the *Cartae*. It also shows the degree of investment Lydgate places in his abbey.\.5

Besides word choices for translation, Lydgate also adds his own commentary as translator throughout the *Cartae*. In most of the charters, the dominant viewpoint is that of the king who issued it: Cnut, Hardecanut, Edward, or William. At various places, however, the viewpoint noticeably shifts, such as in the envoy of Hardecanut’s charter:

Now all the folk that here this chartre or see
of Hardecanut, kyng of grete excellence,
bethe wel wylled to save the lyberte,
In Seynt Edmondis worschyp and reverence,
and advertysethe the dredful highe sentence
yove by the kyng and clergye eke also,
Goddis curs that the contrarye doo. Amen. (*Cartae* 229)

This envoy is marked as the translator’s, and even if it were not, the references to Hardecanut are distinctly in the third instead of first person. This shift allows Lydgate to stress the important points of the charter to “bethe wel wylled to save the lyberte” or “Goddis curs that the contrarye doo.” Thus, Lydgate possesses an authority to emphasize an interpretation of the charters through stanzas of his own commentary woven into the

5 I include explication of Cnut’s Latin charter alone because Arnold’s *Memorials* provides only the Latin originals for the charters of Cnut and William the Conqueror.
Cartae themselves. The spiritual terms of his translation add to the overall spiritual defense he provides for Bury St. Edmunds Abbey in the Cartae Versificatae.

The Abbey Devotional Poems

Lydgate further validates the value of monastic communities through his fourteen prayers to saints. The two poems “To St. Edmund” and “To St. Robert of Bury,” in particular, comprise another category of Lydgate’s monastic poetry affiliated with his local Bury St. Edmunds community. Scholars have traced several more of Lydgate’s works, beyond these two prayers, to Bury’s shrines. One, for example, is the saint’s life “The Legende of St. Petronilla.” One of Bury’s hospitals was named after St. Petronilla, whose skull was included among the abbey’s relics. The poem “A Kalendare” is another example with strong local ties. Its 365 lines provide a record of saints whose days the Bury monks observed as part of the monastery’s local culture, and, like the Cartae Versificatae, it represents a unique Lydgate production for the abbey (Clark 98; Pearsall, John Lydgate 257, 277; Schirmer 158, 175). The prayers “To St. Edmund” and “To St. Robert of Bury” are distinctive because they are addressed to saints native to Bury. Like many of Lydgate’s other prayers, they were likely to have been used as part of the divine office on their respective saints’ days, but because of their local connection, these two prayers reflect particular fervency (Ebin 123; Schirmer 187-88). This fervency further

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6 See the block quotations on additional saints in the Cartae on pages 34-35 above for two more instances of Lydgate’s translator commentary. The first on Edward and Edmund is the envoy to the Edward charter. The second on Lanfranc, Wolstan, and Robert of Herford is inserted into the witness list of William’s charter.
reflects the spiritual investment Lydgate has in his house, distinct from the strong political overtones displayed in the *Cartae*.

Both undated, “To St. Edmund” and “To St. Robert of Bury” consist of twelve and five stanzas in rhyme royal, respectively. “To St. Edmund” begins with two stanzas praising Edmund. The next three stanzas entreat Edmund to pray on the supplicants’ behalf. Another five stanzas recall some of Edmund’s posthumous miracles. Finally, two stanzas serve as an epilogue that emphasizes the patronage relationship between Edmund and Bury. “To St. Robert of Bury” progresses similarly. Its first stanza invokes Robert with supplicants’ praise. The next three recall images of the martyred infant’s passion. In ending, the final stanza again stresses the reciprocal relationship between saint and community. The briefness of both prayers helps to punctuate the sincerity and devotion underlying their fervency.

The fervency in “To St. Edmund” comes through both in its level of high praise and the knowledge it assumes in its reader. Lydgate’s anaphoric apostrophes, such as “Glorious Edmund!” and “O gracious kyng!” at the beginning of several of his stanzas, contribute a high style that reflects personal devotion (1, 17; Ebin 124-25). A lofty comparison in “To St. Edmund”—“Next Crist in erthe thou art our protectour,/ Our bolewerk, our bastyle and dyffence/ Geyn fals extorcioun our castel & our tour”—serves as another example of the hyperbolic high style Lydgate employs in praising Edmund (41-43). However, because Lydgate’s use of high style is hardly unique to this poem, even more important is the fervency added by vivid imagery that shows the utter familiarity of Lydgate and his audience with the legend (Schirmer 188-89). This imagery
is so specific that it serves to help an audience recall points of devotion rather than actually teach them Edmund’s legend. Among these details of Edmund’s legend are references to the relics at Edmund’s shrine:

Thyn hooly nailles and thy royal heer

Greuh by myracle as seith þe cronycleer,

Kept clos in gold and siluere, as I reede. . .

Which be conserved yit in thyn hooly place,

With other relyques, ffor a memoryall. (52-54, 57-58)

The details of Edmund’s posthumously growing fingernails and hair go back to Abbo of Fleury’s original version of the St. Edmund legend. Lydgate’s casual reference to them shows the utter familiarity he and his audience have with the legend. Another reference to specific details from earlier redactions of Edmund’s legend comes a few stanzas later when Lydgate refers to the saint’s defeat of an invading Danish king:

Trust of þi servauntis founde faithful in serteyn,

I mene of them that sette her trust in the,

Expert of old, and preued on kyng Sweyn,

Maugre the tiraunt in his most cruelte

Slain at Geynesboruh, þe cronycle who lyst se,

For extort tribute deth was his fynal mede. (73-78)

King Swein’s death also appears elsewhere in the history of the St. Edmund legend and reflects Lydgate’s internalization of the vita. These passages serve as more examples of the technique observed by Gayk wherein Lydgate’s reference to an established doctrine,
biblical story, or saint’s legend prompts the reader to reflect on an earlier text. In the case of “To St. Edmund,” the audience of Bury monks who heard this prayer also would have had an excellent basis for reflecting upon Edmund because he was their patron saint.

Explicit references to Bury St. Edmunds are what add most to the fervency in “To St. Edmund.” The final stanzas become deeply personal as Lydgate’s entreaties turn directly to the people of his community:

Thy nyh servauntis, goostly mak hem merie,
Pray Crist in spirit for to make hem strong,
Folk of thy toun and of thy monasterye,
In riht conserve hem, suffre hem haue no wrong,
Pees and good love with hem tabyde long,
Brennyng in charite, fervent as the gleede. (89-94)

The personal appeal of this stanza manifests itself in several ways. Lydgate’s reference to his own contemporaries (“nyh servauntis”) bridges the bounds of time between them and Edmund’s legendary miracles (such as the slaying of King Swein) to encompass a more familiar, even mundane existence, elevating it to an emotional and spiritual level (“goostly mak hem merie,/ Pray Crist in spirit for to make hem strong”). Moreover, this bond is further accentuated by the repeated possessives of the stanza, “Thy servauntis,” “thy toun,” and “thy monasterye.” This emphasis shows both Edmund’s responsibility for the people and the collective identity the people can find in Edmund. Thus, it is not a single technique Lydgate employs that creates fervency in “To St. Edmund,” but the cumulative effect of all of his strategies.
The prayer “To St. Robert of Bury” deploys a similarly deep level of fervency. Lydgate is highly invested in the poetry he writes in service of his own abbey. Apparently written for the prayer chapel of Bury’s child-saint, Lydgate’s technique in “To St. Robert of Bury” differs from “To St. Edmund” in its use of heavy pathos instead of high style. The emphasis is on how Jews martyr the infant Robert, who dies “With-oute langage makyng a pitous soun” (14; Ebin 125-26; Pearsall, John Lydgate 265; Schirmer 187). Other aspects of “To St. Robert,” however, are very similar to Lydgate’s techniques in “To St. Edmund.” Vivid imagery is again present: “Allas! it was a pitous thing to see/ A sowking child, tendre of Innocence,/ So to be scourged, and naylled to a tre” (10-12). Laden with pathos, this passage also shows the thorough familiarity of Lydgate and his audience with their local saint’s legend. Finally, and most importantly, there again is reference to the local community and its relationship with Robert in the final stanza of the poem:

Haue vpon Bury þi gracious remembraunce
That hast among hem a chapel & a shrine,
With helpe of Edmund, preserve hem fro grevaunce,
Kyng of Estynglond, martir and virgyne,
With whos briht sonne lat thy sterre shyne,
Strecchyng your stremys thoruh al þis regioun,
Pray for alle tho, and kepe hem from ruyne,
That do reuerence to both your passion. (33-40)
This final stanza establishes the relationship between Robert and Edmund, with the younger saint supplementing the elder’s glory, suggesting a renewal or strengthening of the abbey’s power and prestige, especially as the saints commence “Strecchyng your stremys thoruh al þis regioun.” In light of concerns about encroaching Lancastrians, episcopal authorities, and local burgesses, such a statement represents a powerful statement of hope from Lydgate to the rest of his Bury St. Edmunds brethren (Nisse 280-82).

Monastic Exemplars in Minor Saints’ Legends

Another subset of Lydgate’s religious poetry is his shorter saints’ legends. The trio consisting of “The Legend of Seynt Gyle,” “The Legend of St. Austin at Compton,” and “The Legend of Dan Joos” focuses on monastic persons rather than the place of Bury St. Edmunds. Through these, we can see Lydgate’s investment in monastic behavior, not just in the house he lived in and served. In each case, these poems present an ideal relationship between a monk and an institution: Gyle with the monarchy, Austin with the local secular community, and Joos within the monastery itself. Gyle, Austin, and Joos become exemplars of monastic service and spirituality. They are as important for the images they present to Lydgate’s Benedictine brethren as they are for the reception of lay readers. Through these figures, Lydgate evokes a sense of “historical” and “traditional” behavior even if the figures themselves ultimately take on legendary proportions.

“The Legend of Seynt Gyle” treats the life of a Greek nobleman who gives away his patrimony and takes up an eremitic existence. While living in the wilderness, he receives nourishment from the milk of a doe. The animal later comes to Gyle for
protection while being hunted by King Fluent of Burgundy. Gyle is wounded by an arrow, and in recompense King Fluent makes him abbot of a monastery. Later, another king, Charles (Charlemagne), asks for Gyle’s prayers because of a hidden sin. Gyle complies, and an angel brings him a letter containing Charles’ sin and instructions on how Charles can redeem himself. At the end of Gyle’s life, the saint receives a prophecy of his death and is able to pass on in the company of his brethren.

Lydgate uses the major episodes of Gyle’s life to illustrate his concern with monastic independence from the monarchy. This concern was constant during Lydgate’s lifetime, as seen from the Cartae Versificatae. The same theme appears in The Lives of Ss Edmund and Fremund. The only other clue to the context of “Gyle” is Lydgate’s explanation that the vita was brought to him “Of greet devossionn by a cryature,/ Requyring me to do my besy Cure,/ . . Out of Latyn [to] translate that scripture” (28-31). Although this reference to a patron is vague, the poem’s monastic content and concern for independence leave room for some sort of monastic commission as well (Schirmer 160).

Further evidence for a monastic commission is the moral authority Gyle exercises over kings. Both King Fluent and King Charles owe Gyle recompense: one for wounding him, and the other for acting as mediator. Gyle also gains their respect for the holy example he sets as abbot, represented most extremely by his attitude toward his arrow wound:

Prayeng þe lord duryng al thy lyve,
Be experience as it was affter ffounde,
On remembraunce of Cristis woundis ffyve,
That euer bledyng sholde be thy wounde,
That no leche with salue sholde sownde
Thy grievous hurt, to staunche it, or to bynde,
Cristis carectis [scars] large, wyde, and rownde,
Eternally enprente hem in thy mynde. (161-68)

Gyle’s holy example makes him superior to both kings. It also acts as a kind of monastic advocacy because this monk sets a high standard of holiness that other monks are implicitly reminded to both emulate and venerate. Thus, the complex purpose of advocating holiness to both secular and monastic audiences begins to emerge in this poem.

The knowledge Lydgate assumes in his audience further suggests a monastic backdrop in “Gyle.” The episodes with King Fluent and King Charles form the lengthiest and most pointed portions of this vita, but there are, of course, other miracles interspersed throughout. Lydgate is famous for his use of amplification in his poetry, and “The Legend of Seynt Gyle,” in which the first thirty-four lines form an extended excursus on brevity (a passage oxymoronically dwelling on the virtue of conciseness), is no exception (Pearsall, *John Lydgate* 147). Within this passage, Lydgate’s deliberate use of amplification becomes most noticeable as he asks Gyle:

> Be influence of grace which is devyne,
> Me to dyrecte of that I wolde seye,
> In thy Wurship compendiously to wryte,
Lydgate’s wish “compendiously to wryte/ by a maner breeff” within two lines is telltale amplification. However, while Lydgate’s extended excursus on brevity does highlight his skill with amplification, other parts of Gyle’s vita are notable for the absence of the technique. Comparison of an early miracle in Gyle’s vita to the redaction in the *Legenda Aurea* illustrates the difference. The *Legenda* reads: “Another time, as he [Giles] was returning from church, he met a man who had been bitten by a snake, but Giles prayed for him and drove out the poison” (Jacobus II:147). In contrast, Lydgate says: “Another poysounned, þe venym dist represse” (61). The episode is brief in both versions, but Lydgate abbreviates his episode to the point of assuming his reader has heard it before and drives his poem toward the more extensive episodes with the doe and kings. Lydgate’s assumption may be that a monastic audience already knows Gyle’s vita. As a result, Lydgate’s purpose is to emphasize in Gyle’s life relationships with kings instead of introducing his reader to the saint’s miracles. The single stanza in which Lydgate treats Gyle’s death also shows this tendency:

By a spirit only of prophesye,
Knew afforn whan thou sholdyst passe,
Thy bretheryn present with many wepyng eie,
On a Sunday knelyng in the place,
Spreynt with teris, lokyng on thy fface,
Whan that thou gaf, as I can remembre
Thy oost to God conveyed vp by grace,
With holy angellis mon[e]the of Septembre. (321-28)

This stanza encompasses Gyle’s entire ending. The scene in the *Legenda Aurea* is likewise short (only a single paragraph), but through his use of verse Lydgate abbreviates it even more. Differing also are the details between Lydgate’s version and the *Legenda*—the brethren’s tears do not appear in the earlier redaction and angels sing as Giles’ soul ascends. Clearly, there is more material in the Giles legend that Lydgate might have used. The overall effect of Lydgate’s selective use of amplification is to emphasize themes of monastic holiness and independence from the monarchy over the other miracles in Gyle’s vita (81-264).

Rather than emphasizing the relationship between a monk and two kings, “The Legend of St. Austin at Compton” details the relationship between monks and their local communities. St. Austin, that is, St. Augustine of Canterbury, arrives in the village of Compton where the local lord refuses to pay his tithes to either the priest or Austin. Austin then holds mass and orders all cursed individuals to leave. At this point the corpse of the former lord of Compton rises from his grave because he too had failed to pay his tithes while living. With the curse of excommunication upon him, he cannot rest. Upon learning of the corpse’s plight, Austin orders the body of Compton’s former priest, who cursed the dead lord, to also rise and then scourge and absolve the other corpse. Upon seeing these strange events, the living lord finally agrees to pay his tithes.

The theme of tithe-paying runs throughout this piece and is made all the clearer through the poem’s rubric and historical context. The rubric reads “Offre vp youre Dymes,” thoroughly driving home the tithing theme and solidly anchoring the poem in a
historical moment around or shortly after 1440. At this time, the Council of Basle was still meeting and attempting to enact reforms stemming from the Councilial Movement. This movement had helped resolve the Great Schism that had divided the Western Church into two papacies, and it was continuing to push for rule by council instead of by a pope. At this point in the Council of Basle’s history, monastic exemptions, including the collection of tithes, had come under constant attack. John Fornset, a monk from Norwich, wrote to Curteys to warn him of what had happened. Lydgate’s “Austin” is plausibly part of Curteys’ response to ensure that the abbey continued to receive tithes from the populace (Arnold 3:254-57; Gonzalez 342-46; Lowe 162-63; MacCulloch 38-39; Pearsall, Bio-bibliography 36; Pearsall, John Lydgate 280; Schirmer 160). The importance of the theme of tithing is unquestionable in the poem, and the monastic authority of St. Austin is also central.

Fifteenth-century Benedictines viewed Augustine as an important authority figure, and the development of his image is illuminating. The historical Augustine of Canterbury, who led a mission to England in the late sixth century, lived in a time of monastic rules but before the Benedictines had come into being as a unified order. Later generations of Benedictine monks, however, claimed Augustine as one of their own, endowing upon him a special significance as the bringer of both Christianity and monasticism to England (Clark 20-21). Additionally, the authority that Austin carries in Lydgate’s legend contrasts to its depictions in earlier literature, such as Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People and The Early South English Legendary (SEL). Although neither of these earlier works is necessarily a source for Lydgate’s
“Austin at Compton,” they do show a substantial recasting of Austin to fit Lydgate’s purposes. In the *Ecclesiastical History* Augustine takes a largely subordinate role to Pope Gregory; in going to the British Isles, he acts as the Pope’s agent and frequently looks back to Gregory for advice. The longest of Bede’s chapters involving Augustine is, in fact, a list of the missionary’s questions being answered by the Pope (77-89). In the *SEL* Augustine is a fearful figure who “dredde him sore for he ne couþe : þe speche of Engelonde” (15). The greater confidence of Lydgate’s Austin compared to these earlier depictions is stark. In this later legend, Austin not only persuades the lord to pay his tithes, but he also has the authority to tell the dead priest of the dead lord: “Thu must of riht yeve hym his penaunce,/ With this flagella of equite and resoun” (315-16). The effective difference, then, is that Lydgate’s Austin represents a supreme monastic authority presiding over secular lords and priests, both living and dead.

Such a role for Austin is reminiscent of Lydgate’s own historical situation. Many Benedictine monasteries became from their foundations focal points for the development of a local community. Brethren often associated with the laity so as to provide them with pastoral support and guidance, even when secular clergy were present and began to object to Benedictine competition (Clark 177-78). In other words, the fashion in which Austin relates to the laity and local priests is consistent with fifteenth-century Benedictine policy. Austin’s order to the dead priest to absolve the dead lord illustrates a degree of mercy, suggesting that the poem’s theme of paying tithes is not just a monastic ploy for extracting money from a laity who had begun to protest monastic economic control, as Bury’s burgesses had in the fifteenth-century (Gottfried 5-6). Lydgate in this poem
presents the practice of tithing as part of a genuine spiritual calling for the laity, which
the monks and other clergy are to honor and reciprocate with pastoral service.

Lydgate’s concern for true monastic service also extends into his “Legend of Dan
Joos.” “Dan Joos” is not easily dated, but a monastic audience fits with its story of a
monk, Joos, who out of devotion to the Virgin says every day of his life five psalms that
form the acrostic “Maria.” Upon his death, his brethren find five roses growing from
Joos’ mouth, eyes, and ears, the one in his mouth having “Maria” written on it in gold.
Thus, both in the poem and for its audience Joos becomes an exemplar of monastic
devo tion rewarded.

“The Legend of Dan Joos” further advocates monastic devotion through its praise
of Mary:

O ye fresshe louers, that lyuyn euer in doublenesse. . .
Youre blynde fantasyes now in hertes weyue,
Of chyldysshe vanyte and let hem ouerslyde,
And loueth this lady, that can nowyse deceyue,
She ys so stedfast of hert in euery syde,
That for your nedys so modyrly can prouyde
And for your poysy these lettres fyue ye take,
Of thys name Maria oonly for hys sake. (113, 120-26)

Who Lydgate has in mind when he addresses “fresshe louers”—whether members of the
laity or monks in violation of their vows—cannot be answered, but the advice he gives
actively commends a monk’s devotion to Mary. The medium of poetry further aids in
this commendation through its popular Marian content and its elaboration on the dry account of Joos given in Vincent de Beauvais’ *Speculum Historiale*, Lydgate’s source (Schirmer 162, 191). For a group of monks, whether struggling with their vows or not, such encouragement would have acted as group validation and a reminder of what the monastic vocation is prescribed to be.

Understanding John Lydgate’s monastic poems requires an understanding of the mixed motives of spirituality and social politics that became inextricably intertwined with the Benedictine Rule almost from its beginning. Some of the chief virtues of the Rule had always been its relative moderation as a monastic code and its adaptability to different geographies and cultures, characteristics that helped ensure the Rule’s survival as it interacted with and shaped early secular communities along with the monks of its own monasteries. Through this constantly evolving context, Benedictine monks gained power and prestige even as they followed their Rule and extended its mandates to include pastoral service, acts of charity, prayer, education, and hospitality to the outside world. Such an evolution makes it difficult to call the fifteenth century of Lydgate and Curteys a period of decline because a complete return to the original Rule would have been a total alteration of the historical moment in which these monks lived.

The fifteenth century, like the preceding centuries, thus presented its Benedictines with challenges unique to their historical time and place. In the England of Lydgate and Curteys, the Black Death necessitated long-term changes in practice with novitiates and ordinations, looking to younger monks for filling the monasteries’ ranks. Courtship of the monasteries by the powerful also led to pressures to change from the outside world, as
gentry sought admission into monasteries and nobility offered to buy confraternity
privileges. The cash-strapped Lancastrian court also turned to the monasteries for
revenue. The wars the monarchy sponsored and the reforms it called for contributed to
an atmosphere of conflict that the monks could not escape.

Lydgate wrote his monastic poems both in defense of and as an expression of his
brethren’s monastic identity. They are written for a community among whom he had
grown up and now lived. Lydgate’s different types of monastic poetry thus reveal the
tensions and conflicts with which the Bury brethren struggled. The Cartae Versificatae
act as a kind of abbey advocacy, using spiritual precedent to rally royal support against
episcopal challenges to the abbey’s exemption and other privileges that the Bury St.
Edmunds monks had come to see as traditionally theirs. The prayers “To St. Edmund”
and “To St. Robert of Bury,” through the monks’ utter familiarity with their source
legends and their localized allusions, illustrate the fervent value of the spiritual practices
most specific to the Bury St. Edmunds community. Finally, the short saints’ lives “The
Legend of Seynt Gyle,” “The Legend of St. Austin at Compton,” and “The Legend of
Dan Joos” attempt to illustrate monastic relationships with the monarchy, with the local
secular community, and within the monastery. While each of these legends privileges the
position of the monks within it, they also create a series of exemplars for the monks
themselves to mimic in these relationships.

Each of these examples of Lydgate’s monastic poetry shows Lydgate’s service to
his abbey and engagement with its issues. The poems also suggest the complexity of the
issues and perspectives for the people involved with them. Within the evolving context
of Lydgate’s day, one may see the poet promoting the abbey and bolstering the spiritual welfare of his brethren. The need for abbey self-promotion and spiritual bolstering reflects both the specific challenges faced by the fifteenth-century Benedictines and a larger pattern in human history of people turning to long-lived traditions when faced with outside criticism and outside calls for change.
Chapter 2—Lydgate and the English Benedictine Lives of St. Edmund Tradition

Lydgate’s advancement of his abbey shows his fervent investment in it as the institution most responsible for shaping him and his poetry. As the abbey shaped him, so too did Lydgate shape his abbey and the people who associated with it. In this way, Lydgate joins a larger Benedictine literary tradition associated with Bury St. Edmunds Abbey. Earlier monk-poets redacted regional legends and histories for their contemporaries in order to provide opportunities for reflection and private commentary on the events of their times. The saint’s life of King Edmund of East Anglia, which Lydgate would also go on to redact, was one of these legends that was used consistently to serve and shape the Bury monks.

King Edmund first appears in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for the year 870 CE. Within one hundred years time, this account expanded into hagiographic legend. This first hagiographic account by Abbo of Fleury contained what would become the nucleus of events incorporated into other accounts or acknowledged by them as authoritative. This nucleus consists of the Danish invasion of East Anglia, Edmund’s refusal to fight the Danes, his capture, and his martyrdom by being shot with arrows and beheaded. Following this execution, the Danes disposed of Edmund’s head in the woods. After the Danes departed, the head called out to Edmund’s followers as they searched for it. When the followers found the head, a wolf was guarding it. Edmund’s head and body were then
buried together. Upon later exhumation, the head and body were discovered to have “healed” back together.

Edmund’s legend is one of a class of legends about royal saints. Royal saints were widespread in medieval Europe and appeared again and again in Anglo-Saxon England between 730 and 1066. The cults of Anglo-Saxon royal saints endured beyond 1066 into Anglo-Norman England. Susan J. Ridyard has suggested that Anglo-Saxon monks frequently depicted royal saints as achieving sanctity by protecting Christendom and acting as model Christians for their subjects, especially in the face of hostile paganism. Because Anglo-Saxon kings were in a position to create policy toward monasteries, monastic hagiographers used their saints’ legends to comment upon and influence royal policy. Ridyard asserts, in agreement with my larger argument, that these monastic commentaries upon royal policy were a blend of pious and more self-interested motivations (Ridyard 1-3, 7-8, 75-82, 238).

Although specific audiences and the reach of the Benedictine versions of St. Edmund’s legend are not always clear, generations of Benedictines do appear to have used Edmund’s vita as an instrument for reflecting upon royal policy. Lydgate writing about Edmund in the fifteenth-century, more than four hundred years after Abbo’s first hagiographical treatment, attests to this longevity. The many intervening redactions of Edmund’s legend between those of Abbo and Lydgate often closely coincide with the accessions of new English kings. I argue in this chapter that the legend of St. Edmund became a medium for traditional Benedictine commentary on kings of England, especially young kings, a practice in which Lydgate also participated by writing his Lives
of Ss Edmund and Fremund for Henry VI. The earlier redactions were not necessarily addressed to the kings, but they can be instructive of monastic hopes in (usually) Suffolk when set against a larger English backdrop.

Whether this commentary by Lydgate and earlier writers was deliberate or intrinsic to Edmund’s vita, participation shows the strength of Benedictine traditions that surrounded and influenced Lydgate. Benedictines frequently assumed the role of regional historians and kept the “social memory” of monasteries, through which novices learned their local history (Clark 66, 224-25). In proposing this thesis, I do not mean to suggest that only Edmund’s legend continued to provide commentary on the accession of later English kings. Nor do I wish to suggest that only Benedictines made use of Edmund’s legend. Rather, I adopt Edmund’s legend as a focal point because of its relation to Lydgate’s monasticism and because its connections to the Benedictine order in England date back to the legend’s origin and reflect the fervency that the English monks throughout history felt toward this saint.

As we have seen, Lydgate himself worked with the St. Edmund legend on at least four different occasions, indicating its ubiquity in his oeuvre. I limit my background discussion to the five redactions that show Benedictine use of the Edmund legend. I choose these redactions based on a list by A. S. G. Edwards that focuses on the first appearances of major narrative elements included by Lydgate. Edwards’ list consists of (1) the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (~890 CE), where Edmund’s battle and death at the hands of the Danes is first mentioned; (2) the first elaboration of Edmund’s life into a full-length saint’s legend in Abbo of Fleury’s Passio Sancti Eadmundi (~985–987 CE); (3)
Geffrei Gaimar’s *Estoire des Engleis*, which features an escape attempt before Edmund’s martyrdom; (4) Geoffrey of Wells’ *Liber de infantia sancti Eadmundi* (~1150–1156 CE) with its infancy and accession narrative; (5) Roger of Wendover’s *Flores Historiarum* (~1219 CE) and its account of the visit and death of a Danish king that provides justification for the Danes’ invasion; and (6) MS Bodley 240, a Latin compilation of earlier Edmund legends (Edwards, Introduction 6-7).

I make three revisions to Edward’s list based on my own findings. Here I discuss the life of Edmund from Ælfric of Eynsham’s Old English *Lives of the Saints* (~997 CE) and eliminate Gaimar’s *Estoire des Engleis* and Bodley 240. Ælfric’s reedition has frequently been described as an abbreviation of Abbo’s *Passio* that preserves all major elements of the earlier version (Edwards, Introduction 6; McKeehan 22; Stouck 267). However, I read Ælfric’s abbreviations as a changing of the emphasis between the two redactions that epitomizes how a local monastic community used the legend to comment upon their king. Because Ælfric’s *Lives* is the first revised treatment of the St. Edmund legend, it is important to include it as the work that begins the patterns of monastic commentary traced in this chapter.

Additionally, I omit Gaimar’s *Estoire des Engleis* and Bodley 240. Edwards includes the former because it inserts a battle before Edmund’s martyrdom that does not appear in the vitas by Abbo and Ælfric. The brief account in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, however, does make reference to a battle, so the *Estoire* does not appear particularly distinct in this regard. Where the *Estoire* rightly can be called unique is its depiction of Edmund’s failed attempted escape scene that forms the bulk of Gaimar’s reedition. The
episode does not appear in the accounts of Geoffrey of Wells, Roger of Wendover, or Lydgate. This absence from other accounts combined with evidence suggesting that Gaimar was a secular cleric rather than a Benedictine monk leads me to believe that the *Estoire* is part of a different Edmund tradition. For this reason I do not discuss it in this chapter (Edwards, Introduction 6-7; McKeehan 58; Short xii-xiii; Reimer 183).  

With reservation, I have also cut MS Bodley 240, a compilation of earlier Edmund texts, from my list. Although Bodley 240 is considered Lydgate’s direct source, I exclude it from this study because the uniqueness of its self-presentation as a compilation deserves fuller attention than I can give here. That this manuscript is a compilation can be seen through subheadings such as “Galfridus libro de infancia sancti Edmundi” [Geoffrey, the book of the infancy of Saint Edmund], “Abbo Floriac” [Abbo of Fleury], or simply “Ex chronici” [from chronicles]. Regardless of whether or not Bodley 240 simply copies earlier Latin texts into its pages, its self-presentation as a collection of earlier works instead of a retelling of or elaboration upon earlier redactions of Edmund’s vita points toward a fundamental difference between it and other versions (Bale & Edwards 20-21; Edwards, Introduction 7; McKeehan 54-58; Thomson 33).

The patterns that I trace underlying the five redactions I do discuss are indeed striking. All of the identifiable authors were known or presumed Benedictines. Excepting Ælfric, each also had associations with Bury St. Edmunds or East Anglia, where interest in the Edmund legend was strongest. The record of posthumous miracles

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7 An account of this episode is part of Bodley 240, which is regarded as Lydgate’s source. Lydgate deliberately eschews this episode begun by Gaimar (McKeehan 57-58).

8 I do include a partial discussion of my findings on Gaimar’s *Estoire* in an appendix.
in the *Passio* suggests that Abbo made contact with Bury when writing his vita (Ridyard 64). Geoffrey of Wells openly proclaims that he wrote for the Bury monks. Roger of Wendover lived and wrote from nearby St. Albans. The geographic proximity of these various versions also makes it plausible for later authors to be aware of their predecessors and part of a conscious local Benedictine tradition.

The four later redactions that derive hagiography from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle’s* account of Edmund date to or near the reigns of five different kings. Although living in and ruling England at different points over the space of 248 years, a number of similarities unite these kings. The works of Abbo and Ælfric fall within the reign of Æthelred, Geoffrey’s time corresponds to Henry II, and Roger’s writing was contemporary to Henry III. All three of these kings acceded to the throne at comparatively young ages. Æthelred and Henry III both had minorities, and Henry II’s rise to adulthood was only a few years prior to his accession. Intriguingly, all four authors also wrote their works during or closely following the reigns of unpopular kings. Abbo’s and Ælfric’s again correspond to Æthelred, Geoffrey’s follows Stephen, and Roger’s comes after John. Thus, Benedictines consistently wrote redactions of Edmund’s legend that fell near the reigns of kings who were young or unpopular. The implication is that, within East Anglia, young kings (and possibly when they succeeded unpopular ones) put Benedictines in mind of Edmund’s vita as a time to reflect on holy kingship.

Whether these reflections were simply intellectual and spiritual exercises for the monks or
targeted toward other audiences is not clear. However, the emergence of these redactions fits remarkably well against the backdrop of English royal politics.  

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Memorial Coinage, and the Obscure Beginnings of the Cult

The historical King Edmund of East Anglia is obscure; only a brief passage in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and a collection of contemporary coins reveal he existed. The chronicle reference and coins are enough to indicate that there were also oral traditions associated with him. These oral traditions began a process of elaborating his person into a saint, which represents a major religious and political development in itself. Within one hundred years of Edmund’s recorded death, the Benedictine reformer Abbo of Fleury would draw on oral traditions to draft the first known vita for this saint.

The first reference to King Edmund appears in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for the year 870 CE. It is a very brief reference, even in the later, slightly expanded manuscripts containing the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*:

In this year the [Danish] army rode over Mercia into East Anglia, and took winter-quarters at Thetford; and in that winter King Eadmund fought against

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9 A note on Ælfric’s *Lives of the Saints* and Roger of Wendover’s *Flores Historiarum* is in order because these two sources are collections of legends rather than the works of Abbo and Geoffrey. The accession of a new king may be the occasion for compiling these works as much as the new king putting Edmund specifically in the minds of their writers. The rise of a new king would seem to be a natural reason for historical reflection. However, the fact that Edmund’s vita was included among other legends still speaks to its significance in relation to thinking about a new king. Multiple lives do not diminish the importance of any one so much as speak to multiple angles of reflection for the readers of Ælfric’s and Roger’s texts.

10 The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* dates to about 890 CE in the reign of King Alfred the Great. The mere twenty years between its composition and Edmund’s death makes it the closest thing to a contemporary account (Mitchell & Robinson 224).
them, and the Danes gained the victory, and slew the king, and subdued all that land (and destroyed all the monasteries which they came to). (The names of the chiefs who slew the king were Ingvar and Ubba.) (Anglo-Saxon 2-3)\textsuperscript{11}

This account is the oldest surviving documentation of Edmund of East Anglia, and provides the historical core for the legends that followed. Its brevity can be explained by the chronicler’s greater interest in the events occurring in Wessex. Outside of Wessex, he shows only cursory interest in deaths of kings and major battles (Ridyard 67).

Edmund held religious and political interest for more localized groups, as attested by evidence of the oral traditions. One type of evidence comes from coins bearing Edmund’s name. These coins fall into two groups. The first group bears the inscription “Eadmund Rex Ang[lia],” indicating that they were minted during Edmund’s 855–870 reign. The second group is inscribed “Sce[Sancte] Edmund Rex[ex]” and were minted after Edmund’s martyrdom (Hervey xiii-xiv; Ridyard 214; see illustrations 2.1 and 2.2). The two types of coins point to the popular appeal of Edmund even after his death.

These coins bear both religious and political implications for the development of Edmund’s cult. A large hoard of the coins has been found at Cuerdale, Lancashire, with smaller hoards and single finds at other locales. The Cuerdale collection has been dated to c. 905, which indicates that Edmund’s cult had developed by c. 895. Because Edmund’s martyrdom is dated 870, this places the development of the cult within a rapid twenty-five years of his death. Such rapidity points to a huge popular religious appeal

\textsuperscript{11} The Parker MS is earliest copy of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle in which reference to the historical Edmund appears. Its 870 entry ends with “. . . subdued all that land” (Ridyard 61).
and local promotion of the cult, key factors to the creation of an oral tradition. Finds of single coins concentrated within East Anglia and bearing the inscription NORDVICO (often understood to be “Norwich,” where a mint was located) further add to this impression of Edmund’s early regional popularity (Ridyard 214-15; Rollason, Saints 156).

**Illustration 2.1**—An example of an early coin from Edmund’s reign (Hervey 634).

**Illustration 2.2**—An example of the memorial coinage. The arrow points to the “Sce [Sancte]” that marks the memorial tribute (Hervey 634).
The coin hoards also bear political implications. Both large hoards and single coins were found within regions that were under Danish control in the tenth century (the Danelaw, which included East Anglia). This evidence presents the conundrum of a people who murdered Edmund also revering him as a saint. There are two explanations, neither one exclusive of the other. The first is religious: the Danes, in accepting Christianity in the Danelaw, also accepted Edmund and came to regret his death out of religious piety. The second reason is political and cultural: with the formation of the Danelaw came a mixing of Danish and Anglo-Saxon peoples. In order for the Danish kings of the region to maintain control, they had to make concessions to their Anglo-Saxon subjects. Accepting Edmund was one of these concessions. In honoring the martyr, the Danes also made their own authority acceptable.\textsuperscript{12} As has been seen with Lydgate’s monastic politics, the line between religious and political beliefs is hard to delineate because the motivations of the parties involved in these situations were numerous and complex (Ridyard 216-18; Rollason, Saints 157).

Aside from what these coins show about the popular religious and political use of Edmund, they also point to the development of oral traditions as East Anglians developed his cult. Oral traditions also lie behind Abbo of Fleury’s \textit{Passio Sancti Eadmundi}, the first hagiographical redaction of the St. Edmund legend. The introduction to the \textit{Passio}

\textsuperscript{12} Another instance of political concession between the Danes and Anglo-Saxons appears through the existence of another type of coin found in the Cuerdale Hoard. On these coins the name “Cnut Rex” is engraved on one side. This Cnut is understood to be another name for Guthred, a Danish king who ruled Northumbria until 894. On the other side of the coin is “Elfred Rex,” that is, the Anglo-Saxon King Alfred the Great. Based on this evidence, Cnut/Guthred presumably ruled in Northumbria as underking to Alfred (Starcke 237-38).
openly speaks of Archbishop Dunstan of Canterbury orally passing on the Edmund legend. This transmission was part of a tenth-century Benedictine reform movement, out of which the hagiographic legend was itself born.\textsuperscript{13}

\textbf{Abbo of Fleury and Benedictine Reform}

Saint Edmund’s vita was the product of Benedictine reform. Although oral traditions had preserved and developed Edmund’s cult, credit for the actual recording of the legend goes to Abbo of Fleury upon hearing it from Archbishop Dunstan. Dunstan was one of the great English Benedictine reformers of the tenth century. This movement was responsible for implementing the \textit{Regularis Concordia}, a monastic rule that drew heavily on Benedict’s, in England, thus establishing a Benedictine standard of monasticism throughout the island. As part of this renewal effort, Abbo of Fleury was sent to England from France to teach English monks. Consequently, the meeting at which Dunstan related Edmund’s legend to Abbo occurred within a context of change, steeping the legend in Benedictine concerns. These tenth-century reforms also had the early support of King Edgar of England. Through Edgar’s influence, Dunstan and the other innovators enjoyed their early success and rose to advisory positions over Edgar’s successors, his sons Edward the Martyr and Æthelred Unræd. This close association of the monarchy with monastic interests placed the Benedictines in a position to easily see and reflect upon positive impacts kings could have on their order.

\textsuperscript{13} Only \textit{Asser’s Life of King Alfred} lies between the \textit{Anglo-Saxon Chronicle} and Abbo’s \textit{Passio}. Asser’s account is also brief and itself derivative of the \textit{Chronicle}, so oral traditions and the creativity of Dunstan and Abbo must account for the substantial increase in material in Abbo’s redaction (Ridyard 62-64).
Abbo’s account (summarized at the beginning of this chapter) explains the pre-existing oral traditions from which it derives. He recounts that while visiting Ramsey Abbey to aid with educational reforms in 985–987, he heard the legend from Archbishop Dunstan (Lendinara 1). Dunstan claimed to have heard the story in his youth from Edmund’s elderly armor-bearer at the court of Athelstan. Abbo, in turn, recorded the legend at the request of the Ramsey monks to preserve the story for them and for future generations.

At the heart of both Abbo’s *Passio* and his relationship with Dunstan is Abbo’s reform mission to Ramsey. In a sense, Edmund’s legend was born of this tenth-century Benedictine impulse. Dunstan spearheaded this movement when he was the Archbishop of Canterbury. Viking invasions of the ninth-century—like the one that purportedly killed King Edmund—had decimated monasteries in both England and France because the wealth and poor defenses of monasteries made them ideal targets. Monasticism in these regions declined. Reform movements began in France, spreading from Cluny to other monasteries, including Abbo’s home at Fleury. They revolved around the incorporation of Benedict of Aniane’s *Concordia regularum*, a monastic rule that made prominent use of Benedict’s Rule (Clark 39-41, 46; Hollister, *Medieval* 109).\(^\text{14}\)

These French monastic reforms gave much needed support to the tenth-century reform efforts in England. In addition to the material decline caused by the Danish invasions, discipline in English monasteries had eroded through the attempts of noblemen

\(^{14}\) It had previously been common practice for monasteries to employ various *regulae mixtae*, or mixed rules that drew equally upon Benedict’s Rule alongside a number of other early monastic rules (Clark 26-28)
to extort monasteries for their own political agendas. The presence in the monasteries of secular clerks had also become widespread.\textsuperscript{15} Dunstan and his fellow archbishops Æthelwold and Oswald were key participants in returning the English monasteries to a regular standard of conduct. All three had spent time at monasteries in France or had opportunities to host French brethren associated with the Cluny reforms. Thus, they had firsthand chances to observe the reforms that so prominently featured Benedict’s Rule. Æthelwold is credited with subsequently deriving the *Regularis Concordia* from Benedict’s Rule. The *Concordia* governed tenth-century English monasteries (Clark 43-46; Dachowski 70-71; Hollister, Stacey, & Stacey 86-87).

Actions from the monarchy also aided the English reform efforts. King Edgar, who reigned from 959–975, provided crucial support for the monastic energies by endorsing the work of the leaders. He allotted them power over multiple bishoprics, thereby creating an environment in which Dunstan and the others could work. Edgar’s appointments also benefited him by creating a network of monastic institutions loyal to his own crown (again bridging political and pious motivations). However, later difficulties arose for both the monasteries and his son, Æthelred Unræd (the “Unready” or more accurately “ill-counsell’d”). A child-king who had to rely on his deceased father’s advisors, Æthelred succeeded his half-brother, Edward the Martyr, in 978. As his epithet denotes, Edward had been murdered by members of Æthelred’s own household, thus tarnishing Æthelred’s reign with ill-repute from its outset. The deaths in the 980s and early 990s of many of Edgar’s advisors, including Dunstan, Æthelwold, and Oswald,

\textsuperscript{15} Objection to these clerks, who had not taken monastic vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience, is mentioned in the Cnut charter from Lydgate’s *Cartae Versificatae*. 
further eroded the strength with which Æthelred could support the monks during the early years of his reign. Thus, a faction of nobles who had lost land to the monastic reforms and were defiant to the king emerged as Abbo wrote the Passio Sancti Eadmundi. Æthelred’s reign would only bring more turbulence (Clark 44, 187; Dachowski 71-72; Hollister, Stacey, & Stacey 86-90, 108-09; Williams 22).

Within this context of national monastic reform, the Edmund legend was born as an example of holiness. Abbo’s Passio reflects an interest in bolstering monasticism. This concern is at the heart of Abbo’s introductory epistle to Dunstan. There, Abbo explains how the Ramsey monks asked him to write the Passio: “[they] began to press me urgently . . . that I would reduce to writing the Passion of the miracle worker, Eadmund, king and martyr” (6-7). The Ramsey monks’ urgency is significant to the commission because they take control when Dunstan would not. Although very active in the Benedictine reforms of tenth-century England, Dunstan centered his reforming spirit more on building programs and political involvement than on commissioning saints’ lives (Thacker 237-38). By the time Abbo heard the story of Edmund, Dunstan was well over seventy years old. He would die within three years. With Dunstan’s advanced age and approaching death, the monks’ urgently desired to preserve the story of Edmund as a holy exemplar. They must have feared that its loss would undercut the reform efforts (Winterbottom 1). Resistance to the tenth-century energies from disenfranchised nobles provide more context to Abbo’s situation because some of the East Anglian monastic foundations, the site of Edmund’s martyrdom, had been attacked by these lords (Clark 46).
In addition to these concerns in its opening letter, the *Passio Sancti Eadmundi* also includes themes of monastic reform. Edmund speaks on holiness and reflects theologically on the proper role of a Christian king. This passage appears after the Danish invasion, when the chieftain, Hinguar, sends a messenger to meet with Edmund. The messenger announces the success of the Danes’ conquest and issues Hinguar’s demands: “Submit therefore with all of your people to this greatest of monarchs whom the elements obey” (24-25). This passage and others depict a pagan theology wherein Hinguar’s greatness includes his ability to master the storms at sea, an even greater conquest than that of East Anglia. At this point, an attending bishop advises Edmund to submit until a more opportune time to fight. Edmund’s response to the bishop offers a royal theology that contrasts to the pagan. It rests upon three points: (1) Edmund is a baptized Christian, (2) his rule has been confirmed by the clergy, and (3) he has been acclaimed as king by the East Anglian people. This reply is characteristic of Abbo’s historical context in two ways. In the first place, it is rhetorically elaborate, its three-fold reasoning running to 49 lines. Such ornateness befits Abbo’s mission as a teacher to the Ramsey monks by using the saint’s life as a model of Latin prose for his students (Grant 8). Secondly, Edmund’s contrasting theology is an expression of actual monastic advice to Anglo-Saxon kings. Anglo-Saxon royal martyrs frequently achieved sanctity by protecting Christendom and its inhabitants. The king provided an example of virtue for his people, led them in war, and administered justice. Moreover, Ridyard points to a distinction between Christian “sanctity” and pagan “sacrality.” Edmund’s behavior shows him striving for Christian sanctity by being a model of Christian opposition to the
Danes even when the bishop will not. When Hinguar boasts that the elements obey him, he reflects a model of sacrality, or divine favor inherited by pagan kings (Ridyard 75-77). Thus, Abbo explicitly presents contrasting views of kingship. His monastic audience would certainly be interested in and learn from these holiness distinctions.

Abbo’s idealization of Edmund’s character further reflects the sanctified view of kingship. Edmund was descended “from the noble stock of the Old Saxons”; he was “sincerely” Christian, “of a comely aspect,” “affable and winning in speech,” modest, and admirably kind (14-15). Edmund is thus perfect in every way, possessing good lineage, looks, and virtue. Such idealization serves a very specific purpose for Abbo: by accenting the martyr’s innocence, the guilt of his attackers increases (Rollason, “Cults” 16). An opposite form of rhetoric—demonizing to accent guilt—is applied to the Danes. In the Passio, the Danes are cannibals who “[paid] no respect to the chastity of wife and maid . . . [and] snatched [the babe] from its mother’s breast [and] in order to multiply the cries of grief, slaughtered [it] before her eyes” (20-21). Such barbarism further emphasizes Edmund’s piety. These extremes create maximum contrast between Edmund and his murderers, making him all the holier an example for the Ramsey monks.

Ælfric of Eynsham, Kings, and Their People

Ælfric of Eynsham’s redaction of Edmund’s vita in the Old English Lives of the Saints combines the tenth-century Benedictine reforming spirit with the concerns of an Anglo-Saxon audience over the poor leadership of Æthelred Unræd. The result is a redaction that is almost pastoral in tone. Its particular concerns include the distinctly
Anglo-Saxon *comitatus* relationship, virtuous kingly behavior, and the observation of the divine in everyday experience.

Earlier scholars have generally seen Ælfric’s version of Edmund’s life as an abridgement of Abbo’s *Passio*. However, Ælfric creates his redaction within only ten years of Abbo’s original (Grant 6; Needham 12). A change in audience might partially explain the need for a new translation, but who was this new audience that could not read the Latin of Abbo, written as part of his educational work at Ramsey? The *Lives of the Saints* is dedicated to the nobles Æthelweard and Æthelmær, a father and son who had an intense interest in devotional literature. They also provide a very specific local audience whose interactions with King Æthelred provide an enlightening contrast to St. Edmund. Additionally, Ælfric’s preface to the *Lives of the Saints* as a whole reflects an interest in translating and abbreviating all the work’s legends for a more general lay audience (Needham 16; Williams 39). Ælfric’s abbreviations change the emphasis of Abbo’s themes to reflect the increasing turbulence of the ten intervening years of Æthelred Unræd’s reign. In effect, Edmund as king provides the strength of character that Æthelred did not. This act of commenting on Æthelred’s reign continues Abbo’s precedent for using Edmund’s reign to comment on English kings, especially at their accessions, which many later redactions of Edmund’s legend would follow.

Evidence for this commentary on Æthelred’s reign appears in Ælfric’s first sentence, which references “…æþelred cynincges dæge” [“the day’s of King Æthelred”] (60-61). Such a statement implicitly invokes the contemporary context of reform and monastic conflict with the nobility during this king’s reign. Between 995 and 997, when
Ælfric was writing his translation, Æthelred was still on the throne, and the situation had hardly improved.

During the ten years between Abbo’s Passio and Ælfric’s redaction, invading Danes had returned to England, bringing increasingly worse situations. These renewed invasions had already begun by 980, even before Abbo’s visit to Ramsey, and would increase in conjunction with other problems of Æthelred’s rule. An ongoing problem came from the Anglo-Saxon nobles feuding among themselves and with the monasteries. This internal strife under the reigns of the young Edward the Martyr and Æthelred led to a weakened royal power in raising resistance against the Danish invaders. Some nobles were further blamed for rising to positions of counsel for Æthelred and using their authority for personal gain (Hollister, Stacey, & Stacey 90; Williams 26, 43).

Æthelred’s responses to the Danes also proved problematic. The year 991 was a turning point because it brought the defeat of Ealdorman Byrhtnoth at the Battle of Maldon, an event in part preserved in a poem of the same name. Although the poem is fragmentary, the defeat suffered by the Anglo-Saxons is also recorded in an early redaction of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. The event set the stage for Æthelred’s response of tribute payments to the Danes. In this same year, 991, Æthelred made a payment of £10,000 to Danish leaders not to attack the Anglo-Saxons and, indeed, to protect them from other enemies.¹⁶ Arrangements in 991 also included provisions and winter quarters. This first gafol payment only temporarily assuaged the Danes because Æthelred again

¹⁶ This was the first payment of what has often been called the Danegeld, but Ann Williams has pointed out that in most cases the word gafol was used for these tribute payments and that “Danegeld” was a post-Conquest term that referred to a more general tax levied annually (151).
paid gafols in 994, 1002, 1007, and 1012. The gafols may have had the opposite effect of encouraging Danish threats of invasion by suggesting that the great tribute payments reflected even greater wealth possessed by the Anglo-Saxon people. This seems especially true because Swein Forkbeard finally invaded England in 1013, only a year after receiving the last of Æthelred’s gafol tributes (Hollister, Stacey, and Stacey 110; Williams 44-47, 151-53).

When Ælfric translated Abbo’s Passio between 995 and 997, Æthelred had made only two tribute payments. However, this early policy of paying off the Danes instead of fighting may have elicited criticism of Æthelred even at the time (Williams 46-47). Furthermore, these occasions may have provided premonitions of what was to come with three more gafols, the 1013 invasion, and Æthelred’s subsequent flight to Normandy. Thus, Ælfric’s opening allusion to “æþelred cynincges dæge” sets up Æthelred’s and Edmund’s reigns for comparison. Next to St. Edmund, Æthelred Unraed may pale in comparison, and Edmund’s behavior makes him a pointed antithesis to Æthelred.

This sharp contrast leads to questions of Ælfric’s purpose and audience. Writing less than fifteen years after the deaths of the great reformers Æthelwold (d. August 1, 984), Dunstan (d. May 19, 988), and Oswald (d. February 28, 992), Ælfric participates in a continued reforming spirit that helped to drive the production of his translation (Williams 22). Ælfric’s association with these great tenth-century reformers meant more than his own lifetime overlapping with theirs. His education had placed him under the tutelage of Æthelwold, who in turn had been a student of Dunstan. Thus, Ælfric shared a monastic lineage with the tenth-century, Benedictine reformers who had a special interest
in education (Clark 45). This lineage also draws Ælfric closer to Abbo and his own associations with Dunstan.

As close as Ælfric’s associations were to these earlier reformers’ circles, his work was not strictly for monks. Many of Ælfric’s works are written in Old English, which strongly suggests that their purpose was for educating the laity or commenting on socio-political events. His Colloquy, Lives of Saints, and two series of Catholic Homilies are examples of these lay-targeted works. Additionally, the preface to the first series of Catholic Homilies includes the passage:

Rash, or rather, presumptuous, though it is to have done so, nevertheless I have translated this volume out of Latin books (that is to say holy scriptures) into the language to which we are accustomed, for the edification of the unlearned who know only this language, either through reading it, or hearing it read. (qtd. in Needham 16)

Ælfric’s emphasis here on vernacular translation suggests an interest in the laity because Latinity was a mark of the emerging identity of the Benedictine order. Educative concerns also appear in the Lives of Saints’ preface:

This volume also I have translated from Latin into the language in ordinary use in England, desiring to benefit others, by strengthening them in faith through reading this narrative, who are willing to take the trouble either to read this work, or to listen to it read. (qtd. in Needham 16)

Again, Ælfric’s concern for education is clear. Further evidence for a general lay audience also appears in the Lives of Saints’ preface, where he writes, “I have shortened
the longer narratives, as regards the language, but not the sense, in case the fastidious
should be bored by their being told in our language at as great length as in Latin” (qtd. in
Needham 18). Such passages all point to an intended audience of laity.

A more specific audience may be two of Ælfric’s lay patrons, Æthelweard and his
son Æthelmær, two powerful nobles. The preface of the Lives is addressed to these men,
both of whom had a great passion for devotional literature. This fact suggests that Ælfric
undertook the Lives at their request (Needham 12; Swanton 158; Williams 39). In
conjunction with this dedication, Ælfric comments on kingship: “no man can make
himself king, but the people have the choice to choose as king whom they please; but
after he is consecrated as king, he then has dominion over the people, and they cannot
shake his yoke from their necks” (qtd. in Williams 17). Ælfric issues this warning on the
duties of the ruled in selecting a king as the cult of Edward the Martyr, Æthelred’s
murdered predecessor, was developing. Æthelweard and Æthelmær had apparently been
supporters of Edward, placing them in the camp of nobles who were wary of Æthelred’s
ascent from its beginning. Here and in later writings, Ælfric shows his support for
Æthelweard and Æthelmær’s faction. Even beyond Ælfric’s statements against Æthelred
on their behalf, there is considerable evidence for antagonism between Æthelmær and
Æthelred during Æthelred’s reign (Williams 17, 69, 114, 121).

At the beginning of Æthelred’s reign, Æthelweard was an ealdorman in the
western shires. The positions of ealdormen originated when local kings pledged loyalty

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17 The presence of Æthelweard, who was so fluent in Latin as to translate the Anglo-Saxon
Chronicle into it, as a member Ælfric’s audience should not diminish the importance of
the general laity to Ælfric’s purpose (Williams 39-40).
to an overking in the earlier days of Anglo-Saxon England. In later times, the local kings were reduced to upper-ranking noblemen who ruled English shires on behalf of the king. The responsibilities of these ealdormen included mustering and leading local troops in battle and overseeing the king’s court twice a year, making the position one of privilege and honor (Hollister, Stacey, & Stacey 92-93). Æthelred, however, denied any hereditary rights to the title of ealdorman, and he deprived five sons of ealdormen of their fathers’ titles between 978 and 1002. Æthelmær was among these sons after his father Æthelweard died in 998. It was not until 1006 that Æthelred appointed him ealdorman of the western shires.\(^\text{18}\) This late appointment did not resolve much between Æthelmær and Æthelred, for Æthelmær and his army defected to Swein Forkbeard when the Danish leader invaded England in 1013 (Williams 66, 120-21). Although most of these events occurred after Ælfric wrote his \textit{Lives of Saints}, they do show how themes of good kingship in Ælfric’s \textit{Edmund} belie long-standing frustrations of Æthelweard and Æthelmær that go beyond Ælfric’s general educative purpose for non-Latin speaking audiences.

In light of Æthelweard and Æthelmær’s record of strife with Æthelred, Ælfric’s themes in Edmund’s vita reflect the emerging Anglo-Saxon concerns of 995–997. In contrast to Abbo’s highly rhetorical and theological passages, Ælfric reorients his translation to address the \textit{comitatus} relationship between Anglo-Saxon kings and their warriors. For instance, Edmund’s response to the Danish messenger and bishop who encourages surrender is to say:

\(^{18}\) Also, Æthelmær was the only one of the deprived sons to eventually receive his father’s title (Williams 66).
“This I desire and wish in my mind,
that I should not be left alone after my dear thanes,
who even in their beds, with their bairns and their wives,
have by these seamen been suddenly slain.
It was never my custom to take to flight,
but I would rather die, if I must,
for my own land; and Almighty God knoweth
that I will never turn aside from his worship,
nor from his true love, whether I die or live.” (66-67)

Ælfric’s use of “thanes,” or þegnum in Old English, specifically evokes the comitatus relationship. The word is culturally distinctive and stands apart from Abbo’s Latin “fidelibus karissimis,” “faithful [and] most beloved [ones]” (26-27). It also stands apart from the Old English word folc, “people,” used by the bishop as he counsels Edmund. James Hurt’s study of Ælfric further clarifies the distinctiveness of the comitatus relationship:

The warrior-kings of the Germanic tribes were first among equals; they wielded their weapons alongside their men, seeking fame in battle and accepting the obligation of giving protection to those who served them. To the Christian, the kingly office came to be equated with the priesthood; the king was God’s vicar, and he took oaths not only to his people but to God Himself. (82)

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19 Abbo’s Latin karissimis is obscure; I take it to be the superlative of carus.
The distinctiveness of the *comitatus* relationship thus strongly colors Ælfric’s redaction of Edmund’s life. Edmund’s response also has a distinctly nationalistic edge to it. Accordingly, Edmund shows more willingness for martyrdom, “I would rather die, if I must, for my own land,” than a desire for it. Indeed, the last sentence is the only part of Edmund’s response that speaks to religious concerns apart from those tied to kingship, and it is more a profession of faith than a theological argument. Thus, by abbreviating the theological elements from Abbo’s *Passio*, Ælfric addresses the proper relationship between Anglo-Saxon kings and their thanes as the overarching concern of his redaction, a concern that would be particularly important to the Æthelweard and Æthelmær.

This concern with the king’s relationship to his people also emerges through Ælfric’s condensed portraits of Edmund and the Danes, compared to those of Abbo. By speaking only to Edmund’s character traits and behavior, Ælfric’s portrait of Edmund does not show nearly the same degree of idealization as did Abbo’s:

> He was humble and devout, and continued so steadfast
> that he would not yield to shameful sins,
> nor in any direction did he bend aside his practices,
> but was always mindful of the true doctrine—
> “If thou art made a chief man, exalt not thyself,
> but be amongst them as one of them.”

He was bountiful to the poor and to widows even like a father,
and with benignity guided his people
ever to righteousness, and controlled the violent,
and lived happily in the true faith. (62-63)

Missing from this idealized portrait of Edmund are Abbo’s references to Edmund’s noble lineage and good looks. These omissions ignore the characteristics of inheritance and beauty that Æthelred possessed as part of his claim to the throne; as Byrhtferth of Ramsey once wrote, Æthelred was “graceful in manners, beautiful in face and comely in appearance” (qtd. in Williams ix). The upshot to these omissions is that kingly behavior and example, especially toward his people, become all the more important to Edmund’s portrait. Thus, Æthelred pales in comparison to Edmund without even his lineage and physical attractiveness to support him. A similar effect occurs through Ælfric’s depiction of the Danes. In this instance, the Danes are not demonized to the same extreme as they are in Abbo. Ælfric’s description of the invasion notes that the Danes “stalked over the land and slew the people,/ men, women, and witless children,/ and shamefully tormented the innocent Christians” (62-65). This description is not as graphic as Abbo’s description of the Danes slaughtering infants before their mothers’ eyes. The effect in this instance is to diminish Edmund as an extreme example of holiness and further leave the emphasis on him as the good king to his people—something Æthelred had not been.

Ælfric de-emphasizes the holy for other purposes, too. One such purpose is to stress saintly activity in the daily experience of the Anglo-Saxons. An example of this contrast occurs in the depictions of the wolf that guards Edmund’s head. According to medieval bestiaries, the wolf frequently symbolizes the devil (White 59). This association becomes important early on in both Abbo’s and Ælfric’s depictions when they compare the invading Danes to wolves. The wolf’s denial of its nature by protecting
Edmund’s head instead of eating it symbolizes hope for the saint to subdue the Danes. However, the two hagiographers’ depictions differ on the size of the wolf. Abbo states that the wolf is “monstrous” and that “never afterwards was there seen in that neighbourhood any wolf so terrible in appearance” (42-43). Ælfric does not add these details. The implication could be that divine and saintly powers operate within a knowable human order, regularly experienced by the Anglo-Saxon laity. Further support for this notion appears through Ælfric’s entirely original closing lines:

The English nation is not deprived of the Lord’s saints,
since in English land lie such saints
as this holy king, and the blessed Cuthbert,
and Saint Æthelthryth in Ely, and also her sister,
incorrupt in body, for the confirmation of the faith.
There are also many other saints among the English,
who work many miracles, as is widely known,
to the praise of the Almighty in whom they believed. (78-79)

These lines emphasize English saints. Even as they turn toward the miraculous, they are very concerned with saints who are familiar and close to what Ælfric’s Anglo-Saxon audience has experienced (Phelpstead 43). Thus, Ælfric’s foci on the natural or at least knowable order, virtue of character, and the comitatus relationship all show hope for a king who will display more leadership than Æthelred. In these ways, Ælfric recreates Edmund’s vita to detail the challenges posed to English Benedictines and their supporters ten years after Abbo’s Passio.
Geoffrey of Wells’ New Beginning for a New King

Abbo’s Passio continued to be a source of inspiration for Benedictine writers. The Liber de infantia sancti Eadmundi, written by Geoffrey of Wells between 1150 and 1156, is among these later redactions. The Liber provides Edmund’s legend with a birth and succession narrative that reflects the sense of anticipation felt throughout England as the civil war between King Stephen and Empress Mathilda drew to its end. This 1154 ending came more than fifteen years after the war began. The Benedictine order was also drawn into this civil war and found itself in the position of supporting an increasingly unpopular king. Violence even touched Bury St. Edmunds Abbey, where Geoffrey had personal friendships. Thus, with the resolution of this turmoil in sight, Geoffrey suitably writes a fresh beginning for the legend of a local king whose accession was welcomed by his people.

Geoffrey’s Liber is better called a continuation than a redaction because he creates an entirely new birth and succession narrative to graft onto the beginning of Abbo’s Passio. In an opening tone similar to those of Abbo and Ælfric, Geoffrey tells Abbot Ording of Bury that some of the Bury monks had asked him to “furnish a few particulars which I had gained by word of mouth”—that is, like Abbo, he recounts another oral tradition (Geoffrey of Wells 134-35; Reimer 182-83). He then tells of Edmund’s righteous but childless predecessor to the East Anglian throne, King Offa. Out of righteousness, Offa leaves on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, stopping in Saxony to visit an unnamed relative. This relative is Edmund’s father, who directs Edmund and his older brother to attend on Offa. Offa and Edmund are mutually impressed by one another.
Upon departing, Offa gives Edmund a ring, naming the young man his heir, and shows him another that he will send to Edmund when the time comes for his succession. Offa arrives safely in Jerusalem, but falls ill and dies on his return journey. Offa’s followers return to Saxony with the second ring and expectantly ask Edmund’s father to send his son back to East Anglia with them. Edmund’s father recalls a pilgrimage of his own to Rome on which a widow had foretold that a light shining from his breast signified that either he or one of his heirs “would far and wide enkindle the hearts of men with the love of Christ” (Geoffrey of Wells 148-49). Realizing that this prophecy was about Edmund, he sends his son to East Anglia. Edmund safely arrives in his new kingdom, and upon his giving thanks, twelve springs with healing properties burst forth from the ground. Edmund then builds a royal residence at the site and learns the Psalter while awaiting his coronation. For the final pages of his narrative, Geoffrey shifts to a tale of the Dane Lodebroth and his sons Inguar, Hubba, and Bern. Because of the wickedness of his offspring, Lodebroth taunts his sons, saying they never really accomplished anything great. He then contrasts Edmund’s success in East Anglia to theirs. Stirred by jealousy, the sons begin planning an invasion of East Anglia. At this point, Geoffrey ends his narrative, referring his readers to Abbo’s *Passio* for the completion of Edmund’s life.

By the time Geoffrey wrote his narrative, much in England had changed since Abbo and Ælfric wrote their redactions, causing new tension and relief for the Benedictines. The cross-cultural reinforcement of Norman and Anglo-Saxon patronage and politics that came in the wake of the 1066 Norman invasion brought a cultural renaissance to England. The Benedictines in particular benefited. Norman lords
provided new sponsorship to abbeys and their saints as means of solidifying political control throughout England, and providing stability during the transition, and as status symbols for the patrons. The patronage also built a relationship between the monarchy and the Benedictine order (Clark 73; Hollister, “Anglo-Norman” 1-7; Ridyard 251-52).

These circumstances likewise shaped the ascent to the throne of Stephen of Blois, the fourth king after the Conquest. King Stephen had been a courtier in Henry I’s court and received favor as the king’s nephew. Stephen’s younger brother Henry also benefited under their uncle’s rule. Henry of Blois was a Cluny-educated Benedictine monk who had been promoted quickly to Bishop of Winchester. Bishop Henry’s person and profession become especially significant because he was able to facilitate Stephen’s accession. The two brothers also epitomize the mutually reinforcing relationship between the monarchy and the Benedictine order (Crouch 13, 36; Warren 13).

In part because of support from the Church, the transition to Stephen’s rule was rapid. Upon receiving news of Henry I’s death on December 1, 1135, Stephen hurried to London within a week’s time, jumping over the succession bid of the late king’s daughter Mathilda, Empress of Germany and countess of Anjou.20 Once there, he was acclaimed king. A few weeks later, he was crowned at Westminster Abbey through the support of his younger brother and other members of the clergy (Crouch 30-32, 36-37).

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20 The naming of Henry I’s heir was an exceptionally complicated matter. Although the father of twenty-four children, Henry only had two who were legitimate, a son William the Atheling and Mathilda. William drowned in 1120, two years after Henry’s queen died, so Henry sought special approval from his lords, including Stephen, to allow Mathilda and her children to succeed him. However, Henry and Mathilda had been fighting over several castles in Normandy just prior to his death, providing a justification that Henry himself may have sanctioned for Stephen to step over Mathilda for England’s throne (Crouch 19, 25, 30-31; Hollister, Stacey, & Stacey 163, 169-72).
King Stephen moved to consolidate his rule immediately in January 1136 but would find himself plunged into civil war within two and a half years. Mathilda and her supporters were his chief opposition, but several missteps on Stephen’s part also fed the conflict. An atmosphere of general anxiousness was one underlying factor. Upon Henry I’s death, Stephen and his supporters played up fears of impending anarchy in order to expedite approval of Stephen by the pope. Falling victim to his own stratagem, Stephen then invested his energies in defeating two minor opponents with little support instead of addressing larger problems of regional rebellion in Wales and Normandy. Instead of giving his own direct personal attention to violent outbreaks in these two regions (the one in Normandy even involved Mathilda), Stephen sent proxies, indicating questionable priorities that would weaken his support and feed into the later civil war (Crouch 50, 52-54, 56-57, 59-61; Hollister, Stacey, & Stacey 173). This civil war forms the historical backdrop for Geoffrey of Wells and his Liber.

The opening lines of the Liber provide all that is known of Geoffrey of Wells and his work. The work is addressed to Abbot Ording of Bury St. Edmunds. Ording’s abbacy from 1148 to 1156 thus provides the window of time during which Geoffrey composed the Liber. The only other information Geoffrey provides about himself is that he was from the nearby Norfolk town of Thetford and friends with several of the Bury monks, naming in particular the prior Siccric and Goscelin, a senior member of the community. Geoffrey’s association with these Bury monks and his apparent education make it likely that he too was a Benedictine, probably at the Cluniac priory of St. Mary’s. The mention of Siccric as prior makes it possible to further narrow the beginning date of
composition to 1150 based on his term of office (Arnold 1.xxxiv-xxxv; Hayward 64-65; Thomson 27-28).

The 1150–1156 window of composition provides more specific historical context for considering the Liber. King Stephen reached a peace deal with Mathilda’s son Henry of Anjou at Winchester on November 6, 1153: Stephen designated Henry his heir, Henry acknowledged Stephen as king, and they exchanged hostages to ensure both sides upheld their ends of the agreement. This agreement makes a convenient focal point for interpreting Geoffrey’s work as anticipating an end to fifteen years of civil war. Many events in the five years prior to 1153 pointed to this eventual resolution as support for Stephen steadily shifted from him to Henry. Earl Robert of Gloucester (the chief noble behind Empress Mathilda’s forces) had died on October 31, 1147. Although his death did not end all conflict, it allowed other nobles to express their own war-weariness, become more reticent to participate in additional battles, and begin negotiating paces among themselves (Crouch 221, 233-39, 273; Hollister, Stacey, & Stacey 177; Warren 39-40, 51-52).

The year 1149 brought Henry of Anjou’s first trip to England as an adult (age sixteen) to receive knighthood from his great-uncle David, King of Scotland. The event made Henry a new, fresh figurehead for the Angevin cause. In consequence, Stephen and his oldest son Eustace would pursue Henry across England during the months that followed. Beyond the symbolic threat of Henry being knighted by David, Stephen and Eustace also faced the continued refusal of the Church (at the behest of the papacy) to confirm Eustace as Stephen’s successor. Henry would return in January 1153 and make
steady progress across England, striking peace deals with the nobility and beginning negotiations with Stephen in August, as described above (Crouch 240–47, 262-70; Warren 36-38, 49-51).

This timeline suggests an atmosphere of anticipation for the end of civil war, but not a clear set of parallels between the characters of Geoffrey’s continuation and historical figures. Indeed, the window of 1150–1156 is too broad and the information preserved about Geoffrey too sparse to suggest an absolute set of parallels between Edmund, Offa, and the various historical personages active when Geoffrey was writing. Stephen, Eustace, and Henry all present their own intriguing possibilities and problems. In order to define the atmosphere of anticipation and how it connected to the Edmund legend, I examine each of the three men.

Geoffrey’s opening lines provide some of the most compelling evidence for equating Stephen with Edmund. Geoffrey addresses Ording as “attendant on the person of the king from boyhood” (134-35). Thomas Arnold asserts that this king was Stephen himself and that Ording provided part of his education (1.xxxv, xxxvii). Lending support to Arnold’s assertion is the respect that Stephen showed the Church. Throughout his reign, King Stephen granted religious institutions traditional liberties, distanced himself from simony, and made merit-based episcopal appointments. He also established the Lillechurch convent for his daughter Mary, who was later elected the abbess of Romsey. Most specific to his relationship with Ording, the abbot was among the group of religious and secular loyalists in Norfolk and Suffolk who attended a court session with Stephen’s steward and other royal judges in 1150. The session determined the jurisdiction of the
king for punishing a group of Bury knights who had conspired against the king in 1149. Ultimately, Ording’s right to try the knights was upheld over the king’s, but for his part Ording worked to reconcile his men to Stephen. Such an effort at reconciliation may say something about Ording’s personal loyalties (Clark 67; Crouch 45-47, 295-96, 338-39; van Caenegem 288-91). Considering these loyalties, Geoffrey’s allusion to Stephen’s boyhood may build an implicit parallel with the young Edmund that sanctions Stephen’s rule. Offa’s crisis over who will succeed him begins to recall that of Henry I. Offa’s careful designation of Edmund as his heir with the gift of a ring and instructions on how a second ring will be sent when it is time for Edmund’s accession deliberately contradicts the charges of Stephen usurping the throne from Mathilda with his quick actions. Edmund’s overseas voyage to assume his throne upon Offa’s death also neatly coincides with Stephen’s trip to England from Normandy upon Henry I’s death (Crouch 31-32; Warren 14). Even Stephen’s coronation date of December 22 and Edmund’s of Christmas are so close as to be a potential link Geoffrey creates between them (Geoffrey of Wells 154-55; Crouch 37). The Danes, jealously striking out at Edmund from Denmark, have a parallel in the figure of Mathilda’s husband Geoffrey of Anjou. To the Normans, like Stephen and the other nobles in twelfth-century England, the Angevins were widely regarded as sacrilegious barbarians (Warren 12). Finally, the appearance of

21 Geoffrey’s mention of an older brother to Edmund adds to the image of a sanctioned accession. This older brother easily could stand in for Mathilda or Robert of Gloucester. An even stronger parallel comes through the fact that Stephen too had an older brother, Theobald count of Blois, who may also have had designs for the English throne upon Henry I’s death (Crouch 33; Warren 14). Sticking strictly to the logic of Geoffrey’s narrative and its thematic concern with succession, the older brother also neatly leaves Saxony with an heir to its throne.
the Danish king Lodebroth for the first time establishes a parallel between Henry and Hinguar and Hubba as the sons who invade England.

This interpretation places Geoffrey’s composition someplace between 1150–1153 when Henry returned to England and began his march toward Winchester where he would negotiate with Stephen. The chief problem with drawing a parallel between Stephen and the youthful Edmund of the Liber is that Stephen was over sixty years old by 1150–1153. The parallels between Stephen and Edmund only make sense by looking more than ten years into the past, but even then Stephen was hardly a young man. Given the civil war that continued during that same interval, an argument that Stephen’s reign had always been legitimate seems stale and feeble at a point when his nobles had already begun to negotiate peaces on their own with little regard for Stephen’s position as king. As reassuring to Abbot Ording or anyone else as the Liber would purport to be, in this historical context it hardly seems that it could add comfort.

Stephen’s son Eustace seems another possibility as a parallel to Edmund in the Liber. Eustace had turned twenty-one in 1147, so he possessed Edmund’s youthfulness. Eustace’s quest to be confirmed as heir also befits the succession themes of the Liber. Because he had been granted lordship of the Norman county of Boulogne, the overseas trip to ascend to his English throne also is appropriate (Crouch 245). Considered from this angle, Stephen plays the role of Offa, a parallel that is awkward because Stephen was Eustace’s natural father. The role does allow Stephen to name Eustace his heir as Offa names Edmund. Most problematic, however, is Eustace’s reputation among the Bury St. Edmunds monks. The relentlessness with which Eustace pursued Henry of Anjou after
the latter’s knighting ceremony in 1149 and the campaigns he led against Henry in Normandy in 1151 and 1152 contributed to an impression of hot-headedness. Eustace’s actions leading up to his death in 1153 (shortly before the negotiations between Henry and Stephen) also add to this impression. In response to Henry’s return to England (when they both had been in Normandy), Eustace, apparently out of frustration, began a series of raids in eastern England. His party attacked Bury St. Edmunds on August 10 upon being denied money by its abbey, even though the monks had received him respectfully. Shortly afterwards, Eustace was struck with some sort of seizure, and he died on August 17. Although difficult to say in what esteem the Bury monks held Eustace prior to the raid, they certainly interpreted his death as a sign of their saint’s holy vengeance (Crouch 245, 270; Warren 51).

Henry II seems a final possibility for an Edmund parallel in Geoffrey’s Liber. In many ways, he is the best fit. Like Eustace, Henry is suitably young to be linked to the youthful Edmund. Like both Eustace and Stephen, Henry also had to make an overseas trip from Normandy to England that parallels Edmund’s voyage from Saxony to East Anglia. And like Stephen, Henry succeeded a relative who was not his biological father. Henry’s coronation date of December 19 also coincides remarkably close to the Christmas coronation Geoffrey gives to Edmund (Warren 53). The only point on which Stephen corresponds to Edmund where Henry does not is the parallel between the Danes and the Angevins. This otherwise close correspondence between Stephen and Henry makes it worth speculating that they are intended to parallel each other through Edmund. Parallelism in this regard suggests a respect for Stephen appropriate to his history with
Bury St. Edmunds Abbey and Abbot Ording, but simultaneously a looking forward to Henry’s reign as a future of renewed strong leadership after the long civil war.\textsuperscript{22} Obviously, this interpretation suggests a later date of composition, encompassing the transition of power in 1153–1154.

In addition to these narrative parallels, Geoffrey includes two digressions that are significant to the historical situation during the transition of power from Stephen to Henry II. The first, appearing immediately after Geoffrey’s opening address to Ording, is a nostalgic reflection on succession:

That the kingdom of England was in days past divided amongst a number of kings, we are assured by many passages of authentic history. Indeed the succession of the dynasties of these kings was maintained without fail in the different provinces, down to the time when King Athelstan assumed the reins of sovereignty, and first of all the kings established a monarchy. (136-37)

Geoffrey’s recollection of a time when succession was clear emphasizes the frustration of Stephen’s contested reign. Regardless of whether there actually was a time when Anglo-Saxon dynasties endured for generations, the belief that they did reflects the weariness of Geoffrey and the other monks who at times had been drawn into the long civil war between Stephen and Mathilda. This passage thus highlights the anticipation of stability, whatever the resolution of the civil war might be.

\textsuperscript{22} This attitude may have even encompassed Stephen’s own perspective. Stephen would die on October 25, 1154, less than a year after the peace settlement. During those intervening months he reportedly took great satisfaction in ruling an undivided kingdom for the first time in over fifteen years. For his part, Henry returned to the continent to battle for lands that he held in Aquitaine, confident in the arrangement he and Stephen had reached (Crouch 284-85, 288).
The second digression of note offers a warning against the dangers of the conflict that Geoffrey and his brethren had recently witnessed. It is a speech that Offa gives about dissension from his deathbed:

You know what enormous mischief is brought about by dissensions, and that their prevalence is favourable to ambition, and closely related to usurpation. Consequently in arranging the affairs of the kingdom we must avoid the diabolical venom, and secure the ascendancy of justice and peace. And, therefore, to eliminate wholly all cause of contention among you in the choice of a king, I designate as a successor to myself, and as a strenuous ruler over you, one not unknown to you, namely, the son of my relative, the king of Saxony, Eadmund, who is not only distinguished by his physical beauty, but excels also in wisdom and strength. (142-45)

Offa presents the “enormous mischief” of dissension in familiar turns. Based on Geoffrey’s nostalgia for clear successions, this mischief is more familiar to his audience than Offa’s. Stephen and Mathilda were only two of the contenders for the Henry I’s throne, and both their bickering and Stephen’s neglect of disputes in Wales and Normandy plunged England into civil war. Geoffrey clearly sees that the lesson to be learned from this conflict should be the clear naming of an heir to a king’s subjects. The subjects, in turn, have the responsibility to uphold the king’s will.23

23 Paul Antony Hayward also sees Geoffrey as warning against heavily contested successions. Where I suggest that there is sense of hopefulness toward the resolution of the conflict, Hayward focuses on the larger problem of contested succession in Anglo-Norman England. He reads Geoffrey as commenting on an uncontested throne in light of
Geoffrey’s hope for an uncontested king with a peaceful rule comes through clearly in these passages of succession and dissension and through the parallels he creates between Edmund, Offa, and the historical figures of his day. The fact that he ends his prequel where he does also acknowledges the uncertainty of his historical moment. After introducing the Danes, Geoffrey explains how “Eadmund, the accepted saint of God, consummated his blessed life by a blessed martyrdom, [which] has been described by an eloquent man, Abbo of Fleury” (160-61). There is triumphant closure with Edmund’s coronation, befitting Geoffrey’s high hopes. Through acknowledging the Danes and Edmund’s eventual martyrdom, there is also realistic awareness of the difficulties Stephen, Eustace, or Henry will face in reasserting royal control over the nobles who have fought under them, frequently shifting sides to fit their individual interests (Warren 57-59). Thus, even Geoffrey’s ambiguous ending aligns with the uncertain future that faced England as the end of Stephen and Mathilda’s civil war drew to its end. At least two historical episodes suggest that the Bury monks too held personal interests in a lasting resolution to the civil war. These incidents are the meeting between Stephen’s royal judges and East Anglian magnates to discuss jurisdiction over knights from Bury St. Edmunds who had conspired against the king, and Eustace’s attack on the abbey.

Roger of Wendover, Good Counsel, and Royal Responsibility

Henry II’s grandson Henry III was another king who succeeded to the throne at a young age (nine), although he did not begin his majority until age nineteen. English Edward the Confessor’s heirless death and the sudden death of William Rufus while hunting as well as the civil war between Stephen and Mathilda (Hayward 79-85).
Benedictines had good cause to take interest in his accession because Henry III’s father King John had willfully clashed with secular and ecclesiastical lords alike. Among the earlier conflicts with John was fierce contention over a Benedictine matter: the appointment of a new archbishop for Christ Church at Canterbury in 1205. This incident and others escalated into another civil war. Henry III’s 1216 succession in the wake of this war closely coincided with another redaction of the Edmund legend. This version appeared in Roger of Wendover’s *Flores Historiarum*, most likely begun in 1219. Henry III’s reign marked a period of shifting power between the autonomous (but often abused authority) of the king and the influence of a moderating (but sometimes manipulative) council. Roger’s redaction of Edmund’s vita engages with this debate on the role of a council by presenting Edmund as a king who will listen to advice but departs from it to take personal responsibility for his kingdom’s problems. Roger advances this message in two ways: (1) he interpolates an episode in which the Danish king Lothbroc (Lodebroth in Geoffrey) is slain by one of Edmund’s huntsmen; and (2) he develops the character of Edmund’s bishop.

Roger’s account of Edmund in the *Flores* begins with a year-by-year summary of Edmund’s reign and the Danish invasion. This summary reads stylistically like chronicle accounts, such as those in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Roger then shifts to a narrative presentation, stating: “it is appropriate that I should relate the causes which led to the martyrdom of that famous prince, and whence the chiefs above mentioned [Hinguar and Hubba] drew a pretext for condemning to so cruel a death the most religious king” (170-71). This pretext is Roger’s interpolated account of Lothbroc and Bern. The Danish king
Lothbroc, father to Hinguar and Hubba, is introduced as a great hunter who one day takes a boat along the seacoast to hunt duck. A storm blows him out to sea, and he lands in East Anglia. Country folk discover him and take him to Edmund, who so impresses Lothbroc that he asks the East Anglian king if he may stay at his court. While there, Lothbroc establishes himself as a master hunter, which draws the ire of Bern, the huntsman whom Edmund had assigned to Lothbroc. Overcome by his jealousy, Bern murders Lothbroc while they are out hunting and leaves his body in the woods. Bern then returns to court with the pack of greyhounds and claims that Lothbroc had stayed behind. Unbeknownst to Bern, one of the dogs stays with the body, having formed an especially close bond with Lothbroc. Hunger drives this dog back shortly after Bern’s return, but upon being fed, it returns to Lothbroc’s body. A few days later it again returns for food. Edmund orders it followed, and Bern’s murder of Lothbroc is discovered. As punishment, Edmund’s nobles vote to set Bern adrift in Lothbroc’s boat. The boat drifts back to Denmark where the Danes recognize it as belonging to their lost king. Hinguar and Hubba torture Bern to find out what happened to their father. Bern tells them that upon Lothbroc’s arrival in England Edmund had ordered the Dane killed. Following this interrogation of Bern, Roger resumes the narrative first recorded by Abbo, including posthumous miracles. To avoid repeating narrative that I already have summarized earlier in this chapter, I describe in my discussion below the notable variations from Abbo’s earlier redaction, particularly the development of Humbert, the bishop who counsels Edmund to flee.
Little survives about Roger of Wendover’s life. He is remembered as one of the great chroniclers for St. Albans Abbey in Hertfordshire, another Benedictine house in eastern England. The only other detail preserved about Roger comes from his continuator Matthew Paris, who records that Roger was the prior at Belvoir, Leicestershire but was removed from his post for wasting monastery resources. The dating of Roger’s *Flores Historiarum* is based, in part, on his dismissal as prior and sets the most likely date of composition between 1219 and 1235, although 1204 as a beginning date is possible (Galbraith 16, 20-22).

The *Flores* includes commentary on contemporary events of the reigns of John and Henry III, which I also use as the backdrop for Roger’s redaction of the Edmund vita. The year 1219 (the opening of the time block during which Roger most likely wrote) was just three years into the reign of Henry III, making it a time for Englishmen to look ahead while still being well aware of the recent past. The reign of John was marked by the loss of most of England’s Angevin possessions and by conflicts over royal authority to invest bishops and dispossess magnates. John also tended to be paranoid and under-handed in dealing with his various enemies, which made him unpopular. These conflicts resulted in civil war right up to John’s death in 1216. A direct result of John’s reign and this rebellion was, famously, Magna Carta, which sought to define a standard of law that was above even the king and thereby to impose limitations on royal powers (Hollister, Stacey, & Stacey 201, 209-12; Turner 4-5, 18-19, 225).

The conflict over episcopal appointments, the investiture controversy, would have been particularly threatening to Roger and his brethren. It began with the appointment of
a new archbishop at the Benedictine chapter of Christ Church at Canterbury in 1205. When the brothers opposed John’s choice of John de Gray, Bishop of Norwich, by electing a candidate of their own, the sub-prior Reginald, both parties appealed to Rome. Instead of acting in favor of one side or the other, Pope Innocent III proposed and installed his own candidate, Stephen Langton. King John’s response to this double opposition was to force the monks at Christ Church into exile. Although Roger of Wendover was a monk at St. Albans instead of Christ Church, such an act against fellow Benedictines could understandably color his view of King John. Consequently, Roger’s *Flores* presents John unfavorably (Galbraith 17-18; Hollister, Stacey, & Stacey 201-02, 206-07; Turner 150, 155-59).

John’s death in 1216 ushered in the reign of his son Henry III. This ascent marked a chance for England’s magnates to experiment with council rule because Henry ascended to the throne at age nine and had a ten-year minority before assuming power. Even then, his advisers kept such firm control over administrative affairs that it was not until 1236 that he effectively took control of his government. The justiciar Hubert de Burgh amassed so much power and influence during the minority that he had to be forcibly removed from his office in 1232. Following de Burgh’s removal, the office of justiciar remained empty until 1244, when reform efforts were made to ensure that counselors closest to the king were elected rather than appointed. The ability for these counselors to wield power in tandem with, or even against, the king was a result of Magna Carta. This power gave the nobles a voice and also ensured a model of kingship that saw the king as the greatest source of justice, acting on the behalf of all his people.
Roger lived through all these events as St. Albans’ chronicler (he worked up to 1235), so the issues surrounding Henry’s council are particularly relevant to the *Flores*. Additionally, a number of clerics helped to write Magna Carta, which significantly points to the influence of the English Church’s concerns in the council rule the document poses. Among these religious figures was Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury, who gained Roger’s admiration for his history of opposition to King John. The participation of Langton and other clerical figures in Magna Carta strengthens the base for Roger’s own interest in good counsel. It is also significant that Bury St. Edmunds acted as a staging ground for the rebelling nobles who wrote Magna Carta. This location provides a link between the charter and the Edmund legend into which Roger wrote his counsel theme (Carpenter 45-46, 61, 71-72; Galbraith 20-22; Hollister, Stacey, & Stacey 262-67; Reimer 185; Turner 159, 230-32).

Roger’s redaction of the Edmund legend is one place where the *Flores* reflects interest in the dynamics between a king and his counselors. Over the course of Roger’s redaction, Edmund is shown to rely on and respect the advice of his counsel, but ultimately to take responsibility himself for justice in the kingdom. The Lothbroc-Bern episode summarized above culminates in Edmund’s discovery that his huntsman has killed their foreign visitor. In dealing with Bern, Edmund bade the knights of his Court and his legal experts decide what should be done with the murderer. It was unanimously determined that the huntsman should be placed in the boat in which Lothbroc, so often mentioned, had landed on English shores, and that Bern should be cast adrift alone, and without any nautical
implements, into the open sea, that it might be seen whether God was willing to extricate him from his peril. (176-77)

Edmund turns to a council for sentencing rather than acting alone. Such a decision on Edmund’s part reflects the early thirteenth-century concern for deliberate group rule rather than arbitrary individual rule. The ultimate irony of Roger’s redaction, however, is that the decision to set Bern adrift is what brings the destruction of Hinguar and Hubba’s invasion and Edmund’s own death at their hands. Such an outcome would hardly endorse the wisdom of adhering to a council’s mandates. This irony can be explained through another of Roger’s additions: the episode involving bishop Humbert.

Humbert is the bishop who advises Edmund after the Danish messenger arrives with Hinguar’s demands for Edmund’s submission. Prior to Roger’s use of Humbert’s name, it appears only once in passing during Geoffrey’s description of Edmund’s coronation (Geoffrey of Wells 154-55). Abbo provides no name for the bishop who counsels Edmund upon receiving Hinguar’s messenger.24 Roger’s Humbert has a much more defined relationship to Edmund:

Then the holy King Eadmund groaned in the deep anguish of his spirit, and summoned Humbert, the bishop of Elmham, to advise him in council. To the bishop he said: “Oh! Humbert! servant of the living God, and my most intimate friend, you see that the approach of my barbarous enemies is imminent.” (180-81)

24 Abbo does name a Bishop Theodred who witnesses several of Edmund’s posthumous miracles, but he is not named until after Edmund’s martyrdom. The fact that the earlier bishop is unnamed implies that they are two different characters.
In specifying Humbert as Edmund’s “intimate friend,” Roger elevates the importance of the character and calls attention to his role as counselor. Humbert is reintroduced as a counselor later in the redaction, for he advises Edmund at this moment and in two other places. The next comes when Edmund forms a battle plan against the Danes: “encouraged by the persuasion of Bishop Humbert, and of the nobles, and of his soldiery, the blessed King Eadmund, with all the forces of his command, boldly attacked the enemy” (184-85). The third instance is upon Edmund’s retreating from Danish forces just before his martyrdom: “acting upon the suggestion of Humbert, the bishop of Elmham, he retired to the church” (186-87). Thus, the naming and continued appearance of Humbert emphasizes the importance of counsel to Roger’s redaction. Edmund and Humbert’s friendship also provides a pointed contrast to the investiture controversy that brought King John into conflict with Stephen Langton and the Christ Church monks.

In the first of Humbert’s appearances, Roger uses the bishop as a way to emphasize his authorial message of how Edmund must fulfill justice as king. The exchange between Edmund and Humbert proceeds along lines similar to those of Abbo, with Humbert encouraging Edmund to flee. The exchange, however, does not run to the same length. Where Abbo contrasts a pagan theology of conquest with a Christian theology of royal sanctity, Roger is no more concerned with this type of rhetorical display than Ælfric. Humbert encourages Edmund to flee, but Edmund instead asserts his preference for dying with his people. Notably different from Abbo’s treatment is Edmund’s willingness to fight: “you are suggesting that I, who have never till now incurred any military disgrace, should sully my glory” (182-83). The result of this
affirmation of arms is to show Edmund striving for an ideal of kingship as the ultimate source of justice. This striving is all the more prominent because it must now fly in the face of Humbert’s counsel and Edmund’s own earlier decision to heed the advice of his nobles. It is a grim ideal to pose to Henry III, but Roger’s Edmund does reflect a king who both willingly accepts the advice of a council and takes personal responsibility for the pursuit of justice even when that advice fails.

One final aspect of Roger’s redaction of St. Edmund’s vita sheds light on a situation developing at Henry III’s court. That aspect is the honor Lothbroc gains before Edmund. During his stay at Edmund’s court, Lothbroc earns great respect for his hunting abilities: “Whatever he [Lothbroc] had a mind to capture, he captured, and very often enriched the royal table with dishes of the greatest delicacy” (172-73). This prestige and favor are what fire the jealousy in Bern that leads him to murder Lothbroc. Although Bern’s act is never condoned, his envy of Lothbroc may anticipate a problem developing in Henry III’s court. Following the year 1236, Henry increasingly appointed his half-brothers and the relatives of his wife to positions of favor in his government. All these men came from the continent and gained a reputation as foreigners who usurped positions of power from English nobles. Although Henry did not marry until 1236 and Roger’s writing ended in 1235, the timeline is close enough for it to be possible that Henry’s inclination for favoring foreign relatives was already becoming apparent. If this is the case, the episode between Lothbroc and Bern could warn against stirring up jealousies through foreign appointments. Even if Henry’s preference for his foreign relatives was not yet apparent, his father John had made a similar misstep by relying on foreign
mercenary captains, which precipitated the mutual mistrust between him and the nobles of his day (Hollister, Stacey, & Stacey 268; Turner 18). With these considerations in mind, Roger’s Edmund can also be seen as paying for the mistakes that Henry himself may be in danger of making. Counsel to the king on avoiding these mistakes and being the ultimate source of justice was as relevant coming from early thirteenth-century prelates as from secular magnates because of the close ties the two groups shared in creating and implementing Magna Carta. The involvement of Stephen Langton in these affairs extends the basis for Roger’s interest. The monk greatly admired the archbishop’s opposition to King John in the wake of his expulsion of fellow Benedictines from Christ Church during the investiture controversy.

The vita of King of Edmund of East Anglia has a long history that is thoroughly intertwined with the regional history of the Benedictine order in eastern England. Although the development of Edmund’s cult remains shrouded in mystery, the first known instance of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle’s historical Edmund (from the year 870) becoming hagiography came in the tenth century with Abbo of Fleury’s Latin Passio Sancti Eadmundi. Abbo wrote his Passio while visiting Ramsey in 985–987 to aid with the royally aided reforms that brought the Benedictine Rule to England. Thus, the legend’s birth arguably sprang from the Benedictine order. Befitting this origin, Abbo’s redaction depicts Edmund as an exemplar of holy rule for the Ramsey monks to study.

Later reworkings of Edmund’s legend show local Benedictines continuing to comment upon royal power. By changing the thematic emphasis and adding new episodes, these later redactors voiced their hopes for new kings as they ascended to the
throne or sought to find comfort during the reigns of bad kings. Ælfric’s 997 Benedictine version of Edmund’s vita in the Old English *Lives of the Saints* stresses the *comitatus* relationship that was so important to his noble patrons and Anglo-Saxon culture in general. He thereby downplays the themes of holiness found in Abbo’s redaction. Æthelred failed to honor the ideal of *comitatus* or to display other virtues of good rule, ultimately fleeing from the Danes in 1013. Ælfric’s reworking of Abbo emphasizes Edmund’s fulfillment of these ideals along with the daily presence of God and the saints in the lives of the Anglo-Saxon laity.

In the period between 1150–1156, when the long civil war that plagued King Stephen’s reign was drawing to a close, Geoffrey of Wells wrote his Latin *Liber de infantia sancti Eadmundi*. It reflects the cautious hope he and his Benedictine brethren at Thetford and Bury St. Edmunds felt after being dragged into the civil war and affected by the violence it had unleashed. Geoffrey’s work acts as a prequel to Abbo’s. As a birth and succession narrative, it brims with expectations for a new king or for Stephen’s own renewed rule. Either Stephen’s son Eustace or the future Henry II could have been expected as the new king in the background context of Geoffrey’s *Liber*. Regardless, the Benedictines desired a resolution to the conflict.

Recent conflict again lies behind Roger of Wendover’s version of Edmund’s vita in the Latin *Flores Historiarum*. From as early as 1205, King John’s overreach of royal authority had disrupted secular and ecclesiastical worlds alike. The result was another civil war. John’s death in 1216 had placed the nine-year-old Henry III on the throne. Because much of the outrage John had caused resulted from his interference in the affairs
of the Benedictine chapter at Christ Church and his expulsion of its members, Roger had very personal reasons for hoping Henry III would not rule like his father. On the level of royal politics, there was keen interest in creating a council that could check the power of the king and instill the king with a sense of justice. Roger’s 1219 narrative shows his support for this check to royal power through his interpolated episode of the Danish King Lothbroc and the huntsmen Bern along with scenes that show Edmund relying on a council and his trusted adviser Humbert.

John Lydgate’s *Lives of Ss Edmund and Fremund* fits into this pattern of using the Edmund legend to express the hopes of the Bury St. Edmunds community for a new young king. Henry V was not perceived as a bad king, but he inherited the stain of his father’s usurpation, which eventually passed to his son, making another redaction of Edmund’s legend timely when the King Henry VI visited Bury St. Edmunds in 1433–1434. More importantly, Lydgate’s *Lives of Ss Edmund and Fremund* also extends the monastic community that produced it to include the young Henry VI as the intended recipient of the vita. The inclusion of the young king in Lydgate’s audience extended the hopes of the Bury monks to a new level because through Edmund’s story Bury St. Edmunds Abbey had a direct connection through which to advise Henry on his rule. Chief among Lydgate’s concerns were the privileges of his abbey to advise the English king as powerful houses in the early Middle Ages had. With the development of the secular religious establishment in the later Middle Ages, these privileges had begun to weaken in a way not experienced by earlier generations of monks and abbots (Knowles 280). In order to strengthen his monastery’s position, Lydgate incorporates a theme of
grace into his own rewriting of the Edmund legend. The special access that the
Benedictines have to saintly grace on behalf of others was one of the reasons that Henry
VI should reaffirm the privileges of Bury St. Edmunds Abbey. This theme is one of the
chief concerns in the next chapter.
Chapter 3—Empowerment and Reciprocity in
Lydgate’s *Lives of Ss Edmund and Fremund*

In this chapter, I show how the social and spiritual concerns of Lydgate’s abbey play out in the historical moment of the *Lives of Ss Edmund and Fremund*. Lydgate had to navigate his loyalties to his own convent and those loyalties he was called to show for Henry VI when Bury St. Edmunds Abbey was ordered to house and pay the expenses of the court during an unexpected four-month visit. The king’s stay at the abbey was the occasion on which Abbot William Curteys commissioned Lydgate to write *Edmund and Fremund*. As a result, the work shows a complex mixture of motives related to the abbey as a place of spiritual retreat with a duty to offer prayers for Henry VI and to the abbey as a wealthy landowner in fear of being extorted by the monarchy. Lydgate and Curteys’ offer of spiritual aid may be genuine but so too are their political motivations for cautioning against the abuse of St. Edmund’s monastery.

Lydgate’s 3693-line *Lives of Ss Edmund and Fremund* brought the Edmund legend to a new length. This redaction grafts together the core hagiographic narrative established by Abbo of Fleury and followed by Ælfric of Eynsham with the infancy narrative originally written by Geoffrey of Wells and the Lothbrok-Bern episode created by Roger of Wendover. Lydgate’s own additions include a prologue reflecting on the coats of arms of Edmund and Bury St. Edmunds Abbey, the theme of monastic grace, and an interpolated life of St. Fremund. Fremund is Edmund’s nephew who gives up his own
throne to lead an eremitic existence. He is called from his monastic solitude to avenge Edmund’s death. Although victorious against the Danes, Fremund is beheaded by a traitor among his own followers. Lydgate ends his account with miracles for both his saints. The miracles of Edmund are of particular interest in this chapter for the fervency of monastic purpose in them.

Although Edmund and Fremund was written for Henry VI, Lydgate’s specific reference to his abbot, William Curteys, as the work’s commissioner indicates he functioned as an abbey poet just as much as he functioned as a court poet when he wrote this saints’ legend. Lydgate wrote with a double role because the subject matter of honoring his abbey’s patron saint forms yet another avenue of service that he must navigate. Nor are his concerns of patronage restricted only to himself. Throughout the poem he lays out responsibilities shared between his abbey and the saints Edmund and Fremund. Henry too had responsibilities to his kingdom generally and to the abbey and St. Edmund specifically. Two results stem from this network of reciprocal relationships between the monks, the king, and the saints. The first is a pledge of loyalty from the monks to Henry. The second is Lydgate’s promotion of the abbey as intercessor to St. Edmund if Henry will identify with Benedictine social, political, and spiritual purposes. This promotion takes a variety of forms. Foremost among these methods is the argument that grace bestowed on the monks as St. Edmund’s caretakers can be channeled to Henry to aid his rule. This bestowment happens through intercessory prayer, and through positive and negative examples of rulers relating to Bury St. Edmunds Abbey. Thus, the
\textit{Lives of Ss Edmund and Fremund} promises the cultivation of Henry’s rule through monastic and saintly intervention while providing examples of good rule.

**Royal and Abbey Politics**

The increasingly complex political situation that had emerged by 1433 reflects the web of loyalties surrounding Lydgate. The end of 1428 and beginning of 1429 had brought numerous crises for the English in Lancastrian France. The death of the earl of Salisbury, greatest of the English generals, on November 3, 1428, and the appearance of Joan of Arc on April 29, 1429 were the most alarming. These events caused demoralization and desertions among the English army and paved the way for the coronation of the dauphin as Charles VII at Reims on July 18, 1429. These threats to the dual monarchy of England and France spurred the need for Henry to be taken to Paris in 1430 at age eight for his own French coronation. The trip was costly in many ways. It lasted almost two years, left the crown with £165,000 in debt, and barred any possibility of peace negotiations with Charles in the near future (Wolffe 54-55, 57, 59, 69-70, & 74).

The 1432 return to England brought major financial and political crises for the court and council of Henry VI. Over the next year, the impossibility of peace and rumors about the incompetence of Henry’s uncle, John duke of Bedford and regent of France, sent the duke back to England. John sought to justify himself and to request funds for military action needed in the French holdings to solidify England’s control over Normandy. However, the extravagance and expense of the French coronation had so depleted the royal budget that not even the court’s expenses could be met for the foreseeable future. The immediate solution was to draw upon the centuries-old tradition
of Benedictine hospitality and send the twelve-year-old king and his entourage to Bury St. Edmunds Abbey in Suffolk, where they would stay, free of charge, for four months, from Christmas 1433 to St. George’s Day 1434, while the financial problems were resolved (Clark 167-68; Wolffe 71-74). The impending visit of Henry VI was the occasion for which Lydgate later wrote his *Lives of Ss Edmund and Fremund* in honor of the abbey’s patron saint and its young king’s stay.

The extended visit was undeniably expensive. A month-long preparation included eighty workers restoring and enlarging abbey buildings that rebels had burned and sacked in the late 1300s. It also provided patronage opportunities for the monks (Goodwin 70; Gottfried 3; Wolffe 74). Lydgate himself was one existing opportunity. His access to the king through long service to both Henry V and Henry VI had placed him in a position to make personal requests on behalf of the monastery (Green, *Poets* 49-51). Derek Pearsall has even suggested that Lydgate’s familiarity with the court in some way contributed to the decision to make Bury St. Edmunds the place for Henry’s extended visit (*John Lydgate* 27). However, Henry’s visit would provide other chances to appeal to the king, and the Bury St. Edmunds monks and townsfolk took this opportunity as a high honor. The seventeenth-century antiquarian Sir William Dugdale conveys the pomp of the occasion in the *Monasticon Anglicanum*:

> The alderman and burgesses of Bury, dressed in scarlet, accompanied by the commons of the town, who also wore red livery, met the king, to the number of five hundred, upon Newmarket heath: the royal retinue, before this, extended a

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mile. They brought the king within the precinct of the Monastery by the south gate. Here he was received by the whole convent: the bishop of Norwich and the abbat appearing in full pontificals: the abbat sprinkling the king with holy water, and presenting a cross to his lips. Procession, with music, was next made to the high altar of the church, when the antiphon used in the service of St. Edmund “Ave rex gentis Anglorum,” was sung: after this, the king paid his devotions at St. Edmund’s shrine, and then passed to the abbat’s palace. (Dugdale 113)

This procession demonstrated the seriousness with which the Benedictines received their honored guest (Clark 168). It also demonstrates the opportunity sought by the Bury monks. Robert S. Gottfried’s study of socio-economic tensions finds charged undertones to this passage. He suggests that the townsmen, even the more socially esteemed burgesses and alderman, were locked out of the church for the mass. Excluding the townsfolk from the mass, a spiritual high point for the communal reception of Henry, would create an atmosphere in which the monks could foster privilege before the king and his lords (Gottfried 5). Reasons for this exclusionary move on the monks’ part are explored in Chapter 5.

Other historical circumstances further suggest ways that the monks desired to benefit from the king’s visit. Most notably, fostering the good graces of Henry VI would curb him from the policies on monastic reform attempted by his father twelve years earlier (Ganim 169-70; Sisk 371). In response to criticisms against the Benedictines in 1421, Henry V had convened a general Benedictine chapter to discuss a series of thirteen reforms. The monks had responded to Henry V’s summons but ultimately rewrote the
charges to a list of seven articles (Knowles 182-84; Pantin 98-100). The prologue to Lydgate’s *Siege of Thebes*, putatively written at that time, suggests a similar response on the monk-poet’s part. He joined his brethren in redefining the proposed changes on monastic terms. Lydgate’s pilgrim-persona explicitly meets the clothing, dietary, and behavioral dictates of Benedict’s Rule, but at the same time he defies the authority Harry Bailly imposes on him (Bowers 11 & 20; Patterson 76-77). The posthumous miracles of *Edmund and Fremund* similarly show a heavy pro-monastic element (Sisk 371-72; Somerset 266-67).

One final factor bears consideration in the web of loyalties that Lydgate displays in *Edmund and Fremund*: royal family politics. In addition to Bedford, other relatives of the young king were able to influence royal policy: Henry’s uncle Humphrey, duke of Gloucester, and his great-uncle Henry Beaufort, bishop—and later cardinal—of Winchester. Gloucester and Beaufort had lofty ambitions of their own and constantly competed for power in the dual monarchy. At Henry V’s death, for instance, the ruling council explicitly had to bar Gloucester from claiming the “name of Tutour, Lieutinent, Governour, nor of Regent, nor no name that shuld emporte auctorite of governaunce of the lond” for fear of him over-reaching the bounds of his power (qtd. in Griffiths, *Reign* 22). Conflict between Gloucester and Beaufort had led to the latter’s virtual banishment from England at the time of the French coronation. Beaufort was able to return to favor only when he had provided a papal army to escort Henry to Paris. Meanwhile, Gloucester had been left in England to act as royal deputy while Henry was abroad. Early in 1432, the duke used the opportunity to replace important members of the king’s
household with individuals loyal to Humphrey and to plan a new political attack against Beaufort. The involvement of the young king in these machinations greatly alarmed Richard Beauchamp, earl of Warwick and Henry’s tutor. Warwick’s attempts to remove Henry from these negative influences may have included lobbying for the Bury St. Edmunds visit (Griffiths, “Minority” 177-78; Griffiths, Reign 58-59; Wolffe 43, 55-56, & 65-68). We cannot determine the extent to which Lydgate and the other Bury monks were aware of the quarrels between Henry’s uncles. Nor is it possible to ascertain whether they shared Warwick’s concerns and sought to intervene. However, Warwick was another of Lydgate’s patrons. Given this fact and the record of his concerns, there seems some possibility that Lydgate’s promotion of his abbey and patron saint was intended as a positive influence on a young king who was surrounded by bitter and ambitious relatives (Wolffe 46).

Defining the Theme of Grace

In presenting Edmund to Henry, Lydgate develops a theme of received grace that runs throughout the entire vita, and, as seen in Chapter 1, much of his monastic poetry. Lydgate’s understanding of grace is not unique (it usually encompasses the meanings of “help from God in some moral or secular endeavor”), but the repeated emphasis he places on it indicates a major theme he wishes to impress on Henry (MED). The entire saints’ life contains 90 references to “grace” in the 119 folios of the presentation copy. Additionally, the adjectival form “gracious” appears another 13 times in the manuscript, sometimes, although not always, bearing the possible connotation of divine favor (MED). The frequency of these numbers can be compared to the appearances of Edmund’s and
Fremund’s proper names. “Edmund” appears 100 times and “Fremund” 51 times. To further show the high recurrence of these words, I also turn to the religious *Canterbury Tales* (because Chaucer was Lydgate’s self-acknowledged master) and the “Vita et Passio . . . Sancti Edmundi” from Bodley 240—Lydgate’s primary source for *Edmund and Fremund* (Edwards, Introduction 7; Bale & Edwards 21).²⁶ Within the combined 6072 lines of Chaucer’s Man of Law’s, Clerk’s, Prioress’s, Melibee, Monk’s, Second Nun’s, and Parson’s Tales, the word “grace” appears 80 times—10 times fewer in 2459 more lines. Bodley 240 only shows the word 3 times in approximately 870 lines.²⁷

The extended definition of grace with which Lydgate begins Book I is even more significant than these numbers. According to Lydgate’s definition, grace is the empowerment of all things, especially the qualities that implicitly befit a king. Lydgate begins this discussion by asserting that “Grace forthereth more than doth eloquence,/ Whiche of alle vertues hath the regalie” (17-18). Grace is the highest of virtues. In four stanzas (lines 22-49) he then catalogues the blessings allowed by grace.²⁸ The passage begins by personifying grace as a model for Henry:

For grace hath power all vertues to directe,

Withouten whom auaileth no prudence.

For this princesse hath fredham to correcte

Al vicious things, al slouthe, al negligence

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²⁶ As the numbers indicate, Lydgate’s treatment of his source is hardly slavish (Bale & Edwards 21).
²⁷ A more accurate measurement in this case is the thirty-two pages in which Hervey reprints the redaction. Because the reprint is in Latin, *gratia* is the word I counted.
²⁸ The four-stanza catalog also fits the general medieval and specific Lydgatean inclinations for amplification (Pearsall, *John Lydgate* 7-8).
Which halt the reyne of wisdam and science.

And but she gourne of our lif the bridil,

What euer we do we werke but in ydil. (22-28)

This first stanza focuses on grace as a corrective power, a figure allegorized as a “princesse” royally and divinely mandated to give direction. She becomes a model equal in stature to Henry VI. Such a model might have been developed to support recent requests of Warwick, Henry’s tutor, for more control over the adolescent. Of late, Henry had grown “in the stature of his person and in knowledge of high and royal authority, causing him more and more to begrudge and loath chastisement” (Dockray 3). As an individual charged with bringing up the king, Warwick had been allotted protection from reprisal in correcting Henry, but as the king grew older and more susceptible to pressure from the politically ambitious, further action was needed to regulate access to the teenager (Griffiths, “Minority” 174; Griffiths, Reign 52).29 Gloucester’s replacement of members of Henry’s household in 1432 serves as an example of the very real fears Warwick had that Henry was being “distracted by some from his learning and spoken to about unsuitable matters” (Dockray 3; Griffiths, “Minority” 177-78; Griffiths, Reign 59; Wolfe 69). Within this historical context, Princess Grace offers correctives to Henry, belied through Lydgate’s use of “our” and “we” in the final couplet. She also provides an example of good rule to him through her royal status.

From this opening corrective, Lydgate shifts in the second stanza to a theme of grace as empowerment, striking on ideas that were integral to Henry’s education:

29 Protection from reprisal was also extended to Alice Botiller, who oversaw Henry as a toddler (Griffiths, Reign 52).
Withoute grace, ech vertu is bareyn.

Withoute grace, force is but febilnesse.

Withoute grace, al wisdam is but veyn.

Withoute grace, may be no rihtwisnesse,

Fredam, bounte, manhood, nor gentilesse,

Prowesse in armis, nor sheltrouns in bataile.

Withoute grace what may al this auaile? (29-35)

Each virtue the stanza mentions is important to a king. Some of the instructions issued to Warwick in 1428 told him to teach Henry “good manners, literature, languages, nurture and courtesy and other studies necessary for so great a prince; to exhort him to love, honour and fear the Creator; and to draw himself to virtues and eschew vice” (Dockray 3). Lydgate’s list nicely complements and clarifies the council’s orders that Henry be taught “good manners,” “nurture and courtesy,” and, especially, “virtues.” Lydgate’s “Prowesse in armis” and “sheltrouns in bataile” also echo the physical training Henry had received for knighthood. At the age of seven, he received a long-bladed sword and two coats of armor “for to lerne the kyng to play in his tendre age” (Griffiths, “Minority” 175; qtd. in Griffiths, Reign 53).

Lydgate’s third stanza on “grace” continues to parallel Henry’s education, shifting the poet’s emphasis from empowerment of action to a balancing sense of moderation:

She set in ordre alle virtues be reson,

Preserueth tunges from al froward language.

And she restreynith, thoruh hir hih renon,
The cours of fortune for al hir fel outrage.

And grace kan best directen the passage

Of folk in labour, which that disespeire,

To reste eternall, to make hem to repeire.  (36-42)

The stanza’s appeal to grace’s “restraint of Fortune” is reminiscent of the “love, honour and fear [of] the Creator” Warwick was to instill in Henry. The benefits of grace in the passage also complement the “good manners,” “nurture and courtesy,” and “virtues” emphasized in Henry’s education. All these qualities guide Henry toward balance and moderation as king. Overall, the message becomes increasingly clear: Henry needs grace to be a good ruler.

Fitting to his subject matter of a saint’s life, Lydgate’s final stanza turns to grace as a means for the miraculous:

Grace of the stronge double kan the strengthe,

And she the feeble kan supporte in his riht,

And make a dwerf of a cubit lengthe,

Venquysshe a geant, for al his grete myht,

Which callid is, in euery mannys syht,

Gouernesse of virtues alle.

Therfore to grace for helpe I wil now calle.  (43-49)

The miracles described in these lines anticipate Lydgate’s upcoming narrative. They also could easily appeal to the imagination of a twelve-year-old boy, drawing the young king into the theme of grace with the promise of strange creatures and adventures. Lydgate
certainly maintains this concern for keeping Henry’s attention throughout his redaction: the *Edmund and Fremund* presentation copy, British Library MS Harley 2278, includes illuminations described in Chapter 4. Additionally, Lydgate uses extensive and direct dialogue that Bodley 240, his source text, does not contain (Edwards, “John Lydgate’s” 137). Notably, too, the scenes Lydgate presents in this early stanza are reminiscent of a romance with its deeds of knightly prowess.

Comparison of the openings of Lydgate and Bodley 240 also attests to the distinctiveness of this extended discussion of grace. The opening 149 lines are among Lydgate’s most “significant additions” to Edmund’s vita (Bale & Edwards 21; Edwards, “John Lydgate’s” 136-37). Most pointedly, the extended definition of grace does not appear in Bodley 240 (Bale & Edwards 149).

**The Effect of Grace**

Lydgate models the benefits of receiving grace: “But to this martir, his grace to enclyne,/ To forthre my penne of that I wolde write,/ His glorious lif to translate and endite” (12-14). He then appeals to Edmund for help in completing his project, referring to the saint’s grace as the means by which he will complete his poem:

> And first this martir shal for me prouide
> And of his mercy opne me the gate
> To make grace for to be my guide
> His holi lif in ynglissh to translate. (50-53)

These early passages in Book I are just two of many places where Lydgate invokes Edmund to help with his writing. Subsequent references appear in Lydgate’s final prayer
to Edmund before beginning his narrative (122 & 141), when he transitions from
Edmund’s vita to Fremund’s (2044) and when he begins Fremund’s life (2141, 2200, &
2210). Especially intriguing in these later appearances is the recurrent image of grace as
a kind of ink for Lydgate’s saint’s life: “Thyn heuenly dewh of gra
cence let doun falle/ Into
my penne, encloied with rudnesse” (122-23). Thus, grace as a heavenly aid to writing
forms a distinctive image in Lydgate’s *Edmund and Fremund*.

The inspiration of Lydgate through grace creates a precedent for viewing Edmund
as able to empower people throughout the *Lives*. Lydgate becomes a recipient of
Edmund’s grace through the fact that, upon Henry’s reading of the vita, he has
successfully completed his translation. This presentation of Lydgate as another recipient
of Edmund’s grace has a threefold effect. First, it establishes the saint as trustworthy and
able to fulfill miracles. Second, successful completion of the vita establishes the morality
of Lydgate’s purpose in writing to Henry. Finally, Lydgate’s depiction of his writing as
completed through Edmund’s grace makes the vita a medium of grace, formed as much
by Edmund’s intercession as by Lydgate. As grace’s medium, the vita serves as a means
for channeling the power that Edmund has bestowed on Lydgate on to Henry.

An economy of grace is equally prominent as received by Edmund from God.
The portions of *Edmund and Fremund* dealing with Edmund’s accession to the East
Anglian throne carry a particular emphasis on God’s grace bestowing the virtues that
make Edmund a suitable successor, allowing safe travel, and allowing a peaceable
transition in his rule. In the first of these instances, King Offa of East Anglia, Edmund’s
predecessor, describes his choice of Edmund:
“I wot how he hath disposicion
Vnto al vertu, as semeth vnto me.
And God hath sent him of grace gret foyson [plenty]
Semlynesse, wisdam, and beaute,
Loue, and gret fauour of hih and lowh degre,
Which in o persone to rekne be riht fayr.
Therfore at o word I wil he be myn hayr.” (526-32)

Offa’s statement “God hath sent him of grace gret foyson” connotes divine favor that falls on Edmund. This favor also is bestowed in the same manner as the grace Lydgate asks for to aid in writing the vita.

The grace of divine favor also illuminates the episode as Edmund and his followers arrive in East Anglia:

And Eolus fortuned ther passage,
And God by grace heeld ouer them his hond,
Conueied ther shipp toward Estynglond,
And at a place, pleynly to descryue,
Callyd Maydenburuh in haste they dide arryue. (661-65)

“Grace” this time allows for safe passage across the sea. Shortly after Edmund’s arrival, “enemies” challenge his rule. These enemies are rebuffed when Bishop Hunberht and Anglo-Saxon knights from Offa’s entourage show them the ring that Offa gave to Edmund to mark his succession. Lydgate again credits to “grace” the peaceable end to this potential revolt:
But alle attones at Athilburgh him sette
In the beste wise they koude hemsilf arraie.
Wherof his enemyes gretly gan dismaie.
But alle such eneyes to hyndryn han no myht
Where bi grace God list to forthre aryht. (738-42)

“Grace” resolves the situation peacefully. Thus, Lydgate’s saint’s life presents to Henry
an ideal of grace by which good rule devolves from an absolute trust in divine favor.

Lydgate suggests, moreover, that many mediums can channel divine grace, as
seen with the writing of the vita itself. A miracle of five wells bursting from the ground
upon Edmund landing in England illustrates the relationship between God as distributor
of grace and Edmund as both a recipient and a medium. Upon his arrival in England,
Edmund prays to God “That his comyng were to him acceptable” (671). In response, five
wells with healing waters spring up and nourish the land. Lydgate concludes by saying:
“And al thencre kam of Goddis grace./ For in such caas may been noon obstacle/ Whan
for his seynt God werkith bi miracle” (684-86). In this example, God clearly is the agent
of power behind the act of grace. However, Edmund also has a role in channeling grace
into the land and wells. This miracle provides a scenario for seeing grace as not just
bestowed, but directed by the prayers of an appropriately sanctified mortal. Lydgate
places a strong emphasis on this view of Benedictine sanctity throughout the Lives of Ss
Edmund and Fremund.

30 Again, I do not suggest with any of these instances that Lydgate’s view of grace is
particularly unique. Indeed, Henry V’s speech to the 1421 convocation of Black Monks
demonstrates that he too understood that Benedictine prayers carried a special sanctity
(Knowles 183; Pantin 99).
Similar to Edmund’s channeling of God’s grace in the miracle of the five wells, Lydgate presents his contemporaries as able to direct Edmund’s grace. Abbot William Curteys fits into an intermediary position that is subordinate to the abbey’s saint but still co-authoritative in the writing of Lydgate’s grace-inspired poem. This position suggests Curteys receives Edmund’s grace, even if he is not an explicit recipient. The stanza in which Lydgate mentions Curteys as the work’s commissioner reads:

In this mater ther is no more to seyn
Sauf to the kyng for to do plesance
Thabbot William his humble chapeleyn
Gaf me in charge to do myn attendance
The noble story to translate in substaunce
Out of the Latyn aftir my kunnyng
He in ful purpos to yeue it to the kyng (106-12)

Several noteworthy points appear in this stanza. First, the work is commissioned for the king’s “plesance,” that is, for his pleasure, or in service to him (MED). This wish to edify the king aligns Curteys with Lydgate, and it directs a blessing toward Henry. It provides the king with Edmund’s example as a type of good advice. The fact that the vita had to be translated “Out of the Latyn” emphasizes all the more the gravity with which the example and advice is being given, all with the intent of helping Henry become a good king (Green, Poets 137, 149).

Curteys also receives grace as member of the Bury St. Edmunds brethren as discussed below.
Another demonstration of Curteys’ beneficence toward Henry appears through Curteys as Henry’s “humble chapeleyn.” The role of “chapeleyn,” that is, the officiant at personal services for the king (MED), again conveys Curteys’ desire to aid and counsel Henry. The larger historical record attests to abbots fostering counselor positions before English kings. The development of a close personal relationship between Curteys and Henry VI proves them to be no exception. Henry returned to Bury to visit Curteys on many occasions. He also wrote to Curteys to ask for advice; for money for military expeditions, diplomatic missions, and the summoning of his future wife; and for Curteys’ attendance at the founding ceremony of King’s College (Arnold 3:242-46 & 3:262-71; Clark 307; Goodwin 71; Gottfried 3; Pearsall 26). Additionally, the adjective “humble” (obedient or unpretentious) describes a trait Curteys shared with Edmund (Lydgate, Edmund 999; MED). Humility establishes Curteys’ knowledge of holy people and behavior. Also suggesting the abbot’s recognition of what is holy and worthy of emulation is Curteys’ charge to Lydgate to translate the “noble story.” Thus, Curteys authorizes the saint’s life as a medium of instruction and empowerment of the young king even if the abbot only implicitly receives Edmund’s grace.

The ability to channel Edmund’s grace also extends to the rest of Bury’s monastic community through metonymic parallels in several of Edmund’s posthumous miracles. The first of these miracle stories tells of a sheriff named Leoffstan who impiously arrests a woman seeking refuge in Edmund’s shrine. The saint intervenes, and Leoffstan dies by demonic possession. The devotees at Edmund’s shrine joining the woman’s entreaties for the saint’s protection reflects back on the Bury monks: “The clerkis knelyng in ther
oryson./ ‘Keep thy ffreedom, O martir!’ they gan preye’ (3195-96). The prayers of these clerks magnify the woman’s entreaty for St. Edmund to act. Although grace is not specifically mentioned in this miracle, the episode fits with a pattern of the monks (or, in this case, clerks) acting collectively, as Lydgate and Curteys do individually, to influence the direction of Edmund’s power.

A later, humorous miracle pointedly expresses the monks’ ability to direct Edmund’s grace. In it, a Flemish thief kisses Edmund’s shrine and attempts to bite off a jewel from its setting. Embarrassingly, however, his teeth stick to the shrine, exposing his crime, until the monks come and pray over him:

He koude nat remewe from the place,

But stylle abood that alle men myhte se.

The couent kam, praying the seynt off grace

Vpon that wrecche for to haue pite.

Loosnyd he was, and went at liberte. (3242-46)

In this instance, the monks’ entreaties for Edmund to act out of grace are explicit and just as effective as their prayers on behalf of the woman chased by Leoffstan.

One last posthumous miracle is also explicit in its terms of the convent’s participation in an economy of grace. In this episode, Osgoth the Dane is driven mad after scorning Edmund. He is restored subsequently to sanity when Edward the Confessor and the monks pray for his recovery:

For the holy kyng [Edward] was so diligent

Off his grace to go with the couent,
In procession ther knelyng on ther kne,
To saue Osgothus off his infirmyte. (3350-53)

Edward joins the community’s petition to Edmund to help Osgoth. As a future saint, Edward also has his own grace to endow, so he and Edmund reinforce one another and the monks in restoring Osgoth. Additionally, the occasion for Edward’s visit is “Tencresse [the monks’] franchise and ther liberte,” making Edmund’s response to the prayers of Edward and the monks a sign of his approval of Edward’s gift to the abbey (3329). The involvement of the monks in these saintly activities emphasizes even more the privileged place they hold before Edmund (Sisk 368-70; Somerset 265).

Finally, Henry VI himself is a recipient of Edmund’s grace. Throughout the vita, Lydgate explicitly asks Edmund to give grace to Henry. One early example is so strong as to be a promise rather than a request:

And sithe the kyng in his roial estat
List be deuocioun of his benyuolence
With the holy martir to be confederate
As kyng with kyng bothe of gret excellence
For whiche the martir be heuenly premynence
To sixte Herry shall his grace dresse
To make him floure of triumphal prowesse. (92-98)

Lydgate’s mention of Henry VI as a recipient of Edmund’s grace becomes a prophetic promise. Thus continues the pattern of monastic intervention to channel the saint’s
Entreaties to the saint to bestow grace upon Henry also appear in Lydgate’s Book III account of Fremund (2878-84).

When requesting Edmund’s grace for Henry, Lydgate often has a particular outcome in mind: the fostering of “vertu.” Lydgate mentions “vertu” a total of four times when defining “grace” in Book I, saying: “For grace hath power alle vertues to directe”; “Withoute grace, ech vertu is bareyn”; “[Grace] set in ordre alle vertues be resoun”; and “[Grace is] Gouernesse of vertues alle” (22, 29, 36, & 48). These initial references to “grace” as the power that directs “vertu” (in these instances meaning moral character traits) mark a causal relationship between the two concepts (MED). “Vertu” is gifted divinely, not attained. The lines defining “grace” mark four references to “vertu” at that early point in the poem. They also are part of the numerous appearances of the word in the saint’s life, making the word more prominent than even the references to Fremund’s proper name. Furthermore, Lydgate concentrates his references to “vertu” in Book I, which is concerned with good rule. There “vertu” appears forty-nine times (including the prologue). Notably, sixteen mentions of “vertu” in Book I appear within seven lines, that is, one stanza length, of “grace.”

As these cited numbers reveal, “grace” and “vertu” are linked frequently enough to allow grace to color virtue in the remainder of *Edmund and Fremund*. Continuing in Book I, Lydgate invokes grace as a means to virtue in Edmund’s upbringing: “For vertu gladly take in tendre age,/ Where grace graueth the deep inpressiouns” (309-10). In Book

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32 See Lydgate’s extended definition of “grace” above for full context.
33 Lydgate uses “vertu” sixty-three times. He refers to Fremund by his proper name fifty-one times.
II, the early emphasis on the Danes and later focus on the very traditional account of Edmund’s martyrdom make the connection between grace and virtue less frequent. However, the grace/virtue connection underlies King Lothbrok’s taunting of his sons for being less successful than Edmund. The connection appears most obviously where Lothbrok concludes of Edmund’s good rule, “Thus hath the heuene disposid and his fate/That he in vertu hath no tyme lorn” (1093-94). In this context, the good rule that “the heuene disposid” is strongly reminiscent of the idea of an economy of grace. Later in Book III, Lydgate again returns to this grace/virtue paradigm, extending it to Fremund and his followers as they sail to meet the Danes in battle: “Conueyed be gra/ce, maad in vertu strong,/ Wher God helpith ther doth no force faile” (2556-57). Thus, “grace” is a general means of empowerment and a specific way to receive virtue. This causality of grace bringing about virtue implies that Lydgate’s abbey can help Henry to increase his own kingly virtues by associating with the monks and their patron saint who have received grace from God.

The Abbey and Its Saint

*Edmund and Fremund* displays a strong identification between Bury and its patron saint that contributes to the monks’ ability to intercede before Edmund. The saints and relics of monasteries historically provided a rallying point for identity and economic gain (Geary 58). In East Anglia particularly, royal saints were prevalent because they strengthened the authority of monastic houses. Bury St. Edmunds is a notable example of an abbey that exploited the fame its saint brought through the proliferation of saints’ lives (Duffy 166, 196). In *Edmund and Fremund*, the metonymic pairing of the devotees of
Edmund’s shrine and Lydgate’s contemporary brethren fosters the connection between saint and abbey. Finally, the very name of Lydgate’s abbey and town as Bury St. Edmunds or St. Edmundsbury creates another firm connection to the saint-king. The name literally means “St. Edmund’s burgh” or town (MED).

Turning back to Lydgate’s poem, this affinity between the Bury community and the relics of St. Edmund is stated directly and narratively. Lydgate declares outright early in the poem that Edmund is the “glorious martir of Bury cheef patron,” underscoring the Bury community’s loyalty to the saint (148). And Edmund returns this loyalty to the people. Edmund’s slaying of the invading Danish king Swein Forkbeard provides a dramatic instance of this loyalty. After ignoring the warnings to cease demanding tribute from the East Anglians, Swein receives a visit from Edmund one night and is run through by the saint. Edmund’s garb for this encounter stands out: “Off heuenly colour was his cote armure,/ The ffeeld azour off gold, with crownys thre” (3081-82). These three crowns against a backdrop of blue depict the coat of arms for the Bury St. Edmunds Abbey (Bale & Edwards 147-48). Lydgate himself describes this insignia in the vita’s prologue. There he juxtaposes it with a scene depicting the Fall of Man and “A lamb of gold hyh vpon a tre” against a field of scarlet (P4-56).34 Lydgate calls this latter image Edmund’s battle standard. The fact that Edmund wears the abbey’s coat of arms when he

34 Lydgate may have written the opening prologue in which these standards appear after the rest of the Lives as a special opening to the presentation copy. Some manuscripts treat it as a separate poem (Bale & Edwards 12-17). I have waited to this point to discuss this prologue because of a slight disconnect between it and Lydgate’s “proper” beginning of the vita with the definition of grace.
slays Swein thus reinforces the notion that the saint acts on behalf of the people of Bury and not just out of revenge for a personal violation.

The reciprocal relationship between Edmund and Bury appears even more clearly in the vita’s final episode, which chronicles the return of Edmund’s relics from London to Bury. The episode begins by emphasizing the will Edmund has to be in Bury. For reasons not fully explained by Lydgate, Aylwin, the saint-king’s shrinekeeper and chief devotee, has transported Edmund’s relics to London. After a three-year sojourn at St. Gregory’s Church, Aylwin receives “be reuelacion” that the time is right to return to Bury (3390). This revelation as a divine mandate justifies seeing an affinity between Bury and its saint, and it is the first of many miracles that develop the connection. More dramatic is the subsequent attempt by the London bishop to secretly translate Edmund’s body to St. Paul’s cathedral only to have the reliquary stand “as fyx as a gret hill off ston” (3402). The relics possess a will of their own and become moveable only after Aylwin prays to be able to take them to Bury, the destination the saint himself desires.

Further evidence of the tie between the saint and town is the complementary benevolence with which the saint and people greet one another. The positive effects of this episode contrast with the “negative” consequences of the London bishop’s attempt to translate Edmund to St. Paul’s. As Aylwin moves Edmund across the countryside, “Alle syke ffolk that for help souhte/ To the martir, lyggyng in maladye,/ Were maad hool” (3424-26). In these later scenes, the saint helps rather than hinders people as he gets closer to Bury. He also elicits positive acts from the people themselves: “Broke breggis

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35 Elsewhere, it is to protect the shrine from invading Danes (Farmer 121).
they gan agyen renewe./ Strowed al the weies with floures freshh and grene” (3431-32).
Especially in the case of repairing bridges, the people’s responses to the saint aid
Edmund’s return to Bury and benefit the larger community, making it more whole in a
social sense through the spiritual inclusion of the saint. These instances of the saint
expressing his will and healing the sick reveal a sense of mutual identification between
St. Edmund and his Bury community.36

Grace is seeded throughout this section as Edmund’s relics are translated to and
from London. Similar to the empowerment of human action discussed above, “grace” is
the means by which the miraculous happens in this episode. Scenes in which the word
grace appears include: the safe passage of the reliquary over a broken bridge on the way
into London (as Lydgate puts it, “Narwh was the plawnc, ther was no weye but grace”);
healings while entering London at Cripplegate of “They that were lame, be grace they
goon upryght”; and, upon the return trip to Bury, the miraculous healing of “he that
hadd the domynacion” of the village of Stapleford, who “was be grace thus recuryd”
(3378, 3385, 3440, & 3445). All of these instances showcase the power of St. Edmund’s
relics. In particular, the healing of the Stapleford lord fits into a pattern of positive social
change that comes from a town’s reciprocity with the saint. Upon his recovery, the lord

Ful deuotly, in al his beste wise,
Made his auouh, an hertly hath assuryd
That litil maner, hoo ly to a mortyse [mortmain],
With the reuenus, as lawe lyst deuyse,

36 This fact is true even as Lydgate draws on traditional hagiographical topoi (Geary 113).
To the cherche, breffly to termyne,

Wher the martir lith hool now in his shryne. (3446-51)

The lord repays the saint for his help by leaving property to Bury St Edmunds Abbey. This gesture benefits the Bury community and elevates its Benedictine house by showing its close relationship with St. Edmund.

**Henry and His Saintly Models**

Lydgate also develops an affinity between Henry and Edmund. Parallels between the two kings encourage Henry to adopt a relationship similar to Edmund’s with the abbey. Youth is the most obvious shared trait. Henry’s age of twelve at his 1433–1434 visit makes him a contemporary of Edmund, who was traditionally depicted as fifteen at his ascent to the East Anglian throne (a tradition followed by Lydgate—777; Bale & Edwards 152 &156). Of further interest, the probable timeframe for the completion of the poem and of the presentation copy produces a window of 1434–1439, making Henry between thirteen and eighteen, a span that includes his own fifteenth year and allows the two kings to be exactly the same age (Edwards, “Introduction” 4 &14). Thus, the suitability of Edmund’s age for Henry makes remarkable metonymic sense.

The presence of a ruling council in *Edmund and Fremund* further develops the parallel between Henry and Edmund. Edmund’s father Alkmund establishes this council, which is described over three stanzas:

First twenty knyhtes he ches out off his rewm

That wern in wisdam and knyhthod most notable,

And other twenty that fro Iherusalem
Kam with kyng Offa famous and honurable.

And among alle a knyht off port most stable

Assigned was, the story in ful kouth,

For to gouerne Edmund in his youth.  (603-09)

Like Henry, Edmund has a council to help him rule until he reaches an age when he can lead on his own. There is a great deal of idealization in Edmund’s twenty Saxon knights and twenty East Anglian knights, for it far surpasses the twelve to eighteen Englishmen of Henry’s council in both number and “national” diversity (Griffiths, *Reign* 32). However, the existence of the parallel is still significant because it shows Lydgate’s deliberate effort to make Edmund and Henry analogous. Lydgate deviates from his primary source, Bodley 240, at this point in order to introduce the passage creating the council, which derives from Geoffrey of Wells. Such deviation strongly suggests a conscious effort to develop the metonymic parallel between Henry and Edmund (Bale & Edwards 154).

The passage also describes the “knyht off port most stable” selected to govern Edmund, a figure analogous to Henry’s own tutor, Richard Beauchamp, earl of Warwick:

He hadde off old famous experience

Bothe of armys and off gentilesse.

Al his apport demened with prudence.

Sadnesse in tyme, in tyme also gladnesse

With entirchangyngis of merthe and sobirnesse,

Affter the sesouns requered off euery thyng.
A man ful able to been aboute a kyng. (610-16)

Warwick easily fits this description. At the age of fifty-five in 1433, he had fought alongside Henry V in France as well as served as a diplomat. His interest in poetry and own fluency in French also lent themselves to his qualifications as a tutor (Griffiths, *Reign* 52; Sisk 354; Wolffé 46).

Further similarities in the social diversity of Edmund’s and Henry’s councils emerge in the final stanza describing Edmund’s entourage:

He hadde eek clerkis, ful circumspect and wise,
Signed tawaite vpon his doctryne.
Chose chapeleyns erly for tarise
To do seruyse which that is dyuyne.
And alle sqwieres, pleynly to termyne,
Sqwieres and yomen that sholde with him goon,
Alkmund for vertu ches hem euerychoon. (617-23)

Edmund’s council reflects a social diversity of “clerkis,” “chapeleyns,” “sqwieres,” and “yomen” that genuinely parallels Henry’s. The various administrative groups accurately reflect the representation in Henry’s council of secular nobles, ecclesiasts, and commoners, with Thomas Chaucer, Geoffrey’s son, being among this last group (Griffiths, *Reign* 34-35). Moreover, Lydgate’s specification that Alkmund, Edmund’s father, chose his council may nod to Henry V and the codicils he left to instruct his survivors in the care of his son and dual kingdom.
Edmund also models a number of behaviors for Henry throughout the vita. The prologue and Book I, where Lydgate extols Edmund’s virtues and reliance on grace, are highly reminiscent of the medieval genre of advice to princes, and Edmund is even called a “merour of doctryne” at one point (1174; Sisk 352-53). In the prologue, Lydgate compares Henry to Edmund’s heraldic iconography of the three crowns, the abbey’s coat of arms:

These thre crownyes historyaly taplye,
By pronostyk notably souereyne,
To sixte Herry, in fygur signefye
How he is born to worthy crownyes twyne,
Off France and Ingland lynealy tatteyn.
In this lyff heer afterward in heuene
The thrydde crowne to receive in certeyne
For his meritis aboue the sterrys seuene. (P65-72)

Lydgate praises Henry as being like Edmund. Later statements affirm Edmund’s “knyhtly hy prowesse” and further reinforce the greatness of Henry as he mirrors Edmund (1117; Sisk 355-56; Edwards, “John Lydgate’s” 142). The final lines of Lydgate’s vita culminate in martial imagery, where he exhorts Henry to “Beth to [Edmund’s] chyrche dyffence and champion,/ Because yt ys of your ffundacion” (3612-13). These lines are notable on two accounts. First, the protective roles of “dyffence and champion” that Lydgate assigns to Henry will later be echoed in extra miracle C. There, he entreats Edmund “To save his chirche, his toun, and his cuntre” (EM461). Such
parallel exhortations reinforce the idea of equivalence between Henry and the saint. Second, the assertion that Edmund’s church is Henry’s “ffundacion” affirms that, like Edmund, Henry has ownership and invested identity in Bury and its shrine. The term also appears in Lydgate’s account of Henry joining the abbey’s confraternity. Creating a vested interest in the abbey for Henry was particularly important for the monks as a way to preserve their privileges when the occasion for the Lancastrian court’s four-month visit was the result of its fiscal problems. Such exploitation of monastic wealth and hospitality could easily be interpreted as an initial attack on additional privileges (64, 89; Bale & Edwards 149; Lowe 162).

The example of St. Fremund also develops Lydgate’s model of kingly and monastic relations. Although Lydgate gives Fremund no specific age, he explicitly says that “yonge Fremund sholde be crownyd kyng,” thus creating another youthful parallel for Edmund and Henry (2347). As a young king comparable to Henry, Fremund solves some of the problems created by Edmund’s passive martyrdom. He epitomizes a king who actively fights to protect his lands and peoples (Sisk 350; Somerset 265-66; Winstead 130). Moreover, Fremund models a respectful relationship toward monasticism. Like Edmund, who “sette his study bi ful gret dilligence,” Fremund follows a monastic ideal of devotional reading: “On hooly bookys his lust was for to reede” (821 & 2374). Most importantly, Fremund consistently acts on behalf of monasticism, whether in his eremitic solitude or in acting against the Danes. In the first of these examples, Lydgate writes that Fremund “bilte a litel hermytage/. . . A lytil chapel he dide there edefie,” thus providing a precedent for a king serving as a monastic patron
(2413 & 2416). Similarly, when the messengers from Fremund’s father summon him to fight the Danes, their pleas are made in religious terms:

With wepyng eyen als they hym tolde

Off Christis lawe final destruccion:

Maidnes rauesshid, men slayn that were olde,

Cherchis robbid, despoiled and bor doun,

Menstris desolate, reuersid up so doun

Al religion and clerkly discipline,

With furye off Danys brouht vnto ruyne. (2500-06)

Particularly notable within this passage are the references to “Cherchis,” “menstris” (monastery churches), and “clerkly discipline” (MED). Lydgate, as a monk, would be particularly invested in these institutions and would wish to see them protected. Even though Fremund’s abdication to lead an eremitic existence causes problems with his kingship (it leaves his elderly father as ruler with no other heirs), it affirms and supports a monastic existence (Winstead 131).

The Consequences of Opposition

The relationships among Henry, Edmund, and the abbey are reciprocal, but Henry’s favor before Edmund is also conditional and dependent on his treatment of the abbey. Lydgate never makes an overt claim that the monks can control Edmund’s power, but Edmund consistently acts in his miracles on behalf of the monks and those for whom
they pray. Not surprisingly, the saint-king’s freedom to act becomes a major theme in many of the posthumous miracles of the saint’s legend.37

The major episode dealing with such freedom is the account of Swein Forkbeard, outlined above. Swein’s list of abuses is extensive:

To hooly places was do no reuerence.

Men slayn and moordred by vengable cruelte.

Wyues oppressid by sclandrous violence.

Widwes rauesshid, lost ther liberte.

Maidnes diffouled by force ageyn pite.

Preesthod despised, religyous in disdeyn

Be cruel hatrede off this tirant Swyen. (2934-40)

These abuses strike at people throughout East Anglian society. Lydgate’s primary concern, however, emerges a few stanzas later. There, he explicitly sums up the abuses as also working against Edmund, saying, “[Swein] Confermed off syentes ffredam nor ffranchise” (2954). As the episode continues, Lydgate reduces Swein’s crimes to his demands for tribute, the crime most directly violating Edmund’s sovereignty. For example, Edmund’s apparition tells Aylwin the shrinekeeper to deliver a message to Swein: “[The people’s] ffranchise is to stonde in auantage/ From al trybut and al exaccion,/ Vnder the wynges off my proteccion” (3022-24). Later, at the climax of the episode, Edmund questions Swein: “Wiltow,’ quod he, ‘haue tribut off my lond?’”; after running Swein through, he exclaims: “Haue thyn axyng! haue heer thy tribut!” (3080 &

37A king’s national sovereignty, especially over land, was considered part of his “fredam” (MED).
This concern for tribute echoes and revives discussion of one of the major terms of surrender demanded of Edmund before his martyrdom, when the Danish messenger proclaims that Edmund must, “paie a tribut and vnder [Hinguar] be kyng” (1523). As Edmund’s martyrdom begins, these concerns over tribute quickly disappear, completely subordinated to the religious concern of remaining faithful to Christ. In this miracle, however, Lydgate returns to the issue of Edmund and the Bury abbey owing tribute to other authorities. The episode fiercely reaffirms the abbey’s rights of ownership over the Bury franchise, with Edmund acting as enforcer on its behalf (Ganim 167-68; Sisk 365-66).

Consistent with this pattern, the two miracles following Edmund’s defeat of Swein also express concern for the saint’s and the abbey’s freedom. In the story of Sheriff Leoffstan, the pursued woman exclaims to Edmund upon entering the shrine, “Keep and conserue thy iurediccion,” to which the clerks respond, “Keep thy ffredam, O martir!” (3193 & 3196). Immediately after this miracle is a brief episode in which five armed knights attempt to steal horses from Edmund’s shrine “Ageyn the ffredam off Edmund,” but suddenly become mad until they repent and pledge devotion to the saint (3222). Both episodes warn against infringing on the rights of Bury St. Edmunds Abbey.

This motif of the saint’s freedom provides a new context for the overlapping theme of the monks as intercessors before Edmund by making their support conditional to Henry’s respect for them. As I have shown, the miracles involving Sheriff Leoffstan, the Flemish thief, and Osgoth the Dane all feature the prayers of clerks and monks as channeling Edmund’s power and grace. Throughout Edmund’s miracles, the saint’s
power is further witnessed by important religious figures, making them key attesters to the saint’s loyalties. Aylwin appears as a main participant in the episodes of King Swein and the London-to-Bury translation. King Edward, himself a future royal saint, likewise appears in the miracle of Osgoth. Finally, Abbot Leoffstan (not to be confused with the sheriff) and Abbot Baldwin appear respectfully in the miracles of Osgoth and the London-to-Bury translation. Thus, the support of the monks and their abbey’s patron saint is implied as conditional upon Henry’s cooperation with them, on account of their privileged position for petitioning St. Edmund. A general warning issued by Lydgate after the episode with Leoffstan also contributes to this impression:

Thus kan the martir punysshe hem that been rebel.

Folk that truste hym conforte hem and releue,

Socoure ther pleyntes supporte ther quarrel,

As this myracle openly doth preue.

Who seketh his helpe shal nat mescheue.

To his seruantis gracious and benygne

A tale for them ageyn hym that maligne. (3214-20)

Edmund acts for those who pray to him, and the Bury monks consistently do. This moral message urges Henry to trust Edmund and his abbey, and cautions him against taking advantage of the abbey and its monks by forcing his authority on them. It is also a warning to the king not to make them enact reform or other changes to which they might object.
The historical moment of Henry VI’s 1433–1434 visit to Bury St. Edmunds Abbey presented John Lydgate, William Curteys, and their Benedictine brethren with an important opportunity for gaining royal patronage. Housing the cash-strapped court was an important honor and duty for the monks. It also gave them a chance to persuade the adolescent king to identify with them and to adopt their own spiritual fervency so that future policy would benefit them, securing the abbey’s privileges against dissident townsfolk and curbing unwanted royal reform.

Cultivating Henry’s favor, however, required Lydgate to spin an intricate web of loyalties among himself, his abbey, the king, and two royal saints affiliated with his house. To this end, the *Lives of Ss Edmund and Fremund* depicts the monastic figures appearing in its leaves as fervent and privileged recipients of St. Edmund’s grace. As a result, the monks are able to influence the channeling of that grace through their intercessory position. The grace received by the monks is manifest through the precedent set by the actions of Edmund and of the monks in the posthumous miracles Lydgate records. The completed saint’s life itself also embodies an act of grace because its completion was accomplished through the saint’s intervention. Grace, finally, inspired Curteys’ commission of the work and empowered Lydgate’s creative genius.

In addition to invoking the grace of Edmund and Fremund onto Henry through his saint’s legend, Lydgate presents both saints as models of kingship who correctly relate to the Bury abbey and with whom Henry should identify. They defend monastic interests against both physical violence and threats to its independence. In adopting such a stance
for himself, Henry will form a reciprocal relationship with the monks that will advance his own abilities as a good king and protect him from saintly retribution.

The illuminations in British Library MS Harley 2278 complement Lydgate’s themes of grace and monastic intercession. Harley 2278 is regarded as the presentation copy of the *Lives of Ss Edmund and Fremund*. Its elaborate illustrations and fine workmanship show the communal investment of the Bury St. Edmunds brethren in the message Lydgate sends to Henry. How the illuminations of Harley 2278 honor the king and drive home Lydgate’s themes is the subject of Chapter 4.
Chapter 4—Monastic Self-Depiction in Harley 2278

This chapter builds on the preceding discussion of the privileged intercessory position of the Bury St. Edmunds monks. Although Lydgate gave voice to the perspective that the Bury monks had the power to invoke both blessing and curse, the presentation manuscript commemorating the young king’s extended visit shows that this view was one shared by his whole community. This manuscript still exists and is now known as British Library MS Harley 2278. How its illuminations reinforce Lydgate’s themes of monastic intercession and royal reciprocity is the focus of this chapter.

Harley 2278 is unprecedented among medieval manuscripts for the scale of illuminations it incorporates. In its one hundred nineteen folios it contains one hundred twenty images, extensive vinework, and many gilt initials. The pictures illustrate Lydgate’s narrative, offering a greater degree of textual-visual engagement than any Middle English manuscript that precedes Harley 2278. The pilgrim portraits from the Canterbury Tales in the Ellesmere MS are among the most elaborate predecessors, but they do not reflect the action from any of Chaucer’s stories. The elaborateness of Harley 2278 also exceeds most illuminated Lydgate manuscripts that follow it.38 Manchester University Library Rylands English I contains the Troy Book and sixty-nine miniatures, British Library MS Harley 1766 illustrates the Fall of Princes with one hundred fifty miniatures of Harley 1766 (containing the Fall of Princes) form an exception in terms of raw numbers, but at over two hundred fifty folios it still has a lower ratio of illuminations to pages than Harley 2278 (K. Scott, Later II.303).
eight miniatures, British Library MS Yates Thompson 47 and the Arundel Castle manuscript that each contain later copies of *Edmund and Fremund* are illuminated with fifty-three and fifty miniatures, respectively. Notably, all of these manuscripts are of Lydgatean texts originally written for members of the Lancastrian family, indicating the prestige that continued to be associated with the monk-poet’s works. Such elaborateness is one indicator that Harley 2278 was the abbey’s presentation copy of *Edmund and Fremund* to Henry. The representation of Henry VI in two of the miniatures (on folios 4v and 6r) also points to this manuscript as the presentation copy. The absence of the three authorial continuations to *Edmund and Fremund* known as the “Extra Miracles” and dated to 1441 and 1444 also suggests an earlier date of composition for Harley 2278 (Edwards, Introduction 11, 13-14; K. Scott, *Later II.*225, 259, 302, 307; K. Scott, “Lydgate’s” 339).

The unprecedented magnificence of Harley 2278 demonstrates high investments of time and resources from the whole of Bury St. Edmunds Abbey. The manuscript was a communal production, and key clusters of illuminations within its folios along with signs of a Suffolk provenance show it as such. In this chapter, I argue that these clusters provide visual foci for the themes of monastic sanctity from Lydgate’s poem that at once reinforce Lydgate’s text and enact the investment of the larger community in its mission of interceding between St. Edmund and Henry VI. The first cluster I examine features depictions of the banners of King Edmund and the abbey and emphasizes the appropriate relationship between a holy king and a monastery supporting him. A second group of illuminations features contemporaries of Lydgate as a mnemonic for events from Henry
VI’s 1433–1434 visit. The third cluster of miniatures features groups of Benedictine monks as they appear in the posthumous miracles. These illuminations reflect the awareness of the Benedictines of their inherited intercessory role as shrinekeepers. The final set features the legendary shrinekeeper Aylwin, whose depiction as a Benedictine monk vicariously elevates the sanctity of Lydgate’s contemporary brethren. In examining these clusters, I admittedly am working with more illuminations than can be fully discussed. However, my intent is to focus on the recurrent image of the black-robed Benedictine monk in the Harley 2278 illuminations. This focus excludes a number of other figures but highlights how the Bury St. Edmunds limners prominently feature the Benedictine order at the beginning and end of the Lives. Such prominence reflects the personal involvement of Lydgate and also his order’s sense of its own historical moment and fervent purpose.

As other scholars have noted, combining textual and visual forms creates an altered impression of medieval works. Lydgate paired his poetry with visual art forms such as tapestries, wall murals, and mummmings in addition to illuminated manuscripts. In any case, it is the interplay of mediums that creates this fuller understanding. This chapter reads Lydgate’s Edmund and Fremund, especially as interpreted in the previous chapter, alongside the illuminations of Harley 2278 in order to engage with the dialogue that exists between the manuscript’s textual and visual components (Edwards, Introduction 10; Sponsler 19-21).
Harley 2278 as Abbey Production

As the presentation copy of the *Lives of Ss Edmund and Fremund*, Harley 2278 was a personal gift, but its likely origin in Suffolk makes it all the more distinctive. The bulk of fifteenth-century English books were produced in London where the larger population stimulated the trade. A Suffolk provenance points to a greater degree of involvement from the abbey. A body of evidence for an early book “factory” located in Suffolk and associated with the works of Lydgate in general and *Edmund and Fremund* specifically points to this provenance (Gillespie 175; Horobin 76; K. Scott, *Later* I.27-28). The Benedictine order’s long history of making books and patronizing bookmakers also provides an ideological framework for conceiving of Harley 2278 as locally produced. The expenses incurred by the abbey and the likely collaboration of Lydgate and Abbot William Curteys with the manuscript’s scribe and limners are practical measures of the local production of Harley 2278. When we view these ideological and practical measures for local production side by side, we can understand Harley 2278 as an abbey production in which the entire community of the Bury St. Edmunds monks had a stake.

Evidence for an “early book factory” operating in Bury or nearby Clare appears through a group of nine Lydgate manuscripts and includes Harley 2278. The 1433–

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39 In addition to Harley 2278, these manuscripts are Yates Thompson 47, the Arundel Castle manuscript, Ashmole 46, Harley 1766, Harley 4826, Sloane 2464, Arundel 99, and Laud misc. 67. The post-1461 dating of these manuscripts is based on the revision of Henry VI’s name to that of Edward IV in some of the manuscripts. Edward succeeded Henry in 1461. Additionally, the artist who decorated Yates Thompson 47 has been identified as decorating another eight manuscripts with Bury St. Edmunds associations (K. Scott, *Later* II.308; K. Scott, “Lydgate’s” 352-61).
1434 events commemorated by Harley 2278 predate it to the rest of the group (which were written post 1461), but it provides an important model for two of the others. As extensively illuminated copies of _Edmund and Fremund_, Yates Thompson 47 and Arundel Castle (mentioned above) closely follow some of the illuminations in Harley 2278 either directly or through a lost intermediary. In regards to placement on the page and subject matter of their illuminations, they mirror each other exactly. The patterns among these three manuscripts (extending even to the page format followed by the scribe) suggest a shared provenance. This shared provenance further extends to the rest of the group, based on the fact that all of them except Harley 2278 are in the same scribal hand, and six of them feature illuminations by the same two or three illuminators (K. Scott, *Later* II.308; K. Scott, “Lydgate’s” 355-60).

The core group of illuminators associated with these manuscripts implies a limited number of shops for the scribe to take his work to for illustration. These limitations in turn point to a provincial location with a less extensive book trade. Lydgate’s roots in Bury St. Edmunds make Suffolk a likely possibility. His reputation as a great poet within his lifetime would have stimulated regional interest in owning copies of his works, especially among members of the burgeoning burghal class. The scribe who copied the eight later manuscripts presumably was among those interested in Lydgate’s works because the _Fall of Princes_ and _Secrees of Old Philisoffres_ also are included in the contents of this group. Moreover, Lydgate’s lifelong monastic profession would create plenty of interest in Bury St. Edmunds Abbey preserving the works of one of their most famous brothers. This desire for duplicating Lydgate’s work would be
especially true given the monastic privileges advanced by Lydgate in the *Lives of Ss Edmund and Fremund*, as I have argued. Thus, the putative Suffolk workshop that reproduced many of Lydgate’s works following 1461 may have had strong connections to Bury St. Edmunds Abbey as well. Some question of its earlier existence in the years following 1434 (when Lydgate composed the *Lives*) must remain, but book artists in London during this time were known to rent the same tenement for their workshops for as long as forty years (K. Scott, *Later* I.34, 59; K. Scott, “Lydgate’s” 355-66).

Monastic bookmaking had a long history with the Benedictine order. From early in the order’s existence, bookmaking was an acceptable discipline of study for brethren skilled in the craft. Monks considered this craft to have a spiritual dimension because it helped produce materials used for the observance of the Divine Office. With time, writing was viewed as inherently holy. Even as later practice (post-1200) allowed the commission of bookmaking to workshops, the larger monasteries still produced some of their own texts as literacy and facility in writing became more widespread among the brethren. Knowledge of manuscript painting likewise was found in the monasteries throughout the Middle Ages, and some monks continued to practice this skill too (Clark 111-12, 238-44; Knowles 234; M. Scott 37).

The commission of manuscript illuminations to secular artists appears to have met a combination of social and aesthetic concerns. The ability to hire workmen for any type of artistic production, be it for a manuscript or a building program, were displays of wealth and influence that Bury St. Edmunds Abbey and other large monasteries were expected to make as powerful landholders. Mutually inclusive to this power display is
the possibility that hiring secular professionals was a way to guarantee luxury manuscripts as artistic specializations increased. A desire for quality encompasses both a display of wealth and a spiritual desire to glorify God, the Church, or a monarch with beautiful things, so it does not exclude the possibility that the monks themselves could also produce a beautiful set of illuminations. In a time of increasing specialization, however, a correlation between high-quality manuscripts and professional limners makes sense because the monks were occupied with a variety of other duties. Monks cultivating their own bookmaking skills, additionally, points to their appreciation of carefully crafted books with well-drawn illuminations (Clark 248-50; K. Scott, Later I.26).40

When commissioning manuscripts, monasteries may have turned to traveling craftsmen in addition to local shops. Traveling craftsmen of various trades had long made stops at Benedictine monasteries to perform work for the monks. At times, some craftsmen, including book artists, were encouraged to take up a long-term residence, centering the book trade on that house. This extended residence would certainly have been the case in the fifteenth century when book artists from the continent practiced their craft extensively in England where there was a dearth of native limners. Scholars have often assumed that at least the chief limner of the three artists who decorated Harley 2278 was Dutch, although the basis for this assumption seems tenuously based on the quality

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40 It is also worth mentioning that an increased number of monks drawn from the rising burghal class affected aesthetic sensibilities. Lydgate’s origins in the village of Lidgate and his own rise to fame through Bury St. Edmunds Abbey may place him in this category of monk (Clark 250). Consideration of monastic and burghal power dynamics is a major concern of chapter 5.
of the illustrations being too good to have been produced by a native provincial artist.\textsuperscript{41} Otherwise nothing definite is known of these workers (Clark 164, 253; Edwards, Introduction 11; K. Scott, \textit{Later} I.62-63, II.227-28).\textsuperscript{42} The monastic history of book patronage attests to the spiritual identity motivating the Bury brethren in the commission of Harley 2278, but the elaborateness of the manuscript also bespeaks great material investment of the abbey’s corporately owned resources. This material investment thus contributes to the impression of Harley 2278 as a communal production.

Further evidence for seeing Harley 2278 as a communal production appears through the signs of collaboration between Lydgate, Abbot William Curteys, and the artists who worked on the manuscript. As discussed in my previous chapter, Lydgate presents Curteys as the commissioner of \textit{Edmund and Fremund}, assigning to him a patronage position over both Lydgate and Henry. Curteys’ position of patron over Lydgate also combines with a position of collaboration because his dictation that Lydgate write the poem commemorating Henry’s visit gave the impetus for Lydgate’s creative process (Bale & Edwards 19, 28; Edwards, Introduction 2-3, 10-11; K. Scott, \textit{Later} II.228). It is impossible to know how else Curteys may have influenced the themes of grace and monastic intercession that Lydgate works into his redaction, but Curteys’ personal appreciation of Lydgate’s work, as evidenced by the existence of MS Harley 2255 (the collection of poems Lydgate gave to Curteys as a gift [discussed in Chapter 1]),

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item There were also a large number of French artists in England during the early fifteenth century (K. Scott, \textit{Later} I.63).
\item San Marino, Huntington Library MS HM 268, a copy of Lydgate’s \textit{Fall of Princes}, displays some stylistic similarities that may be attributable to one of the assisting artists of Harley 2278 if that craftsman is allowed a different color scheme than he shows in Harley 2278 (K. Scott, \textit{Later} II.231).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
leaves room for the possibility that Curteys’ own aesthetic sensibilities played into the creation of Harley 2278.

Lydgate may have collaborated too with the scribe and limners who compiled Harley 2278. The careful placement of illuminations to correspond with the text they illustrate in Harley 2278 points to very deliberate coordination between the scribe and artists. Monastic supervision of manuscript craftsmen had become common practice by the fifteenth century, and Lydgate, as poet, seems appropriate for this role too. Another element also suggesting the involvement of Lydgate or another supervisor in illuminating Harley 2278 is the meta-level upon which the pictures operate, wherein they anticipate story elements that are not mentioned specifically by the poem. One example is the appearance of Lothbrok’s greyhound in the illustrations of the Danish king’s departure from Denmark, arrival in East Anglia, and subsequent success as a hunter in England (folios 41v, 42r, and 43v). *Edmund and Fremund’s* text makes no mention of the dog prior to its involvement in revealing Lothbrok’s murder, so its appearance in the illuminations shows a careful planning that allows Harley 2278’s artwork to tell part of the story.43 This careful planning of both the redaction and manuscript suggests Lydgate

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43 Indeed, depiction of the dog as arriving in East Anglia with Lothbrok rewrites the episode from its origin in Roger of Wendover. Roger explicitly states, “that Lothbroc had taken charge of a greyhound in the Court of King Eadmund, and the animal, being, as commonly occurs, devotedly attached to his master, remained alone with his body, when the huntsman [Bern] went home with the other hounds” (174-75). This use of illumination to help tell part of the story in a Lydgate manuscript may also occur in Cotton Tiberius A.VII. This manuscript is a copy of Lydgate’s *Pilgrimage of the Life of Man*. At one point, the illuminator depicts Heresy as a tailor, a detail that follows Lydgate’s source, Guillaume de Deguileville’s *Le Pelerinage de la vie humaine*, but that Lydgate himself does not make explicit in his translation (L. Cooper 101-02).
himself as coordinating with the illustrators of Harley 2278 (Clark 240-41; Edwards, Introduction 10-11).

The large number of other Lydgatean works with visual components is another factor suggesting Lydgate’s coordination with the limners of Harley 2278. As I have already mentioned, many extant manuscripts of Lydgate’s works are more heavily illustrated than any manuscript to precede them. The total of these extant illustrated works comes to twenty-nine. Many are copies of the lengthy *Troy Book* and *Fall of Princes*. Such heavy illustration implies a tradition of illustrating Lydgate’s works. There are instances of innovative illumination in Lydgate manuscripts too. Some translated works, like the *Troy Book*, *Fall of Princes*, and *Pilgrimage of the Life of Man*, are illustrated for the first time in an English manuscript. Harley 2278 is exceptional for making extensive use of original illuminations instead of a stock set of images often imposed upon limners by their gilds. Lydgate’s numerous mummings, devotional poems, and wall and tapestry poems also suggest that he was valued as a poet who could link his works to visual representations. Examples include reflections on the *pieta* and *imago pietatis* in “On the Image of Pity” and the “Dolerous Pyte of Crystes Passioun,” the description of the priest vesting himself in “Poems on the Mass,” and a reference in “On De Profundis” to the poem being hung on the wall of a church. John Shirley is also helpful for identifying certain poems as mummings or, in the case of the *Dance of Death,*
as having been inscribed next to a mural on a wall (Edwards, Introduction 11; Gayk 181-83, 190-94; K. Scott, *Later* I.35, 37, 42, 52-53, 59-60, II.228; Sponsler 24-25, 30).

The Visual Identity of Black Monks

I turn now to the visual identity of the Benedictine order. In pairing this visual identity with the Suffolk if not Bury St. Edmunds context discussed above, I establish the framework for seeing the illuminations of monks in Harley 2278 as representations of Lydgate’s own community as it interacts with St. Edmund as intercessor. My purpose in this section is to call attention to how particular Lydgate and his brethren were about depicting the “Black Monk” in terms of dress, literary representation, and visual representation. There are deliberate and significant implications when Harley 2278’s miniatures depict black-robed Benedictine monks.

Monastic clothing is a topic specifically addressed in Benedict’s Rule. The specificity of this passage acts as a definition for monastic visual identity:

Vestments shall be given to the brothers according to the quality of the places where they dwell, or the temperature of the air. For in cold regions more is required; but in warm, less. This, therefore, is a matter for the abbot to decide. We nevertheless consider that for ordinary places there suffices for the monks a cowl and gown apiece—the cowl in winter hairy, in summer plain or old—and a working garment, on account of their labours. As clothing for the feet, shoes and boots. Concerning the colour and size of all of which things the monks shall not

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44 Clare Sponsler intriguingly remarks on the impact of a visual image that Lydgate claims for his own “conversion” experience of seeing a crucifix and the word “vide” in “The Testament of Dan John Lydgate” (32-33).
talk; but they shall as can be found in the province where they are or as can be bought the most cheaply. The abbot, moreover, shall provide as to the measure, that those vestments be not short for those using them; but of suitable length.

(Henderson 301)

Benedict addresses clothing as it relates to climate, changing seasons, labor, expense, and proper fitting of garments. The passage even continues to prescribe redistribution of unwanted garments, a change of clothes for washdays, and dress when traveling. One thing that is surprising for the order that would become known as the “Black Monks” is Benedict’s assertion, “Concerning the colour . . . the monks shall not talk.” Benedictine interpreters have debated at various times whether this passage mandates a particular uniform or a set of guidelines allowing for local variation. Black became the standard color of Benedictine robes as a sign of humility. This standardization of color, ironically, does translate to a concern about color, and the monks did talk about it, especially with concern as the Cistercian order developed in the late eleventh century and adopted white as the color for its garments. Such concern, however, shows the seriousness and stock that Benedictines placed in their identity as “Black Monks.” After 1215, English Benedictines increasingly referred to themselves as “ordo monachorum nigrorum in Anglia” (Chittister 145; Clark 56-58, 121, 265; Henderson 301-02).

Such an awareness of visual religious identity extended to other regular orders as well and offsets the Benedictine conception of themselves as Black Monks. Cistercian and Carthusian monks wore white; Franciscan friars, brown; Dominican friars, black over white; and Carmelite friars, white over brown. The distinctiveness of these color
schemes each signified the investment of adherents in the reforms of their own
movements. Such uniforms also visibly tied individuals to group identities both in their
immediate moments and over the course of history as religious fashion remained stable
compared to the clothing worn by noble and gentry classes. Predating all of these orders,
the secular clergy of the early Middle Ages also placed great stock in visual identity.
Clerics ranging from deacons up to archbishops wore different vestments as reflections of
rank and responsibility. The vestments used varied considerably by region, but the
principle of visual identification was well established. The strength of this establishment
is also apparent through the use of formal ceremonies for both frocking and defrocking of
clergy (Burns 1; Cannon 317; Elliot 55-61; Hartley 6-7; Keefer 13-17; Kelly ix).

This visual identity of the religious easily transposes to artistic representations.
Although Harley 2278 depicts monks robed in black and secular clerics dressed in white,
British Library, Add. MS 18850, the Bedford Hours, provides an even more striking
example of fifteenth-century sensitivity to visual religious identity. Folio 150v of the
Bedford Hours depicts the Virgin reverenced by representatives throughout society (see
illustration 4.1). Among the devotees are figures identifiable as representing four or five
of the regular orders: an Augustinian canon or
Illustration 4.1—The universal adoration of the Virgin from the *Bedford Hours* (folio 150v). Members from the regular orders appear in the middle and bottom images on the left (M. Scott 134).
Benedictine monk, wearing a black robe; a Franciscan friar, dressed in brown; a Carthusian monk, robed in white; a Cistercian nun, wearing a white robe and black wimple; and a Benedictine nun, wearing a black robe and white wimple. Differences in dress mark each of them and form the basis for their identification. The differentiation between the orders is crucial to the image because it conveys the universal adoration of the Virgin and her widespread mercy (M. Scott 134).

Lydgate’s poetry also shows keen awareness of visual religious identity. In describing his pilgrim persona’s entry into Canterbury in the Prologue to the Siege of Thebes, Lydgate includes the line “In a cope of blak and not of grene” (73). This reference to “a cope of blak” clearly identifies Lydgate as a Benedictine monk. Writers of estates satire do not always include such emphasis on order. Chaucer’s portrait of his Monk in the Canterbury Tales, for instance, says:

I seigh his sleves purfiled at the hond
With grys, and that the fyneste of a lond;
And for to festne his hood under his chyn,
He hadde of gold ywroght a ful curious pyn;
A love-knotte in the ende ther was. (I.193-97)

For all his Monk’s finery, Chaucer does not mention his robe’s color, linking the character to no particular order and contrasting with Lydgate’s definite concern for
order. Lydgate also gives attention to priestly garb in his *Poems on the Mass*, which explains the different elements of a medieval church service:

\begin{verbatim}
Vpon hys heed An Amyte [amice] furst he leythe.
Whyche ys a sygne, a token, and a fygure,
Owtward a shewying, groundyd on the feythe.
The large Awbe, by record of scripture,
Ys ryghtwysnesse, perpetually to indure.
The long gyrdyll, clennesse and chastyte,
Rounde on the arme, the fauon doth assure
All soburnesse, knyt with humylyte. (145-52)
\end{verbatim}

This detailed description of a priest’s vestments is another example of Lydgate’s interest in visual religious identity; moreover, it continues for another eight-line stanza. Thus, Lydgate was very attuned to how visual spectatorship, whether of daily life or a manuscript illumination, could interact with his poetry. The interplay of references to monks, clerks, robe colors, and miniatures of religious figures in Harley 2278 therefore appears deliberate and significant.

**Visual Loyalties and the Abbey’s Coat of Arms**

The first group of illuminations I discuss incorporates the coats of arms of King Edmund and Bury St. Edmunds Abbey. These illustrations are an important starting

\footnote{This oversight may very well be deliberate as it allows Chaucer to satirize the whole institution of monasticism. Earlier on, the portrait makes reference to “The reule of Seint Maure or of Seint Beneit,” and to “Austyn,” thus effectively straddling the Benedictine and Augustinian Rules (I.173, 185-86). Nevertheless, the lack of color omits much of the specifically visual aspect of the pilgrim monk’s religious identity.}
point because they tie Harley 2278 and Lydgate’s poem to Bury St. Edmunds Abbey in Suffolk where these coats of arms were used. The locality of the manuscript and poem emphasizes the relationship between Henry VI and his monastic servants at the abbey. Even more importantly, the appearance of the two banners points to a shift that Edmund undergoes from fighting for his own glory as a Christian king to allegiance to the Bury St. Edmunds Abbey. A metonymic parallel between Edmund and Henry suggests that the young Lancastrian king should make this shift too.

The coats of arms of King Edmund and Bury St. Edmunds Abbey both appear in Harley 2278 as full-page illuminations (appearing on folios 1v and 3v). Lydgate’s poem appears on the facing pages (folios 2r and 4r), where it describes and reflects upon the coats of arms. Edmund’s banner depicts Adam and Eve eating from the Tree of Knowledge in gold against a red background. Enclosed in a circle above the Tree of Knowledge are the symbols for Christ of a lamb and a cross. These symbols are also colored in gold (see illustration 4.2). Lydgate interprets this scene as Edmund’s mnemonic for good rule:

Lyk a wys kyng peeplys to gouerne
Ay vnto reson he gaff the souereynte;
Figur off Adam wysly to dyscerne,
Toppresse in Eua sensualite,
A lamb off gold hyh vpon a tre
An heuenly signe a tokne off most vertu
To declare how that humylite
Lydgate emphasizes a hierarchy of humility over virtue, reason, and sensuality through this scene. Allegorically reading this hierarchy into this banner is the way Edmund (and metonymically Henry) achieves good earthly rule. The Abbey’s coat of arms features three golden crowns, two slightly smaller and placed next to one other and above the third. The background is a field of blue (see illustration 4.3). As with Edmund’s banner, Lydgate interprets his abbey’s arms in light of Edmund’s character:

This other standard feeld stable of colour ynde
In which off gold been notable crownys thre
The first tokne, in cronycle men may fynde,
Grauntyd to hym for royal dignyte,
And the seconde for virgynyte,
For martirdam the thrydde in his suffryng,
To these annexyd feyth hope and charyte
In tokne he was martyr, mayde, and kyng. (P49-56)

The Abbey’s banner emphasizes Edmund’s saintly qualities. As discussed in the previous chapter, Lydgate goes on to draw explicit parallels between the three crowns and Henry VI’s double monarchy and own pious character (Edwards, Introduction 19; K. Scott, Later II.225).

The size, placement in the manuscript, and placement in relation to the text adds significance to these two coats of arms. As the only full-page illuminations among the one hundred twenty in Harley 2278, these two illustrations gain special prominence
Illustration 4.2—King Edmund’s personal banner. From folio 1v.

Illustration 4.3—The coat of arms of Bury St. Edmunds Abbey. From folio 3v.

Illustration 4.4—King Edmund fights the Danes at Thetford. From folio 50r.

Illustration 4.5—St. Edmund slays Swein Forkbeard. From folio 103v.
through their size alone. The rarity of full-page illuminations presumably points to a higher cost in producing them because of the greater quantities of material needed. If this is true, one might conclude that these two miniatures were the most expensive ones in the manuscript. Based on this assumption, these full-page scenes are especially important to the message the Bury St. Edmunds monks wished to send to Henry. The placement of these two images at the beginning of the manuscript also accents their importance.

Notably, an anomaly in the binding pattern appears at this point in the manuscript. Most of the quires in Harley 2278 appear in leaves of eight, but this first one is a quire of six leaves (with the last leaf removed). This smaller number of leaves suggests that the first quire was added at a later date. A possible explanation for this later addition is that the prologue and opening prayer contained on these leaves were written after the rest of Edmund and Fremund and presented a way for Lydgate to emphasize themes that he developed while composing the work. Such emphasis is consistent with the visual prominence of the full-page illuminations on folios 1v and 3v. The relationship between images and text is also especially well planned at this point in the manuscript. The facing layout of pictures on the left and poem on the right allows for easy observation of the miniatures while reading Lydgate’s descriptions and reflections upon the significances of the banners. The overall effect of the size and placement of these images at the very least expresses the prestige of the town and abbey, because local military forces and the

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46 Other cost factors could include the level of detail and experience of the artist, but speculating on the premium placed on these qualities is less easy (K. Scott, Later I.37-38)

47 This carefully planned layout between poem and illuminations at this point is another sign of Lydgate’s involvement in the physical production of Harley 2278 (Reimer 173-74).

The banners of St. Edmund and Bury St. Edmunds Abbey acquire another layer of significance through their later appearances on folios 50r and 103v. The image on folio 50r depicts Edmund’s initial battle with the Danes at Thetford. Edmund is easily distinguished among the knights for his crown and red tabard bearing his personal coat of arms (see illustration 4.4). Lydgate, however, does not mention the tabard at this point in the poem. The appearance instead recalls the Prologue line, “Ay in the feeld with hym was this baneer” (P32). This instance is another example of the meta-level created between text and illuminations that points to the careful planning and possible involvement of Lydgate in Harley 2278. In recalling the earlier image, it also sets up the contrast between the banners and what they represent, for Edmund again appears wearing a coat of arms in the picture on folio 103v. This illumination shows Edmund’s ghost slaying King Swein as the tyrant lies in bed after ignoring Aylwin’s warning to cease demanding tribute of the East Anglian people (see illustration 4.5). Edmund is again dressed for battle in this scene, except here he wears the arms of Bury St. Edmunds Abbey. In the previous chapter, I have discussed how Lydgate calls attention to Edmund’s dress, “Off heuenly colour was his cote armure,/ The ffeeld azour off gold, with crownys thre,” as a sign of Edmund’s saintly allegiance to the abbey (3081-82). These images reinforce that message. The color contrast between the banners on folios 3v and 103v, and folios 1v and 50r also drive home this point. There is no mistaking the red and blue backgrounds of the banners.
Edmund’s shift from wearing his personal red coat of arms to the blue of the
Abbey also presents a shift in attitude for Henry VI. The illumination of Edmund
wearing his personal banner on folio 50r marks the climax of Edmund’s worldly rule.
Edmund is unquestionably a holy king, but his battle with the Danes at Thetford is for the
protection of his earthly realm. The stanza appearing immediately below the illustration
on folio 50r reads:

But whan kyng Edmond knew of [Hinguar’s] coming,
And of the paynymes the maner herde seyn,
Ful lik a knyht he made no tarieng,
But with his power, statly weel beseyn,
Beside Thetforde he mette him on a pleyn.
Ther wardis set and sheltrons in bataile,
Euerich gan other ful mortaly assaile. (1401-07)

This passage is chiefly concerned with the physical terms of the engagement. Edmund
rightly and justly fights (a few lines later, Lydgate calls him “Christis champion”), but the
battle is to protect Christian lands and contains few other theological undertones (Lives
1415). This context for the second appearance of Edmund’s red coat of arms reinforces it
as a visual symbol of his personal, earthly rule. Immediately after this scene, however, is
the moment when Edmund renounces future fighting against the Danes (“good
conscience ageyn slauhtre agrysith [is horrified]”), a decision that ultimately sets him on
the road to martyrdom and sainthood (1447).
The illumination of Edmund garbed in the blue arms of his abbey forms a parallel to this earlier scene at Thetford. This is the only other place in Harley 2278 where Edmund appears dressed for battle. It also is the first place after the scene at Thetford where he makes any type of active, physical resistance against his enemies. The difference, discussed in Chapter 3, is that his personal rule ended with his death. Following it, he acts as a saintly protector of the East Anglian people. As with the red banner, the blue banner becomes a symbol, this time of Edmund’s role as saintly patron and abbey agent. Thus, the narrative moments of the illuminations on folio 50r and 103v emphasize a shift of Edmund acting on behalf of his own privileges to his acting on behalf of those that he grants to his people, most specifically those from Bury St. Edmunds abbey. This dual protector role is implicitly transferred to Henry VI through the associations Lydgate drew between him and Edmund with his Prologue reflections on the red and blue banners previously depicted on folios 1v and 3v.

Depictions of Henry VI, Lydgate, Curteys, and Their Brethren

Representations of Henry VI, Lydgate himself, Curteys, and other Bury brethren appear in Harley 2278 in addition to the metonymic links between Edmund and Henry. These illuminations of fifteenth-century personages comprise a second cluster. The depictions honor the individuals they portray and tie them and their concerns to the Edmund legend. In the case of Henry VI, his appearance in two illustrations (on folios 4v and 6r) reinforces the metonymic links between him and Edmund. Depictions of

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48 My focus for this section remains on Harley 2278, but the larger tradition of elaborately illuminating *Edmund and Fremund* manuscripts duplicates a number of the images in which Lydgate appears (K. Scott, *Later II*.307; K. Scott, “Lydgate’s” 347-49).
Lydgate, Curteys, and other anonymous but contemporary brethren appear (on folios 4v, 6r, and 9r) as representatives of the relationship between Henry and Bury St. Edmunds Abbey, and they depict the importance of that relationship. The presence of these individuals further bespeaks the likelihood of Harley 2278’s local production because they pointedly represent events from Henry’s 1433–1434 visit.

A highpoint of this visit for all parties involved was the induction of the king and his uncle Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester into the confraternity of Bury St. Edmunds Abbey. The king was admitted at his own request, ensuring the prayers and continued support of the Bury monks. Wealthy patrons often considered the privileges of a shrine so important that they would sometimes pay for fraternal membership, but in Henry’s case the bond also advantaged the monks by ensuring the king’s favor. The ceremony included the prostration of Henry and Gloucester at St. Edmund’s shrine and a fraternal kiss given to them by Abbot Curteys (Clark 177; Gottfried 181; Lowe 164; Schirmer 146; Wolffe 75).

The illumination on folio 4v of Harley 2278 reenacts this moment of Henry’s induction (see illustration 4.6). The obviously smaller and younger figure of Henry VI appears in his crown and royal robes, kneeling before the shrine, which is the focal point of the picture. Four men from Henry’s entourage stand to the left. The foremost of these men is brown-haired and carries a sword over his shoulder. Interpreting the sword as a symbol of power, protection, or office suggests that this individual is Henry’s uncle Gloucester, or his tutor, the Earl of Warwick. Two monks also observe the scene from the right of the shrine. This visual recreation of Henry’s induction into the confraternity
“documents” the event in a way that, albeit potentially idealized, would return Henry and
the members of his entourage to that earlier moment. It serves as a reminder of the
1433–1434 visit, the loyalty and hospitality of the Bury monks, and Henry’s own pledges

Another illumination on folio 6r visually recreates a second event from the history
of Henry VI with the Bury St. Edmunds monks, the presentation of the manuscript to the
King. Or, more accurately, the illumination imagines the presentation because the event
itself would have postdated the manuscript’s completion (see illustration 4.7). The scene
on this page depicts Henry, again noticeably younger and smaller than the others in the
scene, crowned and seated on his throne and surrounded by members of his court and
monks. Just below and to the left, one of the monks hands Henry a book. The brown-
haired swordbearer, who is suggestive of Gloucester or Warwick, is also present among
the onlookers. Lydgate’s accompanying lines suggest this scene is of the book
presentation: “The noble story to putte in remembrance/ Of saynt Edmund, martir, maide,
and kynge,/ With his support my stile wil auance” (1-3; Edwards, Introduction 19; K.
Scott, Later II.225). The lines and scene both befit an imagined book presentation. Folio
6r’s illumination is also significant for the visual parallel it builds between Henry and

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Precedent for seeing this scene as reflecting the actual people involved comes through
the famous illustration of Chaucer in British Library MS Harley 4866 of Thomas
Hoccleve’s *Regement of Princes*. Hoccleve’s assertion that his portrait depicts Chaucer
suggests at least some developing sensitivity to the creation of accurate portraiture.
Because Harley 4866 and its artistic concerns predate Harley 2278, there is room for
these figures from the later manuscript to reflect their historical counterparts. Also
suggesting this concern for reflecting historical individuals is the larger fifteenth-century
trend of depicting a manuscript’s patrons among its illuminations (K. Scott, Later I.60-
61, II.160-61, 225, 227).
Illustration 4.6—Henry VI at St. Edmund’s shrine. From folio 4v.

Illustration 4.7—The presentation of the Lives of Ss Edmund and Fremund. From folio 6r.

Illustration 4.8—A young King Edmund sits at court. From folio 32r.

Illustration 4.9—Lydgate prays to St. Edmund. From folio 9r.
depictions of Edmund later in the manuscript. Illustrations on folios 31r and 32r both feature Edmund youthful and enthroned similarly to Henry on folio 6 (Winstead 132-33). The mirroring in folio 32r’s picture is especially significant because it shares additional parallels with folio 6r through the appearance of a sword bearer and a pair of monks among the rest of Edmund’s court (see illustration 4.8). Clearly, Harley 2278’s visual parallels flatter and strengthen Henry VI’s identification with Bury St. Edmunds Abbey. 50

The illuminations on folios 4v and 6r are also noteworthy because two of the monks in them can be identified as Lydgate and Curteys when placed alongside folio 9r. Folio 9r’s miniature features a gray-haired monk kneeling at St. Edmund’s shrine (see illustration 4.9). The stanza preceding this image narrates the scene:

And thouh I was bareyn of elloquence,
Hauyng no practik fresshley to endite [the vita],
I took upon me, vndir obedience,
Aftir his [Curteys’] biddyng, me lowly for to quite
But yit aforn or I gan to write
Vpon my knees riht thus I gan to seie

50 Reimer notes that there is also a larger interplay between the illuminations of Harley 2278 and the geography of East Anglia. Most of the towns in the region had developed some connection to the Edmund legend. Hunstanton, for example, built a chapel on the cliff of St. Edmund’s Point where the saint reputedly landed in England on his voyage from Saxony. It was at this location where the miracle of five springs bursting from the ground supposedly occurred (springs are still present in Hunstanton as well). The illustration on folio 28r commemorates this miracle. Although pictures such as these may not be topographically accurate, they would provide visual triggers for memories of places Henry might have seen while hunting during his 1433–1434 visit (Reimer 179-82; Schirmer 145-46, Wolffe 75).
To the holi martir, and meekly for to preie. (113-19)

Lydgate’s description of praying at the shrine indicates that he is the gray-haired monk in the folio 9r illumination (Edwards, Introduction 19; K. Scott, Later II.225). With this gray hair as an identifying feature for Lydgate, the illuminations on folios 4v and 6r gain additional dimensions. On 4v, the rightmost monk has a gray tonsure, suggesting that this again is Lydgate witnessing Henry’s induction into the Abbey’s confraternity. The monk presenting the book to Henry on folio 6r also wears a gray tonsure. That this monk should also be Lydgate is appropriate because of his role as poet.

I also posit that Curteys appears in these two illuminations. Because only two monks appear in 4v’s miniature, it seems reasonable to identify Curteys as the brown-haired monk standing closest to the shrine, if Lydgate is the other. As abbot, Curteys would have been present at Henry’s induction into the confraternity. He also is the only other monastic contemporary mentioned by Lydgate in the Lives. This picture of Curteys shows some reddish-brown coloration along his cheeks and jaw line that is reminiscent of a beard or ruddy complexion. With this facial feature in mind, folio 6r’s illumination of the presentation scene shows a monk standing directly below Lydgate. He has a brown tonsure and some redness to his cheek that may equate him with the Curteys figure from folio 4v. Additionally, he holds what may be a box. The impression is that the book Lydgate presents to Henry was to be transported in this box. Curteys’ prestige as abbot and commissioner of Edmund and Fremund again fits with this role of carrying the presentation copy to Henry’s throne.
These depictions of Lydgate and Curteys alongside Henry visually recreate the formal integration of the king into the community of Bury St. Edmunds Abbey. On the most basic level, depictions of Lydgate and Curteys create connections with the king that would have served to remind him of interpersonal relationships he established and would hopefully cultivate after his 1433–1434 visit. The group of other monks appearing on folio 6r may further build these interpersonal relationships. Although no clue appears in the manuscript to indicate who they might be, there is sufficient differentiation between them that may be intended to remind Henry of other Benedictines he interacted with in Bury. It is notable how Lydgate, Curteys, and the Harley 2278 illustrators literally draw Henry into the Bury St. Edmunds community through the manuscript’s text and illustrations. The scene portraying Henry’s induction into the confraternity on folio 4v, in particular, sees Henry becoming one of them. In doing so, he would appropriate their values toward reading the text that they produced. This internalization of monastic values would, then, serve to remind Henry of the friendships he had formed with the monks, which would then influence his future interactions with the Bury St. Edmunds Abbey (Green, “Textual” 26, 29, 33).

The Community of Witnesses

The depiction of the Benedictine community through Harley 2278’s illuminations extends to later images in the manuscript. These pictures appear in conjunction with Edmund’s posthumous miracles, reinforcing the theme of privileged monastic intercession discussed in Chapter 3. They also reflect the deep awareness of the Bury St. Edmunds monks of their inherited role as shrinekeepers.
Both Lydgate and Harley 2278 display a medieval awareness of history as a progression of time during which the dominance of one group gives way to another. It is a conception developed in such variations as Augustine’s six ages of the world in the *City of God*, Paulus Orosius’ demonstrations of calamity in all ages in the *Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, and the model of the Nine Worthies who led civilization through its pagan, Jewish, and Christian pasts (Godden 205-08). Lydgate expresses this awareness in the Cnut charter of the *Cartae Versificatae* (discussed in Chapter 1) with the mandates that “of Bedrycsworthe [Bury St. Edmunds] . . . monkys first ha ful posessioun” and that it would be an act “of fals presumcion/ to set clerkis in that hous ageyne” (*Cartae* 217, 219). The awareness that monks permanently replaced secular clerics at Edmund’s shrine shows the progression of history to increasingly Benedictine spiritual values.

This same knowledge that the Benedictine order earned its place of service in England and at Bury also appears through the illuminations of Harley 2278. The depictions of the Lydgate’s black-robed Benedictine contemporaries in the illustrations on folios 4v, 6r, and 9r give way to images of white-robed priests throughout the legends of both Edmund and Fremund. I have demonstrated the general fifteenth-century interest in distinguishing between colors of robes of the religious orders through the *Bedford Hours*. The interest of Harley 2278’s illuminators in the elaborate costumes of the nobles (compare the robes of Henry and his nobles in 4v and 6r for examples) is so great as to also suggest deliberateness in the contrasting robe colors (K. Scott, *Later II.227*). A miniature from folio 80r, of Fremund and the two companions he takes into his ascetic
solitude, presents an example of these white-robed religious figures (see illustration 4.10).

Awareness of clerks as earlier keepers of Edmund’s shrine appears in the second of Edmund’s posthumous miracles.\(^{51}\) This is the miracle of the sheriff Leoffstan being killed by demonic possession after he pursued a woman into the saint’s church. Lydgate consistently calls the religious men who join the woman in her entreaties for protection from the saint “clerkis” (3179, 3184, 3189, 3195). These men also appear in white robes in the preceding illumination on folio 106r (see illustration 4.11). This consistency in appearance between Lydgate and the limners points to deliberateness in depicting these figures as the predecessors of the Benedictines as custodians of Edmund’s shrine. It also points to the deliberateness in later depictions of black monks as shrine attendants.

Groups of black-robed Benedictines begin to appear as the Lives continues with Edmund’s other posthumous miracles. The first appearance of a group of Benedictines occurs in the illumination on folio 108r (see illustration 4.12). The episode it illustrates consists of five knights stealing horses from Edmund’s church. Upon their attempted escape, they are driven mad until they return in penance. Lydgate takes only two stanzas to relate this episode, so the illuminations substantially embellish the story to be consistent with the themes of intercessory monastic prayer and freedom in the other miracles. The line that the knights entered Edmund’s court “Ageyn the ffredam off Edmund” is Lydgate’s only reference to these themes (3222). The folio 108r

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\(^{51}\) The first miracle, of Swein Forkbeard’s death, mixes appearances of clerks with the presence of a single Benedictine, Edmund’s chief shrine attendant Aylwin. As an individually distinct character, Aylwin is an important exception who is discussed in detail in the last section of this chapter.
Illustration 4.10—Fremund and his clerks go into exile. From folio 80r.

Illustration 4.11—Clerks pray as Leoffstan chases a woman into Edmund’s shrine. From folio 106r.

Illustration 4.12—Knights steal horses from Edmund’s shrine. From folio 108r.

Illustration 4.13—The horse-stealing knights receive their penance. From folio 108v.

Illustration 4.14—A Flemish thief bites off more than he can chew. From folio 109r.
illumination, however, shows a group of Benedictines in the doorway to Edmund’s church as the knights escape. Among the monks, one raises his hand and two others raise their faces in postures that are reminiscent of prayer (compare these gestures to those of Lydgate on folio 9r and the clerks on folio 106r). This depiction implicitly ties the theme of intercessory monastic prayer into the episode. The knights’ penance forms the basis for a second illumination associated with this miracle on folio 108v (see illustration 4.13). This one is slightly anomalous in that even though the repentant knights kneel at Edmund’s shrine, no black-robed Benedictines are depicted when a bishop and at least two white-robed and tonsured clerks do. The implication may be that the knights are receiving their penance from members of the secular clergy because not all monks were priests, especially at earlier points in Benedictine history (Hartley 6; Keefer 13-14).

The next two illuminations in Harley 2278, on folios 109r and 110v, also feature the monastic community. Folio 109r illustrates the comical story of the Flemish thief whose teeth stick to Edmund’s shrine when the thief pretends to kiss the shrine in an attempt to bite off a jewel. A pair of monks seated nearby look up to notice the would-be thief (see illustration 4.14). The illustration on folio 110v shows the Danish lord, Osgoth, descending into madness for scorning Edmund. A group of praying monks to the right of the image signifies his rehabilitation through the community’s petitions (see illustration 4.15). The appearance of monks in both these illuminations has the effect of solidifying the connection between the Benedictine order and Edmund’s shrine because Lydgate’s

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52 The illumination on folio 110v is one of twenty-three in Harley 2278 that depicts multiple scenes in the same miniature. Thus, Osgoth’s scornfulness toward Edmund, descent into madness, and restoration all appear in the same picture (Edwards, Introduction 9-10).
text for both episodes refers to the “covent,” a term that has definite associations with monks, nuns, and monasteries (*MED*). Thus, miniatures of groups of “historical” Benedictines illustrate the order’s inherited role of shrine attendants while simultaneously reinforcing Lydgate’s theme of privileged monastic intercession.

**Aylwin the Holy Shrinekeeper**

The Benedictine appearing most frequently in Harley 2278 is Aylwin, the legendary chief attendant of Edmund’s shrine. Aylwin is a prominent character in two of the posthumous miracles and appears in no less than six illuminations. These illuminations (three of them in particular) form the final cluster of miniatures I discuss. Aylwin always appears as the sole Benedictine in these illuminations, a fact that is notable in itself because even the illumination of Lydgate on folio 9r shows two other Benedictines in the choir loft at the left of the miniature. Even more notable about Aylwin’s lone appearances is the ordering of the two miracles in which he appears. These are the first miracle, of King Swein’s death, and last miracle, of Edmund’s London-to-Bury translation. These placements cause Aylwin to transcend the sense of time created in the posthumous miracles, especially because his appearance in the first miracle *precedes* the disappearance of the secular clerks as Edmund’s shrine attendants.

Aylwin’s depiction as a lone Benedictine monk makes him easy to identify. He first appears in the picture on folio 100v, depicting the East Anglian people appealing to

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53 Two of the miniatures in which Aylwin appears depict multiple scenes at once, thus increasing the actual number of his depictions to eight.
Saint Edmund’s shrine in response to the oppressive tribute demands of King Swein (see illustration 4.16). Lydgate’s associated texts read:

Thus ryche and poore off al that region,
Off oon affeccion, with herte, wil and myht,
With deuout prayer for ther redempcion,
Kam on pilgrmage, with sondry tapris lyht

To the hooly corseynt ther wachchyng day and nyht. (2969-73)

This mass petition at Saint Edmund’s shrine is the illumination on folio 100v. The pilgrims, including some tonsured clerks, gather around Edmund’s reliquary kneeling and bearing candles. All are dressed in white with the conspicuous exception of a black-robed, white-haired Benedictine at the extreme right of the image. This monk is identified a few stanzas later as Aylwin, “he that was cheeff cubyculer [attendant]/Aboute seynt Edmund, and his chaumberleyn” (2992-93). The next illumination in Harley 2278, on folio 102v, verifies the identity of this monk as Aylwin. It shows him “as he lay slepyng on a nyht” being visited by Saint Edmund with a message for King Swein (3011). The 102v illumination is in two parts, the second half showing Aylwin standing before Swein delivering the message (see illustration 4.17). The white tonsure on the monk in this miniature makes it clear that he is the same as the one on 100v.

The later appearances of Aylwin in the episode of Edmund’s London-to-Bury translation are also distinctive in his appearance as a Benedictine. This episode treats Aylwin’s transportation of Edmund’s reliquary to London and back in order to protect it against a later Danish threat. A high point is when the London bishop attempts to steal
Illustration 4.15—Osgoth the Dane. From folio 110v.

Illustration 4.16—Aylwin and the East Anglian people pray to Edmund. From folio 100v.

Illustration 4.17—Aylwin delivers St. Edmund’s warning to Swein. From folio 102v.

Illustration 4.18—The London bishop fails to steal Edmund’s reliquary. From folio 113v.
Edmund’s relics before Aylwin can return them to Bury. The saint foils the theft by causing the reliquary to stand “as fyx as a gret hill off ston” (3402). Only Aylwin’s prayers allow it to be moved again. The folio 113v illumination illustrates the incident (see illustration 4.18). Aylwin is easily distinguishable for his black robe and white tonsure in the two-part scene. He tells the bishop of his imminent departure with the saint in the upper right corner. In the lower right, he offers his prayer to move the saint. The bishop and “clerkis” who go to steal Edmund’s reliquary are also distinctive for their dress in white robes (Lydgate, Lives 3396). Thus, in both the miracle of Swein’s death and the return to Bury, Aylwin’s visual depiction as a Benedictine causes him to stand out as a favored and exceptional figure.  

Aylwin’s depiction as a Benedictine and his transcendence of time between the first and last miracles also turn him into a legendary figure who elevates the importance of the Benedictine order. As I have discussed, most of the religious figures in the accounts of both Edmund and Fremund appear as white-robed clerks, and such depiction extends to the posthumous miracle of Leoffstan’s death. Leoffstan’s death, however, is the second of Edmund’s posthumous miracles that Lydgate presents. Aylwin’s appearance as a Benedictine in the earlier episode therefore distinguishes him from the rest of the religious in these scenes and stresses the importance of the Benedictines as

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54 Aylwin also appears in the illuminations on folios 112v, 114v, and 115r (not pictured). Folio 112v shows the destruction of the house of a priest who denied Edmund and Aylwin shelter on flight from Bury to London. In 114v, the London ecclesiastical authorities bid farewell to Aylwin as he departs with the relics. On 115r, a priest and several of his parishioners welcome Edmund as Aylwin passes through their town on the way back to Bury. In each instance, Aylwin is the only monk and easily distinguished from the white-robed clerics who also appear in these miniatures by his dress and his behavior (Edwards, Introduction 21; K. Scott, Later II.226).
inheritors of Edmund’s shrine. Such a depiction of Aylwin is comparable to how Benedictine houses all over Europe retroactively adopted their founders as Benedictines. Often, these houses were established before Benedict’s Rule had become the widespread and unifying standard of monasticism in the west, so their first brothers actually adhered to some earlier, more localized Rule. The “Legend of St. Austin at Compton,” discussed in Chapter 1, is another example of this adoption of a founder as Benedictine elsewhere in Lydgate’s monastic poetry (Clark 5, 20-21). Through this appropriation of Aylwin as a Benedictine, Harley 2278 also accents the favor and exceptionality of the Bury St. Edmunds monks as intercessors before St. Edmund’s shrine.

The illuminations of monks in British Library MS Harley 2278, the presentation copy of John Lydgate’s *Lives of Ss Edmund and Fremund* to King Henry VI, reflect the work’s emphasis on monastic community in a twofold way. First, the careful pairing of these images with Lydgate’s text visually reinforces the theme of fervent monastic intercession that Lydgate lays out in his poem. At times, this reinforcement is so strong as to supplement even Lydgate’s own words, as if the poet himself were involved in the manuscript’s design. Second, the substantial amount of human and material resources required to produce Harley 2278 make the manuscript a material enactment of the monks’ intercessory mission between St. Edmund and King Henry VI. Through this twofold presentation and enactment of monastic power, Harley 2278 becomes a product of the entire Bury St. Edmunds Abbey community that shows its unified, corporate investment in its spiritual mission of interceding before Edmund on behalf of Henry.
Material and ideological bases ground Harley 2278 in the abbey. Scholars have traced eight other manuscripts with a Suffolk provenance to within thirty years of the *Edmund and Fremund* presentation copy. This number suggests that Suffolk, if not Bury St. Edmunds itself, was becoming a provincial center for book production of Lydgate’s works. With Lydgate as a life-long member of the Abbey and one of the region’s most famous sons, the convent’s involvement early on in this venture is easy to conceive due to proximity alone. Additionally, the Benedictine order’s reputation as a patron of books created a value system through which the Bury monks would want to be involved closely in the production of a presentation manuscript for the King of England. This involvement would be true whether through its own manufacture or through the intermediaries of lay scribes and limners.

The pages of Lydgate’s works reflect his own commitment to Benedictine celebration. A wide sample of his poetry reflects the importance he placed in his identity as a “black monk.” Harley 2278’s miniatures similarly reflect this identity keenly, and clusters emerge at its beginning and end of this manuscript that visually argue for the usefulness of the Benedictines to Henry VI through their sanctity. Coats of arms celebrate the reputation of Bury St. Edmunds Abbey and suggest that the holiest of kings, like Edmund (and Henry), will align themselves with the abbey to protect monastic interests. Illustrations of Henry, Lydgate, and William Curteys act as visual reminders of the services the monastic community rendered to the king on his 1433–1434 visit. Most especially, Henry’s induction into the abbey was among these services, and through this ceremony he was expected to adopt the values and concerns of the convent. Harley
2278’s depictions of miracles occurring through intercessory monastic prayer seek to garner respect as inherently owed to the sanctity of the Benedictines. The gradual replacement of clerks with Benedictines as the caretakers of Edmund’s shrine in these depictions speaks to the earned holiness of the order, as does the claiming of Aylwin as a Benedictine. By association, Edmund’s holy and legendary chief shrine attendant elevates the sanctity of the rest of the order.

The wedding of these themes to elaborate illuminations in Harley 2278 testifies to the importance the Bury St. Edmunds monks saw in the opportunity of the 1433–1434 visit made by Henry VI to their abbey. As we have seen, this was an opportunity for the monks to ingratiate themselves to the king in order to protect themselves against the grabs for power and money that his councilors were making even against monasteries. My next chapter shows that this navigation of power also extended to the monks protecting themselves against an increasingly disquieted populace of the region in which they lived and exercised their most privileged influences.
Chapter 5—Lydgate’s Extra Miracles of St Edmund and Social Unrest

We have seen how Lydgate employs a wide range of his poetry to advocate his abbey’s interests. This advocacy is especially fervent in Lydgate’s religious poems, particularly those that deal with St. Edmund. Lydgate’s use of Edmund also participates in a larger Benedictine tradition of hoping to encourage young kings to identify with the saint or of drawing the analogy for an audience concerned about contemporary events. His Lives of Ss Edmund and Fremund is especially notable in this way. In it, Lydgate presents his monastic brethren to Henry VI as fervent intercessors for the king, helping to preserve St. Edmund’s example and to direct both his blessings and his vengeance. The elaborate manuscript produced as part of Lydgate’s Edmund tradition reinforced this commentary and provided the whole of Bury St. Edmunds Abbey with an outlet for petitioning the king. However, Lydgate’s use of his full-length Edmund legend on behalf of his abbot and abbey did not end with his original saint’s life. During the tumultuous fall of Lancastrian France in the early 1440s, three continuations, or extra miracles, extended Lydgate’s argument for the necessity of monastic intercessors to a wider audience. Lydgate’s abbot, William Curteys, once again appears to have been a force behind the commission of these continuations. The townsfolk of Bury St. Edmunds seem to have been the audience he may have had in mind (Bale & Edwards 11).

Differences in content between Lydgate’s original Lives of Ss Edmund and Fremund and the extra miracles point to the wider audience of Bury’s townsfolk. The
extra miracles all have familiar, contemporary urban settings, and they all fit into the thematic category of saved children. The first, miracle A, is set in London and features a boy knocked into the Thames by oxen. After his mother prays to St. Edmund, she discovers a boatman has saved her son. Miracle B recounts how a little girl in Bury St. Edmunds falls into a river and drowns but is resuscitated after her body is held upside down and the community prays. Finally, miracle C, again set in Bury, tells of a little boy crushed by a cartwheel. He is revived later when his body is taken to Edmund’s shrine and the people petition the saint.

These extra miracles, especially B and C, are the topic of this chapter. They are of interest precisely because they are directed at an audience of commoners from Bury St. Edmunds instead of Henry VI. Anthony Bale and John M. Ganim see these miracles as efforts to create communal solidarity in Bury through its patron saint. Bale posits all three extra miracles are attempts to spread the fame and influence of St. Edmund’s cult in Bury, honoring the piety of noble patrons in miracle A and fostering local pride in B and C. Ganim’s discussion revolves around St. Edmund’s presence in London and Bury in Edmund and Fremund. The extra miracles transcend temporal place to diffuse competing claims for power, especially those that threaten the abbey. Although Bale and Ganim both rightly call attention to St. Edmund’s shrine as a focal point for Bury and English piety, miracles B and C also represent a call for unity behind the abbey as maintainer of the shrine at a time of social discord and well-remembered, not-so-distant past violence. Within this context, the extra miracles of Lydgate’s Edmund move beyond viewing the presence of St. Edmund’s shrine as a source of local pride to demonstrate how the monks
who maintain the shrine are spiritually necessary to the Bury townsfolk. As I argued in chapters 3 and 4, Lydgate presents his brethren as privileged and necessary intercessors before Edmund who are worthy of respect. In the extra miracles the Benedictines work on behalf of the local Bury populace as well as on behalf of King Henry VI. Such thematic continuity between *Edmund and Fremund* and the extra miracles also suggests the continued involvement of Curteys, especially because he makes prominent appearances in miracles B and C.

The Lydgatean and Suffolk Provenance of the Extra Miracles

In editing these miracles, Bale and A. S. G. Edwards attribute all three to Lydgate based on dates provided in the poem and on references to historical personages. Internal dating places A on November 20, 1441, a time when Lydgate was known to have been in London petitioning Henry VI for an annuity. Miracles B and C explicitly occur on April 28 and July 8, 1444, respectively (EM10-14, 241-46, 427). These dates place all three miracles within Lydgate’s lifetime because he did not die until 1449. Specific references to personal acquaintances of Lydgate, Lord Fanhope in A, who is known to have died in 1443, and Abbot Curteys in B, who died in 1446, also suggest the accuracy of the stated dates and Lydgate’s authorship (EM91 & 354). Additionally, the poet’s references to the recentness of the miracles, saying four times they “ffyl but late,” reinforce their dates of composition as within Lydgate’s lifetime (EM9, 211, 350, & 393). In B and C, finally, the detailed setting of Bury St. Edmunds and the casual knowledge of its features, evidenced through references to the town’s Northgate and Risbygate, are information
Lydgate would have known even if they do not guarantee his presence in the town at those times (EM251 & 395; Bale & Edwards 26-28).

A number of linguistic features support Lydgate’s authorship of the extra miracles. Bale and Edwards point to Chaucerian echoes of the “Prioresse’s Prologue” in the miracle poet’s “A bussh vnbrent with fffyr was maad bryght,” which echoes Chaucer’s “O bussh unbrent, brennyng in Moyses sighte” (EM172; PrP 468). Similarly the miracle poet’s “Off eloquence, I haue but smal konnynge,” echoes Chaucer’s “My konnyng is so wayk, O blisful Queene” (EM220; PrP 481). Other linguistic cues that Bale and Edwards note are “the use of distinctively Lydgatian terms, formulae, and pleonasm, such as pleyly to termyne (EM20), sodeyn violence (EM39), adjectival chek maat (EM84), sugryd cadence (EM231), as well as an uniquely Lydgatian form, the plural oxes (EM37) for oxen” (Bale 147-48; Bale & Edwards 27).

Material evidence in the form of the five manuscripts where the extra miracles survive further bolsters the case for Lydgate’s authorship. These manuscripts are the Arundel Castle MS (A²); Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 46 (B); Bodleian Library, MS Tanner 347 (T); Bodleian Library, Yates Thompson MS 47 (Y); and Bodleian Library, MS Laud misc 683 (L). All of these manuscripts except T have a definite Suffolk provenance (Lydgate’s home) based on scribal and linguistic features. A Suffolk origin by no means guarantees Lydgate’s authorship, but as discussed in Chapter 4, a group of nine Lydgate manuscripts in the same scribal hand and bearing illuminations by the same two or three artists suggests an “early book factory” in or near Bury. That factory appears to have specialized in reproducing the works of the monk-poet. Included in this
group of nine manuscripts in the common scribal hand are $A^2$, B, and Y. $A^2$ and Y also were illuminated by the same artists (Bale 147; Bale & Edwards 12 & 15-17; K. Scott, “Lydgate’s” 360-66).

Moreover, these manuscripts appear as part of a developed tradition linking the extra miracles with the Lives of Ss Edmund and Fremund. With only the exception of L, the extra miracles survive alongside Lydgate’s vita. Such consistent partnering suggests an effort to create a tradition that builds and extends from Lydgate (Bale 149). If Lydgate did not write these continuations, his authority as poet at the very least is being invoked. Even the independence of L evinces a strong interest in Lydgate because it was produced in Bury. Furthermore, it is the only instance where two of the extra miracles, B and C, appear independent of the third. The omission of extra miracle A is significant in this case because A is set in London whereas extra miracles B and C occur in Bury St. Edmunds. Thus, B and C indicate a more localized interest in the saint from someone who may already have been familiar with Lydgate’s earlier vita. Finally, Bale also observes of L that it “is a more amateurish, indeed unreliable, witness” due to scribal errors. In it a signed name, ‘mastres cole,’ provides the name of a wealthy family from Clare, which neighbored Bury, who may have been interested in the local saint’s legend (Bale 153-54). Both of these facts additionally suggest Bury connections and interest in works attributable to Lydgate as a local poet.

There is also considerable thematic consistency between the extra miracles and Lydgate’s original Lives of Ss Edmund and Fremund. Such consistency indicates the thorough familiarity of the continuator with the earlier vita, if he was not Lydgate
himself. Three of Lydgate’s original miracles are invoked in the prologue to extra
miracle B with a casual familiarity:

    God lyst his martir ffor to magneffye,
    Notable signes fful expert in certeyn.
    Seint Edward present in his regalye,
    Osgothus slayn ffor his ffroward dysdeyn.
    Thynk on Leoffstan, and fforget nat Sweyn. (EM201-05)

The poet assumes his readers share his knowledge of the miracles involving Osgoth the
Dane, Sheriff Leoffstan, and Swein Forkbeard. In addition to these allusions to
Lydgate’s original vita are references to “grace” (EM18, 23, 57, 88, 95, 166, 176, 328,
335) and “ffredam” (EM348, 385), which we have seen are important themes Lydgate
treats in the miracle stories of his original vita and throughout his monastic poetry.

Before continuing, some final qualifications are in order. As has already been
acknowledged, miracle A stands apart from B and C on account of its London setting.
Bale has discussed miracle A’s London context as giving it possible connections to the
Lancastrian court through reference to Lord Fanhope, Henry VI’s great-uncle and
councilor, or to the earl and countess of Suffolk through the specific location of London
Bridge and Thames Street, near which they had a house (154-59). Given the conspicuous
patronage possibilities presented by these references in miracle A, I treat B and C as a
separate unit, focusing on them for the remainder of this chapter. And indeed, the latter
miracles are separate: the existence of L, preserving B and C independent of A provides a
material basis for this treatment. Furthermore, even where A, B, and C exist together, the
text suggests some prior effort to connect them even if they were not written that way (Bale 148-49). This connection appears in Lydgate’s lines at the beginning of miracle B, “of two [miracles] that fflyl but late,/ Which I purpoose to putte in remembraunce” (EM211-12). Similarly, miracle C begins “Anothir myrace with this to combye/ I wyl remembre” (EM391-92). These likenesses further suggest a greater degree of unity between B and C than either has with miracle A. Thus, while some discussion of miracle A in conjunction with B and C is helpful for establishing Lydgate’s authorship of all three miracles, A’s context in London and in the manuscripts places it apart from B and C. My chief aim in the following sections is to discuss the people of Bury.

The History of Social Conflict in Bury St. Edmunds

The period c. 1175 to the abbey’s dissolution in 1539 was one of prolonged struggle for municipal control of Bury St. Edmunds between the Benedictine monks and the town’s burgesses. Prior to the late twelfth century and during the devastation of the Black Death, the abbey had proven itself a boon to Bury’s populace, attracting pilgrims and commerce through its shrine to St. Edmund. The abbey had the right to develop the community beyond its precinct boundary. Through its seigniorial connections to the crown, it also brought the town a local market. The market’s royal sponsorship protected Bury from competition by prohibiting nearby communities from holding their own fairs or markets. The abbey additionally provided monastic support to schools and hospitals and the presence of an extensive library, probably containing around 2000 books (Clark 137-38; Knowles 350; Lobel 118-20). Early on the burgesses benefited from these monastically sponsored institutions, but the abbey, as the major landholder in West
Suffolk, reaped the continued benefits of its position. The abbey received rent from the local populace and land-based income through governmental fees, the raising of livestock, and all agricultural and industrial milling. The abbey’s access to the crown and its traditional position of power in the social order ensured the enforcement of these privileges (Clark 306; Gottfried 77-80). Consequentially, the abbey was an obstacle to the economic and political freedom of the borough’s people.

One way that burghal attempts at municipal freedom appear is through the population’s topographic shifts between 1295 and the dissolution. Extant rental records from 1295, the late fourteenth century, 1433, 1539, and 1553, although giving only partial pictures, suggest a pattern of population movement away from the most expensive tenements located near the abbey. Bury St. Edmunds was divided into five wards: Northgate, Southgate, Eastgate, Westgate, and Risbygate. Risbygate was situated between the Northgate, Eastgate, and Westgate Wards. The abbey was situated next to the Eastgate, Risbygate, and Southgate Wards. The rental records from 1295 (illustration 5.1), the most complete of the five rentals, reveal that the Southgate and Risbygate Wards were the richest and most densely populated due to the presence of Bury’s two markets. The Eastgate Ward was poorest, smallest, and most under the control of the abbey. The Northgate and Westgate Wards were least densely populated and least developed. The rental from the late fourteenth century (illustration 5.2) shows an influx of residents into Westgate and Risbygate Wards. Westgate had formerly been

55 The dissolution of Bury St. Edmunds occurred in 1539. The disbanding of England’s monastic institutions was part of a larger set of religious reforms enacted by Henry VIII as he established himself as the head of the English Church (Gottfried 237).
the least populated of the five wards, but with this shift jumped to third. Risbygate Ward’s high population density can be explained by the presence of the primary, Great Market within its bounds. Progressing to the 1433 rental (illustration 5.3), the movement continues into the Westgate Ward. Increases into Northgate and Southgate Wards also appear, especially into their respective northwestern and southernmost neighborhoods, the areas farthest from the abbey. Finally, the combined impression given by the 1539 and 1553 rentals (illustration 5.4), which encapsulates Henry VIII’s dissolution of monastic orders in England, shows the continued highest population densities in the Westgate and Southgate Wards. These numbers are followed by a leveling between Northgate and Risbygate, and continued shrinkage of Eastgate Ward. The overall picture to emerge from these population shifts is the movement of the burgesses away from expensive rental properties that were most under control of the abbey (Gottfried 26-38 & 41-43).
Illustration 5.1—13th century tenement density (Gottfried 28).

Illustration 5.2—14th century tenement density (Gottfried 35).

Illustration 5.3—15th century tenement density (Gottfried 37).

Illustration 5.4—16th century tenement density (Gottfried 42)

Key: 1=Eastgate, 2=Southgate, 3=Westgate, 4=Risbygate, 5=Northgate

Note: Shading patterns indicated on the right side of each diagram translate as descending from highest population to lowest population density.
A *relevia* (a report of tenants paying rent on property developed prior to the Norman Conquest) covering the years 1353–1539 (illustration 5.5) and a 1523–1524 Lay Subsidy and anticipation (table 5.6) reinforce this pattern of population movement away from the abbey’s most direct control. Consistent with the patterns shown in the property rentals, surviving heirs’ payment of the *relevia* on taxable land suggests population increases in the Westgate and Southgate Wards, especially along the extreme borders. The 1523–1524 Lay Subsidy and anticipation (or prepayment of the subsidy), in turn, show the largest numbers of wealthy burgesses resided in Risbygate and Southgate, where the markets were located and Bury’s richest families traditionally lived, followed by Westgate with its great influx of residents (Gottfried 36-41).

![Illustration 5.5—15th-16th century relevia density (Gottfried 39).](image)

![Table 5.1—1523–1524 Lay Subsidy and Anticipation (Gottfried 40).](image)

Note: I have corrected a misprint on table 5.1. It originally listed Westgate twice and omitted Northgate.
In addition to these population shifts, the great number of legal disputes between the monks and burgesses in the late twelfth through fourteenth centuries points to the depth of tension between the abbey and town. These disputes were quite often accompanied by violence. A sampling of some of the more physical incidents demonstrates the seriousness of these tensions: The late 1170s brought a riot as the abbey’s cellarers attempted to collect manure from the town’s dunghill, “property” customarily given to but not always collected by that abbey office (Gottfried 81; Lobel 24-25; Trenholme 6). In the late 1250s, a burgess with the rare privilege of owning his own sheepfold (this right was usually reserved for the abbey’s cellarer) had men from the abbey come twice at night to take down his pens and steal his sheep (Lobel 20 & 126). The year 1264 brought a major incident when some of the younger burgesses established a guild with an alderman and bailiffs appointed by them instead of the abbot. The incident included an attack on the abbey and shutting the abbot, sacrist, and cellarer outside of Bury’s gates (Gottfried 218-19; Lobel 126-27; Trenholme 22-23). In 1290, the cellarer constructed a dam in one of Bury’s rivers. The burgesses subsequently tore the dam out (Lobel 132-33). Violence erupted a generation later in 1327 when the townsmen, backed by Franciscan friars and secular clergy, repeatedly ransacked the abbey and its holdings, and imprisoned twenty-four of the monks. The following year, they also kidnapped the abbot, ultimately spiriting him away to Diest, Brabant until 1329 (Gottfried 220-31; Trenholme 37-40). In addition to these outbreaks of violence,

56 I.e. Today’s Belgium.
57 The involvement of the Franciscans and secular clergy may reflect tensions between these other religious groups and the Benedictines similar to those underlying “The
royal justices heard cases between the abbey and burgesses over such issues as the appointment of aldermen and bailiffs, and control of the town’s gates in 1266, 1293, 1305, 1320, and 1327. The conflict of 1327–1329 even involved the papacy (Gottfried 220, 226-28; Lobel 127-29 & 133-43; Trenholme 23-25 & 39).

This history of social conflict embroiling Bury St. Edmunds reached a peak early within Lydgate’s own lifetime (~1371–1449). The year 1379 brought a disputed abbacy to Bury with the monks supporting their subprior John Tymworth and the townsfolk favoring a papal candidate, Edmund Bromfeld, a cousin of the alderman Thomas Halesworth. In jockeying for favor, Bromfeld and Halesworth were able to gain the support of the burgesses through promises to give some power to the town upon Bromfeld’s election to the abbacy (Gottfried 233; Trenholme 55-56). As the abbatial dispute played out over the next few years, the burgesses were poised to take any chance they could to strike again at the abbey’s control.

The next chance came with what is misleadingly called the Peasant’s Revolt, for in Bury, as elsewhere, the burgesses were fully complicit in allowing a mob led by John Wrawe into town on June 14, 1381 (Gottfried 233-34; Lobel 152; Strohm, “Peasant’s” 197-98). As a ruling power in Suffolk, Bury St. Edmunds Abbey had become a target of hatred when labor legislation and taxation were levied in the 1370’s to control wage-laborers. These laborers had become newly empowered due to their decreased numbers after the Black Death, allowing them to demand more economic and political rights.

Legend of St. Austin at Compton” discussed in chapter 1. This example and Lydgate’s poem both may reflect awareness of the Benedictines’ adopting pastoral work in places where the secular clergy had not been present at an earlier date (Clark 177-78).
Wrawe and his followers, supported by the local burgesses, unleashed renewed violence on Bury. The town and its *banleuca* (the area of the abbot’s jurisdiction) became the locations where Richard II’s chief justice, Sir John Cavendish, was chased down, killed, and beheaded. The abbey was affected by the violence too, being sacked upon the rebels’ entrance into the town. Later that week, the prior, John de Cambridge, was caught, given a mock-trial, and also decapitated, his body left naked and unburied in a field. In a further act of mockery, the rebels placed the two heads on the town’s pillory positioned as if Cavendish were counseling or kissing de Cambridge. Another monk, John de Lakenheath, was dragged from the abbey by the mob, then slain and beheaded in Bury’s marketplace (Aers 432-35; Dugdale 111; Gottfried 14, 233-34; Trenholme 56). All three of these murders pointedly indicate the abbey and town tensions: Cavendish, as a royal justice, had both property in Bury and associations with its abbey. De Cambridge, as prior, was the leading abbey official in Bury while the abbacy was under dispute. De Lakenheath had served in a position to decide on levels of seigniorial dues (Dyer 14 & 38-39; Gottfried 233). Thus, all three were figures of abbey oppression over the town. Furthermore, Thomas Halesworth, the alderman and cousin of Bromfeld, was implicated as an active participant in the murders, indicating the deep involvement of an individual known for attempting to wrest power from the abbey for the burgesses (Hilton 203; Lobel 153). The overall intensity of the 1381 conflict in Bury between the monks and burgesses is finally indicated through the exclusion of the town and its burgesses in the general pardon issued by Richard II at the end of the Peasants’ Revolt (Lobel 153; Trenholme 57).
Regarding his participation in the events of 1381, Lydgate, admittedly, was too young to have yet joined the Benedictine order, decreasing the chance that he witnessed or in any way was involved directly with the events of the Peasants’ Revolt. However, I posit that his age of about ten would have made him old enough to remember these tumultuous events and later understand their implications to the depth of town-abbey tensions, an observation that scholars have not previously noted. This remembrance is especially important because minor incidents between the town and abbey continued to take place (see below). The location of Lydgate’s home village of Lidgate in relationship to other locations within the geographic radius of Bury’s influence where the violence of 1381 occurred is also important. Lidgate village is less than ten miles southwest of Bury St. Edmunds. This close proximity gave its inhabitants partial social, economic, and cultural dependence on the market that was held in Bury three times a week. Regular commercial traffic makes it probable that word of the uprising would have reached the outlying village (Gottfried 20-22). Moreover, the action of the revolt was hardly confined to Bury and came much closer to Lidgate as events played out. In attempting to escape the mobs that eventually killed them, Cavendish and de Cambridge fled from Bury to the village of Mildenhall, where Cavendish was captured and slain. De Cambridge initially escaped from Mildenhall to the village of Newmarket before being captured nearby and taken back to Mildenhall for his execution (Gottfried 233-34; Trenholme 56). Mildenhall’s and Newmarket’s locations north of Lidgate does not mean that Cavendish, de Cambridge, and their pursuers passed through Lidgate. However, the presence of smaller regional markets in both Mildenhall and Newmarket and their
respective distances of about ten miles north and just over five miles northwest of Lidgate, again, provide very plausible avenues by which word of the revolt’s events could have reached young John’s home (Gottfried 21-23). At the very least, the village of Lidgate’s location relative to the 1381 violence suggests a very real knowledge for the future monk-poet of the events occurring in Bury St. Edmunds (see illustration 5.6). The probable track of John Lydgate’s education further suggests what his retrospective assessment on the Peasant’s Revolt might have been. Lydgate’s age of about ten years old in 1381 was the traditional age boys were recruited into abbey almonry schools. Derek Pearsall has suggested that 1382 is the latest date that Lydgate would have been recruited for his education as a potential novice (John Lydgate 22-23). This time frame makes the sacking of the abbey and executions of some of its members very recent as he began his association with the institution that directly would sponsor and shape him for the remaining sixty-seven years of his life. This timeline even makes it possible that Lydgate was living in the abbey’s almonry and studying at its school when Wrawe and his followers entered Bury St. Edmunds (Orme 278-79). Lydgate’s physical presence in Bury in 1381 set aside, the atmosphere of continued social conflict makes it likely his strongest loyalties would have lain with the abbey.

Social conflict stemming from and involving land ownership continued in Bury St. Edmunds later in Lydgate’s life when he composed the Lives of Ss Edmund and Fremund and the extra miracles. The overall history of conflict between the monks and burgesses in abbey-controlled towns shows a greater tendency toward revolt at the local level whenever the English crown was itself facing troubles or scandal (Trenholme 31).
Illustration 5.6—The greater geographic area of Bury St. Edmunds (Gottfried 21).
The early 1440s marked the fruitless English release of Charles, duke of Orleans in the pursuit of peace in 1440, and the beginning of the disastrous marriage negotiations between Henry VI and Margaret of Anjou in 1444, which ultimately led to the English forfeiture of Anjou and Maine (Griffiths, *Reign* 443-54 & 482-90). These dates closely coincide with Lydgate’s writing of the extra miracles, even if the events are of as much interest to England generally as Bury specifically. Also closely coinciding with the dates of the extra miracles is the putative composition of the *Cartae Versificatae*, examined in Chapter 1. Although translated to defend against the episcopacy and monarchy, they certainly contributed to the embattled atmosphere in which Lydgate and his brethren lived (Lowe 154). The need to defend against royal and ecclesiastical authorities could plausibly trigger preemptive steps against the burgesses.

There were also specific tensions with the Bury burgesses later in Lydgate’s lifetime. The 1433 land rental discussed above was conducted in the same year as Henry VI’s Christmas visit to the abbey, so material evidence exists showing that Lydgate’s later monastic career overlapped with the population’s attempts to escape abbey control. Henry’s visit itself also may have revealed the social tensions between the monks and burgesses. After a communal reception of the king by the townsfolk and monks, the monks conducted the king’s party into the abbey’s church. Robert S. Gottfried suggests the monks then locked out the townsfolk, burgesses, and alderman and held a private mass for Henry and his lords, an act of exclusion (5). Closer to the extra miracles’ dates of composition, an instance from around 1440 shows the abbey’s continued possessiveness of its land rights. A letter from Abbot Curteys to the duke of Norfolk
complains that some of the duke’s tenants were pasturing sheep on abbey-owned land. Says Curteys: “they, not consideryng the right but all only the myght of your lordschype, and the symplenesse of religious men, usurpen, encrochen, pasturen, and commen fro day to day, more largely and boldely than ever they deden beforn, or of right at ony tyme owyn or schulde doo” (Arnold 3:242). Part of Curteys’ concern comes from the Norfolk tenants competing with the grazing of Suffolk sheep, in which the Bury St. Edmunds Abbey, as landowner, had a vested interest (Gottfried 78-79).

The abbey jealously guarded its land rights, but it also had to coexist with the people of Bury, for whom Lydgate wrote miracles B and C. Indeed, it would be a mistake to imply that only bad blood existed between the town and abbey. Monastic profession could be a form of social advancement for members of burghal families and upper peasantry (Clark 68). Lydgate himself may have fit this pattern, and a contemporary acquaintance of his, John Baret III, definitely does. The son of one of Bury’s most prosperous burghal families, Baret was the monk and abbey treasurer who jointly collected Lydgate’s annuity so as to follow the injunction against brothers collecting money as individuals (Gottfried 156-57; Pearsall, Bio-bibliography 36-38). I have already reviewed specific evidence for the extra miracles’ burghal audience in connection with Lydgate’s authorship, so it needs to be reiterated only briefly. First are Lydgate’s casual references to the Bury locations of Northgate and Risbygate, a move that assumes a local audience’s knowledge of these places (Lydgate, Lives EM251 & 395). Additionally, the Suffolk origin of four of the five manuscripts in which the extra miracles appear further suggests Lydgate’s audience is from Bury (Bale 153-54). Finally,
manuscripts A², B, and Y show signs of having been produced by the same workshop, located in or near Bury and, therefore, suggesting a local audience. Moreover, the elaborateness of A² and Y suggests that their patrons were the wealthy burgesses emerging in Bury in the 1460s, who were gaining wealth as the abbey began to decline. These burgesses might have been interested in the prestige of owning an elaborate manuscript of a local poet’s works as much as in the literary content of that manuscript—John Baret II, father of the abbey treasurer, even lists “my boke with the sege of Thebes in englysh” (presumably Lydgate’s) in his will (Gillespie 175-77; Gottfried 236; K. Scott, “Lydgate’s” 360-66; Tymms 35). This interest in owning manuscripts as a display of wealth hardly necessitates a critical reception of the themes Lydgate raises in depicting the interactions of the town and abbey.

With the Bury burgesses forming part of his probable audience, Lydgate cannot of course be overtly hostile, and returning to Bale’s interpretation of miracle A provides a helpful precedent for viewing the relationship between Lydgate and the Bury townsfolk. The miracle’s specific London location of Thames Street was located near the newly formed (as of 1440), self-governing community of Baltic tradesmen or Hansards. Bale speculates on how miracle A may manifest social tension as a result of this settlement:

Given the subject of Edmund’s vita—of English piety versus Danish savagery, English legitimacy versus Baltic usurpation—there may be a yet more specific micro-context, or just a literary side-swipe, retrievable in miracle A. There was growing animosity between Londoners and the Hansa in the fifteenth century, culminating in a brief attack on the [Hansard community] in 1493; it is
noteworthy that the xenophobic ‘alien subsidy’—in effect a poll tax on foreigners—was levied in 1440, just before the date of miracle A, with the Hansards immediately claiming exemption. The highly nationalistic cult of St Edmund might usefully be placed against this background of competing definitions of Englishness and belonging. (159-60)

The possibility Bale sees in miracle A of a “literary side-swipe” is precisely the move Lydgate takes against the burgesses as he presents his abbey community as necessary to the spiritual well-being of Bury St. Edmunds. As prosperous as Bury has become, danger befalls the populace and their children from which they cannot protect themselves. Only through the intercessory prayers of the monks can daily crises be averted. Without the brethren, the people are actually helpless.

Ganim’s argument that Lydgate excels at using language that is inclusive to the interests of groups with competing claims to authority is also helpful to understanding Lydgate’s relation to his burghal audience:

As wealthy and powerful as monastic houses were in medieval England in particular and in Western Europe in general, they were obliged to defend their independence and their material holdings against claims by local episcopal hierarchies, by the crown and by the papacy, and often appealed to these various institutions for aid against the claims of the others. Many typically monastic literary productions, from hagiography to chronicles, often were composed with such defenses in mind, or were called up as evidence for such defenses. Lydgate is especially skilled in devising rhetoric of negotiation among shared temporal,
spiritual, and political claims. The poetic that results from such a monastic context is translatable to other, apparently more secular contexts, including commissions from the London elite. As a consequence, Lydgate’s monastic and civic poetry often takes on the quality of document or archive, both performing and preserving the claims of his patrons in the physical and material body of his texts. (166)

Ganim helpfully calls attention to a mediating quality in both Lydgate’s monastic and civic poetry that serves whomever the monk’s patron might be. Lydgate also importantly employs this mediating quality to protect his abbey’s interests above and beyond those of other authorities he serves. Thus, even as the extra miracles celebrate Edmund’s beneficence to the townsfolk of Bury, the abbey’s monks appear alongside the townsfolk as spiritual intercessors between the people and the saint. 58

The Social Tensions of the Extra Miracles

With this historical audience in mind, the extra miracles become suggestive of abbey self-promotion to the townsfolk. One important way in which the extra miracles seem to be targeted toward a burghal or common audience is through their plausibility compared to those in Lydgate’s original vita. Their realism is relative and I do not deny

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58 Ganim’s argument covers some very similar ground to my own. He discusses Lydgate’s use of the extra miracles for creating communal identity around a monastic ideal, and even makes reference to the underlying social tensions between abbey and town. Ultimately, however, Ganim is more concerned with Lydgate’s defense against the higher authorities of bishop, pope, and king rather than with the efforts of the Bury townsfolk to wrest control away from the abbey (169 & 174-78).
the existence of martyrological symbolism throughout the extra miracles.\textsuperscript{59} There is, however, concreteness to the extra miracles that grounds them in the townsfolk’s experiences. This mundaneness is in the miracles’ aforementioned specific dates, urban setting, and inclusion of the historically identifiable Lord Fanhope and Abbot Curteys. The effect in miracles B and C of mentioning Curteys alongside specific times and places is to provide a source for verifying the saint’s power. The fact that Curteys is the abbot also benefits the abbey by affirming and bolstering its power and place in the Bury St. Edmunds community. Given Curteys’ role in commissioning Lydgate’s original \textit{Edmund and Fremund}, it seems reasonable to conclude that he was in some way behind the commission of miracles B and C. References to him are no more or less conspicuous than mentions in miracle A to Lord Fanhope or the Suffolks referenced by Bale in suggesting them as patrons of the earlier continuation. Further, Curteys’ death in 1446 was still two years away, giving him plenty of time for giving Lydgate a new commission. Curteys, however, is not the only historical personage associated with B and C to lend an essence of historical plausibility to them; T glosses names next to three of the participants in extra miracles B and C, an effort by at least one individual to read

\footnote{\textsuperscript{59} Indeed, I would be remiss to deny the artistry of this symbolism. Miracle A’s rescue of a fletcher’s son plays upon Edmund’s martyrdom of being shot with arrows before his beheading (Bale 156). As noted above, A is also conceivably targeted at the Hansard community, so the interplay of Danish and martyrological elements contain great potential for interpretation.}
the recounted events as historically factual (Bale & Edwards 15).\textsuperscript{60} I say more about Curteys and T below.

Like the presence of historically identifiable figures, the actions taken by the townsfolk add verisimilitude to extra miracles B and C. Ronald C. Finucane’s survey of 156 miracle stories of children saved from accidents reveals a preponderance (51%) of drowning stories, like miracle B. In those drowning stories, there is a pattern of acting by turning the drowned child upside down “Tavoide watir” before kneeling to petition a saint (EM290). Similarly, placing the dead child on the saint’s shrine, as happens in miracle C, and the first response to tragedy coming from a neighbor, as in both extra miracles, recur in miracula of children’s accidents. Lydgate’s employment of this larger tradition indicates not just his understanding of popular \textit{topoi}, but his awareness of the types of accidents he is writing about, for the \textit{topoi} are reflective of contemporary practice. Medieval coroners’ reports corroborate them (Finucane 11-12, 131-32, 143, & 147-48). As common as these \textit{topoi} might be, they foster reliance of the townspeople on saints through the implication that saints empowered everyday actions (Ganim 177). The empowerment of the Bury people by St. Edmund, however, is specific to extra miracles B and C. Specific too was the history of conflict between the townspeople and Edmund’s caretakers, the Bury monks.

The popular and “true to life” character of the extra miracles stands in contrast to those in Lydgate’s original \textit{vita}. More characteristic of these earlier miracles is

\textsuperscript{60} The last name of the little girl in miracle B is apparently “Brayser,” the family of the little boy in C is “Prykke,” and the name of the neighbor in C is “Curte.” I return to the possible significance of the neighbor’s name (Bale & Edwards 15).
Edmund’s vengeance on the Danish king Swein Forkbeard. In this episode, Swein invades England, demanding tribute. After ignoring warnings to leave, Swein is run through by Edmund’s ghost in bed one night. The story is spectacular to envision but historically distant and set in Swein’s bedchamber where it allows no English witnesses to the event. Indeed, the English learn about the miracle only through a number of visions, which are themselves miraculous by definition. Thus, the plausibility of the extra miracles compared to the miracles in Lydgate’s original vita suggests an effort on Lydgate’s part to show how the saint is still at work in the daily activities of Bury St. Edmund’s people.

The extra miracles are not presented, however, as contradictions of the original miracles, but as ratifications of them. Miracles B and C are particularly notable in this regard because Lydgate introduces them with a catalog of miraculous events from his original vita. This catalog (quoted above) consists of the posthumous miracles of Osgoth the Dane’s insanity, the death of Leoffstan while attempting to arrest the woman at Edmund’s shrine, and the slaying of Swein Forkbeard by Edmund’s ghost (EM204-05). Lydgate’s allusion to his own redaction tellingly connects the localized miracles set in Bury to “historical events” of much grander, proto-nationalistic significance. This elevated significance appears especially in the case of King Swein, who invades all of England, not just East Anglia or Bury. Nor is this opening catalog the only place where allusion to Swein appears; Lydgate mentions him again at the end of extra miracle B in detail that further elevates the significance of the Bury-set miracles:

O blyssed martir of mercy take good heed!
Save thy ffraunchyse, think on Bury toun!
Suffre no tyraunt thy ffredam to assaylle!
Noon oppressour ageyn hem to maligne!
Thynk [how] thy spere greetly did avaylle
Ageyn kyng Sweyn, a thyng notable and digne
To be regestryd and showyd for a signe,
Whoos tyrannye was ful dere abought! (EM383-90)

Lydgate moves to the threat posed by Swein from the miracle of Edmund’s resuscitation of a drowned child. Elevating the resuscitation miracle to the level of saving all of England from Swein points to an omnipresence in Edmund’s influence. It suggests that trusting the saint in the peoples’ daily lives should be absolute because it has important repercussions for England as a whole. Thus, Lydgate also concludes extra miracle C:

Now lat vs alle with hertly confidence
Requere this martir to graunte thynges thre:
With spere and arwe to stonde in our diffence
Geyn them that caste to breke his liberte.
To save his chirche, his toun, and his cuntre,
Mawgre alle tho that in ony wyse
Wolde interupte his royal dignite
Be deregacioun doon to his ffraunchyse. (EM457-64)

The trio of “his chirche, his toun, and his cuntre” again points to the all-encompassing influence of Edmund and the necessity of absolute trust and obedience. The inclusion of
“his chirche,” moreover, adds another element to the picture. Edmund’s “chirche” can very well include the whole of English Christendom, but it most literally is his own shrine on the Bury St. Edmunds Abbey’s premises, maintained by Lydgate, Curteys, and their Benedictine brethren. Thus, Lydgate’s prayer, to be shared by the Bury townsfolk, that Edmund be trusted absolutely also implies an absolute acceptance of the abbey. It is a macrocosmic vision that encompasses trust in the abbey with trust in Edmund.

There are also microcosmic levels in miracles B and C that appeal to the importance of the abbey as an intercessor for the local populace through the saved children. The sentimental focus on the helplessness of the towns’ children is the means for this appeal. The high infant mortality rates of the era have sometimes led to the assumption that children were less cherished in the Middle Ages than in later centuries, but this seems unlikely. The pervasive appearances of infancy narratives in hagiography and romance; the artistic motifs of the Madonna and Child, the Ages of Man, and the Holy Innocents; and the infusion of emotion in saved children *miracula* themselves reveal that the sentimentalizing of children would have had an effect on medieval people (Finucane 151-58; Oosterwijk 231-32). Pearsall has noted Lydgate’s own propensity for evoking emotion toward children “always respond[ing] with immediacy of feeling . . . especially [toward] children exposed to pain or suffering” (*John Lydgate* 239).

Admittedly, it is miracle A rather than either of the Bury miracles that provides the strongest instance of Lydgatean sentimentality, as the saved child cries out while being carried ashore: “‘Wher is my moodir? Myn owne moodir dere?/ Moodir, moodir!’” (EM129-30). However, there are also instances of this sentimentality in both miracles B
and C where the rescued children are referred to as “tendir mayde,” “the chyld of colour ffresso and reed,” and “a yong babe” (EM256, 366, & 396). The revival of the child in miracle B is also poignant:

By his martirs meeke mediacioun

The lord above, withinne litel space,

By his mercifful consolacioun

Made blood appeere in the chyldes fface.

Sodeyn quyknesse hir herte did enbrace,

Quyk lyk a soule moore than vegetatyff,

Al the membrys revived wer by grace,

So that it was restooryd ageyn to lyff. (EM329-36)

Here, the metaphor “quyknesse hir herte did embrace” is particularly effective in conveying the saintly and divine mercy and grace bestowed upon the little girl through the literal implications of the image. The passage also provides an instance in the extra miracles of Lydgate’s constant concern with grace as discussed in chapters 1 and 3.  

Lydgate at times, however, juxtaposes such sentimentality with jarring contrast in these later miracles. Following the resuscitation of the child in miracle B, Lydgate moves into a stanza on the impossibility of hindering God’s power and then says:

This royal corseynt, gloruous and notable

To helpe his servauntys is nat wont to tarye,

And can also in tyme ben vengable

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61 Note too that God acts “By his martirs meeke mediacioun.” Grace is both the general means of the miracle and channeled through the person of the martyred saint.
To them that been to his ffredam contrarye.

Which in the boundys of his senytwarye

This myracle was but late wrought.

Regestre it vp mid of your lybrarye

For a memoryal and forget it nought.  (EM345-52)

This sudden warning against violating St. Edmund’s “ffredam” comes so unexpectedly as to be almost menacing. This threat is especially pointed when it closely follows the sentimentality of the drowned child’s resuscitation. Moreover, the word “ffredam,” in addition to its meanings of a king’s or another individual’s liberty of action, may bear special significance because it can include the meaning of landright (*MED*). Thus, it possibly hearkens back both to Swein Forkbeard’s invasion of England—alluded to twice by Lydgate in miracle B—and to the historical context of the burgesses attempting to usurp abbey privileges. Regardless, the stanza’s conclusion with direct address to the reader to remember the saint’s power is a strong cautioning against angering Edmund. This warning comes through the injunction to “forget it nought,” and through the common medieval metaphor of the memory as a “lybrarye.” This image builds one level of meaning on another. First, the mind is a storehouse in which valuable lessons should be kept. Even more importantly, what a person remembers should be carefully linked to mnemonic devices that enable quick and easy recollection of concepts, just like well-cataloged shelves of books (Carruthers 39, 151-52). Thus, in using this metaphor with its layered meanings, Lydgate adds further stress to the magnitude of St. Edmund’s power.
Given the volatility of his power, the townsfolk audience would be wise to keep an intercessor close to hand.

**Monastic Intercession and Privilege**

The able intercessors before St. Edmund, naturally, are the Bury monks, and Lydgate implies this position is a privileged one. The Benedictine brethren appear in extra miracles B and C, shaping the outcome of the two episodes similar to their shaping of miracles in Lydgate’s original *Edmund and Fremund*. In miracle B, the monks provide the Bury community’s response to the saved child:

For this myracle al the bellys rang,

Abbot William beeyng ther present,

And ‘Te deum’ devoutly was ther song,

Toffor the awteer knelyng the covent. (EM353-56)

This response is notable because it is the most specific response Lydgate records. A few lines later, he mentions “Som ffolk wepte ffor devocioun,” kneeling as the resuscitated little girl is carried past, but only the monks offer prayers of gratitude (EM364). Reading the monks’ singing as an assertion of their importance to the Bury community makes even more sense because this stanza appears immediately after Lydgate’s aforementioned warning against opposing St. Edmund and invoking his vengeance. The section overall reads as an appeal to childhood sentimentality, a promise of divine power, a warning against saintly vengeance, and then the intercession of the monks, offering the whole community’s thanks.
The intercession of the monks in extra miracle C is also pronounced. After the child is crushed by the cartwheel, the townsfolk respond by placing the body on Edmund’s shrine. They then offer prayers of supplication and thanksgiving before and after the child is revived. The “Te deum” and the “Ave rex gentis” are specifically mentioned, strongly suggesting that the monks again take a lead role in the petitions because these prayers are in Latin and the miracle occurs at Edmund’s shrine on the abbey’s premises (EM439–40). The references to Latin prayers may be significant because the townsfolk are less likely to have been able to fully participate in the singing of these hymns. An air of divine mystery and power comes through the use of Latin instead of vernacular English. This point should not, however, be overemphasized as the “Te deum” was part of the regularly recited Divine Office and the “Ave rex gentis” was an anthem from the Office of St Edmund. Both are likely hymns to which the Bury laity frequently would have been exposed, learning them through sheer repetition (Bale & Edwards 178-79; Duffy 217-20). Still, some familiarity with these hymns would be necessary for the allusions to have any effect upon Lydgate’s lay audience.

Audience familiarity would also be necessary with the miracles from *Edmund and Fremund* that Lydgate alludes to in extra miracle B’s prologue. These three miracles become significant to the theme of intercession due to the roles played in them by monastic characters. As seen, these allusions are to the stories of King Edward and Osgoth, Leoffstan, and Swein Forkbeard (EM201-08). Chapter 3 has already discussed how the monks featured in these episodes actively pray to Edmund for intervention on behalf of themselves and their people. The presence of the monks further creates
metonymic links with Lydgate’s brethren. These links help Lydgate to argue for the benefit of Henry VI fostering a relationship with the Bury St Edmunds Abbey. The images discussed in Chapter 4 also reinforce these parallels. Lydgate’s selection of these three miracles for allusion carries the earlier theme of monastic intervention on behalf of the king into extra miracles B and C. In them, it becomes intervention on behalf of the townsfolk. The treatment of the extra miracles as an extension of Lydgate’s original vita in A², B, Y, and T further reinforces this transference of theme.

Lydgate also grants special distinction to Abbot Curteys beyond the privileged intercessory position the rest of St. Edmund’s monks assume in miracles B and C. As seen above, Curteys is present for the drowned child’s resuscitation in miracle B and authorizes the ringing of the abbey’s bells (EM353-54). This authorization demonstrates Curteys’ leadership among the monks. By taking the lead, he guides the brethren in their role as intercessors and gives the rest of the monastic community permission to intercede. These powers to direct the monks were absolute and exclusively granted to him as abbot under Benedict’s Rule (Henderson 279; Knowles 253-54). Extra miracle C likewise calls attention to Curteys’ presence and authority among the monks who witness the child’s revival: “The priour last this myracle gan purpoose,/The peple abood with greet reuurence” (EM441-42). Lydgate’s word “purpoose” depicts Curteys as having the authority to verify and sanction the miracle while the people listen dutifully (MED). To further emphasize this point, the following stanza can be understood as Curteys’

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62 Nor was absolute abbatial authority ever rescinded. It remained even as understanding of the Rule evolved with the socio-historical circumstances of the Benedictines (Knowles 253-54).

63 Benedictines used the title “priour” for any superior (Bale & Edwards 179; MED)
“recorded” words (as presented by Bale and Edwards in their edition), saying that

Edmund:

“Which shewyd hath in this myracles two
Our lord above of his magnificence,
Off oold tyme and now of newe also,
To shewe to yow by notable evidence
How this martir of royal excellence
Prefferryd is in the hevenly consistorye,
With glorious kynges to holde residence,

Crownyd with seyntes euer to regne in glorye. Amen.” (EM449-56)

If viewed as Curteys’ actual words, this passage serves as an instance of what Ganim calls Lydgate’s documentary style. This technique most literally encompasses themes and content that benefit Lydgate’s abbey or patrons and makes a formal, legal presentation of the event Lydgate preserves in his writing (Ganim 170). By recording Curteys’ “actual” words in this passage, Lydgate preserves the moment when the abbey sanctifies extra miracle C.

The importance of Curteys in extra miracle C also appears in connection with one of the names glossed in manuscript T, mentioned above. After the child in this miracle is crushed by the cartwheel, a neighbor comes to his aid. A gloss at this point reads “Nomen Curte,” which “looks suspiciously like ‘Curteys’, Lydgate’s abbot” (EM406; Bale & Edwards 15). Additionally, the glossator of this manuscript is the same scribe

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64 The *Cartae Versificatae* from chapter 1 are another instance of Lydgate’s documentary style.
who copied the text and has a thorough knowledge of Latin, indicating that he may have been a monk himself (Bale & Edwards 15). This possible assignation of Curteys as a major participant in miracle C by a monastic scribe suggests another effort to promote the Bury St. Edmunds Abbey and its abbot as credible intercessors and witnesses to St. Edmund’s power. However, some caution is in order when ascribing strong pro-abbey feelings to T’s copyist. T is the only manuscript of the extra miracles not originating in Suffolk, so the scribe may not have been aware of the social strife in the region. On the other hand, the association of miracles C’s neighbor with Curteys outside of Suffolk indicates a strong oral tradition influencing T’s scribe or the scribe of the non-extant manuscript the T-scribe used.

John Lydgate’s abbey was an important institution in the medieval town of Bury St. Edmunds, and seeing the monks and townsfolk appear alongside each other in extra miracles B and C is natural in a celebration of the abbey and town’s patron saint. Stylistic features of these miracles and their themes suggest that Lydgate was indeed their author, writing for a local audience from Bury St. Edmunds. Through linguistic features, a shared scribe, and shared copyists, the five manuscripts in which the extra miracles are preserved provide material evidence for a Suffolk provenance to the extra miracles. Thus, the extra miracles are products of local culture. However, with the fervent and triumphant celebration of these local productions also comes a dark historical reality in which they were produced.

This past was over two hundred fifty years of social and economic turmoil between the Bury St. Edmunds town and its abbey. The abbey’s unwillingness to
concede even small degrees of municipal self-control to the local burgesses brought both legal disputes before the crown and violence between the two groups during almost every generation after 1170 until the abbey’s 1539 dissolution. The Peasants’ Revolt of 1381 was one of the worst instances of this town-abbey violence, culminating in the town-backed executions of several abbey officials and Richard II withholding pardon from the local burgesses at the end of the conflict. Although still a child, Lydgate was alive at this time to witness these events from some peripheral vantage point. Conceivably, Lydgate could have been living in the borough by this time. He at least had opportunities to hear of the violence from his home village less than ten miles away. It was also within a year of these events that he began his latest possible direct association with the abbey as he began his education in the abbey’s almonry school.

When Lydgate wrote the extra miracles in the 1440s, such violence was long past, but social discord between the town and abbey was still present and seems reflected in the extra miracles. On a macrocosmic level, the connecting of miracles of saved children to allusions of the “national” threat posed by Swein Forkbeard from Lydgate’s original vita urges a complete trust in St. Edmund and, through him, in his abbey. Microcosmically, the extra miracles’ sentimental focus on saved children is an appeal to one of the most personal and vulnerable aspects of the townsfolk’s lives. The people and monks of Bury harmoniously coexist through St. Edmund’s power and protection in the miracles, but Lydgate privileges the monks with very important intercessory positions. Through prayer and thanksgiving that the townsfolk cannot perform on their own, the monks and Abbot Curteys become the chief petitioners before Edmund. Such a depiction
by Lydgate reveals his very strong ties to his house and his fervent investment in using poetry to defend the abbey’s interests to a local audience in addition to the royal level of the Lancastrian court.
Conclusion—The “Monk of Bery”

Many intertwining themes define Lydgate as abbey-poet. His identification with his abbey, his brethren, and his patron saint show some of Lydgate’s strongest loyalties. These corporate identities in turn reflect back on his self-understanding. As a monk of the Benedictine order generally and Bury St. Edmunds Abbey specifically, Lydgate was a shrinekeeper for the relics of King Edmund of East Anglia. He understood this as a high honor, inherited by earlier, sanctified members of his community. Such an honor was a sign of divine grace, a force that empowered his king, his brethren, and his own poetry. Awareness of his role as intercessor gives Lydgate a fervency toward those individuals and institutions with whom he identifies. It is a deep loyalty that encompasses both spiritual and political zeal and blurs the distinction between them. However, the overlap between spirituality and politics characterizes Lydgate as a fifteenth-century Benedictine monk and points toward a broadened understanding of him.

In this study these themes coalesce around two overlapping foci on Lydgate. The narrower focus centers on Lydgate’s use of the St. Edmund legend. Lydgate returns to this legend multiple times for audiences that are internal and external to his monastic circle, local and “national” in their scope, and ecclesiastical and secular in their outlooks. The larger focus is on Lydgate and his role within his abbey. Loyalties matter to Lydgate whether they are personally directed toward William Curteys and Henry VI or institutionally oriented toward Bury St. Edmunds Abbey and its town. Both angles
explore Lydgate’s religious poetry for its significance to regional stories, people, and places of the monk-poet’s life. To see Lydgate in light of these people and places is to contextualize him in a way that viewing him as Chaucer’s successor or as a Lancastrian propagandist does not. It also lays a strong groundwork for future research in viewing Lydgate as a monk-poet.

**Lydgate and the St. Edmund Legend**

Lydgate’s use of the Edmund legend was part of a larger Benedictine reliance on that story. For the Benedictines, King Edmund of East Anglia was an exemplar of royal sanctity to whom they turned for defining the good rule of new kings. This ideal of holy rule embodies both political and spiritual dimensions. For Lydgate’s part, there were at least five different occasions on which he turned to Edmund’s story. His use of it is extremely versatile as he employs it for political and spiritual purposes, and ecclesiastical, monastic, royal, and lay audiences. The frequency and breadth of its use illustrate the great appeal the saint had as patron for him and for his house. The works in which Lydgate draws upon the vita or posthumous miracles of Edmund are the *Cartae Versificatae*, “To St. Edmund,” “To St. Robert of Bury,” the *Lives of Ss Edmund and Fremund*, and the *Extra Miracles of St Edmund*.

Tracing four early redactions in which major episodes of the Edmund legend first appear fits with a pattern of Benedictine commentary on virtuous kingship. The earliest hagiographic redaction was that of Abbo of Fleury (~985–987 CE), who reflects early Benedictine zeal for reform in a time when such great churchmen as Archbishop Dunstan of Canterbury were approaching their deaths. Dunstan’s death would leave the young
king Æthelred Unræd on the throne without a long time spiritual and political advisor, and the monks of Ramsey Abbey without their lead reformer. In this context, Edmund appears as a surrogate for Dunstan. Ælfric of Eynsham presents Edmund as a spiritual foil to Æthelred. He wrote his Anglo-Saxon redaction within ten years of Abbo’s (~997 CE), when Æthelred’s political policy of bribing Danish invaders had made it clear that he did not honor the comitatus relationship of Anglo-Saxon culture. Edmund’s spiritual loyalty to God and especially to his thanes set him up as a model king who would support his people with his very life. The next Benedictine revision of Edmund’s vita was by Geoffrey of Wells (~1150–1156 CE), who created a birth and accession narrative prequel near the end of the fifteen-year-long civil war that marked King Stephen of Blois’ reign. This extended political conflict had left all factions, including the Benedictines, utterly exhausted. A new beginning to the saint’s life of Edmund reflected the spiritual hope for a king, most likely Henry II, who would bring renewal to England through a piety modeled by Edmund. The end of the rule of the fiercely independent King John brought another Benedictine expansion of Edmund’s life by Roger of Wendover (~1219 CE). Roger emphasized the spiritual ideals of kingly responsibility and adherence to counselors’ advice by incorporating the Lothbroc/Bern episode and developing the bishop Humbert as a distinct character in the narrative. Roger presents these ideals as serious political policies that John’s son Henry III should follow to avoid the secular and ecclesiastical strife of his father’s rule. Although it is unknown if these earlier writers expected their redactions to reach beyond their local communities, Lydgate’s own Edmund and Fremund was able to extend this loose Benedictine tradition to Henry VI,
presenting him with Edmund as the model for good rule. Henry’s 1433–1434 visit made this extension possible, but the shadow that fell on Henry VI as the grandson of the usurper Henry IV also displays a similar historical context to these earlier redactions when an unpopular king had recently been on the throne. However, the Lives is but one of Lydgate’s uses of St. Edmund.

Among Lydgate’s works, the Cartae Versificatae present one use of Edmund that bridges political and spiritual purposes. They are chiefly ecclesiastical and royal in their audience. In these Middle English translations of five Latin charters, Lydgate appeals to the spiritual authority of Edmund and a number of other saints in order to supersede the ecclesiastical authority of local bishops and royal authority of the Lancastrian court. The terms of the charters are specifically concerned with divine gifts and royal gifts that have been imbued with divine authority. This superseding of other authorities is both spiritual and political because the spiritual defense extended to defending the abbey’s rights of secular overlordship as a prominent landowner in Suffolk. A secondary monastic audience could also underlie these charters. The privileges they grant could make them valuable aids for teaching novices at Bury St. Edmunds Abbey about the history of their house.

Geffrei Gaimar’s 1136–1137 Estoire des Engleis, briefly discussed in the appendix, was also written during the reign of Stephen. It is non-Benedictine in origin but may show an awareness of this pattern. The compilation of Edmund redactions in Bodley 240, although not discussed above, also appears to fit with a tradition of Benedictine commentary on young kings succeeding bad ones. It was written ~1377 when Richard II assumed the throne. The last few years of Edward III, Richard’s grandfather and predecessor, had been marked by decline due to the king’s senility.
The short poems “To St. Edmund” and “To St. Robert of Bury” are much more spiritual and monastic in their nature. They are prayers specifically invoking Edmund to watch over the people of Bury town and abbey. Their invocatory style and heavy use of allusion show how locally oriented they are, assuming an audience’s complete familiarity and internalization of the regional legends of Edmund and Robert. Such local assumptions point toward the use of these prayers by the Bury St. Edmunds monks as part of their own worship. These poems show a type of devotion that is intimate through the limitedness of their audiences.

The Lives of Ss Edmund and Fremund is a major triumph in Lydgate’s use of the Edmund legend. The work blends monastic concerns with its target royal audience to achieve a balance of the political and spiritual. Henry VI’s four-month visit to Bury St. Edmunds from 1433–1434 sparked the commission of Edmund and Fremund, an undoubtedly political occasion. The young king’s French coronation less than two years earlier had been contentious in its own right, but the near-bankruptcy of the crown upon its return made the extended visit a blatant political move to unload the court’s expenses on the Bury monks. This threat to the financial welfare of Bury St. Edmunds Abbey alarmed the monks because frequent exploitation of Benedictine hospitality would undoubtedly jeopardize the house’s stability. Thus, the Lives served as an occasion for the Bury monks to counsel the king on the proper relationship between court and monastery. Lydgate presents Edmund and Fremund as kings who identified with monastic institutions. At the same time, the monastic forebearers to Lydgate’s contemporary brethren appear in Lydgate’s poem and in the illuminations of the
presentation manuscript as vital intercessors between St. Edmund and various authority figures. These figures are rewarded or punished for their treatment of the saint and his shrine. The work is a political defense of the abbey on spiritual terms that is similar to what Lydgate does in the Cartae Versificatae. However, the way Edmund and Fremund is permeated with a theme of grace points to fervency of belief shared by Lydgate with his brethren. The Benedictines provide spiritual aid to Henry but can only offer that help if the court respects the integrity of the monastic house. Lydgate’s Lives undoubtedly goes beyond this purpose to discuss different models of kingship for Henry. But how the Benedictines benefit from these models is an important piece to add to this puzzle when reconciling the models to one another (Sisk 350, 372-75; Winstead 131, 136-37).

The Extra Miracles of St Edmund extends the triumph of the Lives to include the Bury townsfolk in its intercessory themes. Thus, the Extra Miracles are political and spiritual because they are directed toward monastic and lay audiences. The political context for these continuations reflects the social tensions that had disrupted life in Bury St. Edmunds every generation or two since the twelfth century. Each outbreak of conflict revolved around privileges traditionally enjoyed by the abbey being challenged by the burgesses as they gained greater economic and social stability. The Peasant’s Revolt of 1381 was one of the most severe instances of violence that occurred in this history. Although only a child in 1381, Lydgate would still have witnessed these events from some peripheral vantage point, be it his home in the village of Lidgate or the abbey’s almonry. Such events could easily have made an impression on young John, especially when they were sure to have impacted the collective consciousness of the older Bury
monks who were eye-witnesses. This underlying crisis for the monks would surely accent their desire for political control with a spiritual ideal of peace through prayer. All five of these poems featuring Edmund show Lydgate’s strong ties to his house in Bury. They also point toward the larger capacity of abbey-poet in which Lydgate served.

**Lydgate and his Abbey**

Lydgate’s role of abbey-poet grows out of his strong local ties. This identity mediates Lydgate’s service to his abbey, the king, and his town in his Edmund works. In my study, two different angles emerge for expanding discussion of this role beyond Lydgate’s Edmund works. One approach examines how Lydgate acts as an official spokesperson for Bury St. Edmunds Abbey, coordinating with Abbot William Curteys and other members of the abbey community to produce British Library MS Harley 2278. A second avenue explores monastic themes in Lydgate’s poetry outside of his treatment of the Edmund legends. Examples include “The Legend of Seynt Gyle,” “The Legend of St. Austin at Compton,” and “The Legend of Dan Joos.” Future study of Lydgate as abbey-poet should be especially fruitful as it moves to other poems in which his relationships to Chaucer and noble or civic patrons take central roles.

The remarkable degree of coordination necessary to produce Harley 2278, the presentation copy of *Edmund and Fremund*, makes this manuscript a communal production and points to Lydgate’s unique position within the abbey as the driving force behind the work. In the text of the *Lives*, Lydgate states outright that Abbot Curteys commissioned the poem. Such consultation between the two men at the outset of the commission leaves room for Curteys to have shaped the themes that Lydgate would treat.
The careful planning evident in Harley 2278 points to Lydgate working in close consultation with the scribe and limners who worked on the manuscript as well. The one hundred twenty illuminations in Harley 2278’s one hundred nineteen folios are carefully placed to illustrate the action of *Edmund and Fremund* as it happens. Such placement points to a careful overseer who coordinated with the scribe and illuminators. The limners’ inclusion of meta-level elements, characters, and animals in scenes that are not explicitly mentioned in the poem points to the careful direction that they received. With evidence for three artistic hands in the *Lives*, supervision of these workers would have been especially crucial for maintaining consistency across the illustrations. No one would have known *Edmund and Fremund* better than its poet Lydgate, so he seems the most plausible candidate as overseer of this manuscript made on behalf of, and at the expense of, his entire monastic community.

As the presentation copy of the *Lives*, Harley 2278 is arguably still focused on the Edmund tradition. However, the underlying coordination between Lydgate, Curteys, the scribe, and the limners who produced it point to larger patterns of communication that extend to other Lydgatean manuscripts. Manchester University Library Rylands MS English 1 of the *Troy Book* and British Library MS Harley 1766 of the *Fall of Princes* are two Lydgate manuscripts that lie outside of Lydgate’s Edmund tradition while containing comparable scales of illumination to Harley 2278. The likely site of composition of London for the Rylands manuscript and a date of composition between 1450–1460 for Harley 1766 make it unlikely that Lydgate participated in the production of either, but the need for coordination between scribes and artists in a heavily illuminated Lydgate
manuscript may provide lines of further inquiry. More can perhaps be said as well about British Library MS Harley 2255. This manuscript is a collection of poems dedicated to Curteys by Lydgate. Its contents may provide insight into the monastic relationship between these two men. Additionally, Lydgate may have overseen production of mummmings, tapestry poems, and civic pageants in their respective visual mediums, and scholars have already begun to undertake studies examining the interplay of visual elements with Lydgate’s text (Edwards, Introduction 11; Pearsall, *John Lydgate* 77; K. Scott, *Later* II.259, 301; Sponsler 24-30).

Other Lydgate poems broaden the scope of monastic themes found in Lydgate’s Edmund poems. “The Legend of Seynt Gyle,” “The Legend of St. Austin at Compton,” and “The Legend of Dan Joos” are examples that firmly root themselves within Lydgate’s understanding of fifteenth-century Benedictinism. Each of these poems illustrates a type of monastic relationship with another fifteenth-century institution. “The Legend of Seynt Gyle” models an ideal relationship between monks and kings, elaborating on the moral example monks should provide for their rulers. “The Legend of St. Austin at Compton” details the symbiotic relationship that monks should have with the laity who dutifully supports its local abbey. Finally, “The Legend of Dan Joos” details an ideal of monastic devotion to Mary. Its praise of monastic piety bolsters the individual’s commitment to a regular order. All of these poems show Lydgate’s dedication to his monastic profession by elevating exemplars for his own brethren as they deal with the outside world. These models are built around monastic values but extend
beyond the scope of Lydgate’s own abbey, showing how his worldview is truly Benedictine.

Poems not covered here also reveal the influence of Lydgate’s Benedictine background. Another of Lydgate’s short saint’s lives, “The Legende of St. Petronilla,” makes no specific reference to Bury St. Edmunds Abbey but has definite local associations. One of the six hospitals located in Bury was dedicated to this saint, and her skull was among the abbey’s relics. The poem’s themes speak to service and to patience through suffering as way of gaining purity. These themes would resonate well with both the patients and the workers in St. Petronilla leper hospital (Gottfried 198). Another of Lydgate’s works that a Benedictine lens might shed light on is the *Siege of Thebes*. As mentioned several times in the preceding chapters, Lydgate distinctly identifies himself as a Benedictine monk in the *Siege’s* prologue. Focusing on this self-presentation could provide additional context for understanding some of the problems presented by this work. Among these problems is the discrepancy in Lydgate’s knowledge of the *Canterbury Tales* as his source text. The opening of the prologue to the *Siege of Thebes* closely mimics the style of the *Canterbury Tales* opening, suggesting Lydgate’s thorough familiarity with Chaucer’s text. However, the pilgrim characters that appear in the prologue appear as transformations of Chaucer’s originals. Lydgate’s Benedictine context of abbey and burghal conflict (as discussed in Chapter 5) suggests that such misrepresentations are deliberate efforts by the abbey-poet to diffuse the threat represented by the non-monastic elements of fifteenth-century Bury society. These
approaches to “The Legend of St. Petronilla” and the prologue to the *Siege of Thebes* are just two possible areas for future research using Lydgate’s identity as abbey-poet.

Lydgate the Monk-Poet

In the introduction, I laid out the terms “abbey-poet” and “monk-poet” as largely interchangeable references to how Lydgate’s Benedictine profession overlaps with his literary identity. I denoted a slight distinction between them, with “abbey-poet” referring to Lydgate’s role when serving his house. “Monk-poet” refers, in contrast, to his service to the larger ideals of the Benedictine order. I return now to this distinction in order to accent the underlying political and spiritual value systems in Lydgate’s poetry. I have colored “abbey-poet” with a strong, but not completely, political connotation to this point because it strikes at the mix of motives that Lydgate had in dealing with the events of his everyday life. “Monk-poet,” however, is less specific to Lydgate’s time and place in Bury St. Edmund and thus can connote a more abstract set of Benedictine ideals in Lydgate’s works. I call attention to these ideals in order to demonstrate how the spiritual and political overlap with one another, humanize Lydgate, and allow us to see him on terms apart from those of Chaucerian and Lancastrian influences.

My use of the term “humanize” needs careful qualification. By using it, I point to aspects of Lydgate’s poetry that show him to be a human being with a full range of hopes, fears, aspirations, and ambitions. I do not necessarily imply any emerging secular consciousness associated with the Renaissance whereby Lydgate celebrates the human
condition.\textsuperscript{66} My usage of the term is admittedly ironic because, in setting up and following monastic ideals in his poetry, Lydgate places a high emphasis on loyalty to his abbey institution and expounds upon spiritual strength as a corrective to human fallibility. Nevertheless, Lydgate and Abbot Curteys appear to have valued one another as individuals, and strength and weakness, hope and fear, and aspiration and ambition often belie each other. The presence of one accents the underlying presence of the other. Thus, the definition of monastic ideals in Lydgate’s poetry is humanizing because it points to the inextricable tensions that are part of the human condition.\textsuperscript{67}

To see Lydgate as a monk-poet is to acknowledge the essentially conservative values in his work as the terms on which he is best understood. A number of Lydgate scholars in the last ten years have rightly called attention to this conservatism. Lydgate’s religious devotion, ratification of estates theory, and misogyny all shape his outlook. While positing such conservative terms for understanding Lydgate, these scholars also caution against presuming we know exactly what such labels mean (Colton 109; L. Cooper 97-100; Gayk 201-03; Straker 122). Much dismissal of Lydgate’s work is attributable to responses to Lydgate’s conservative stance, especially as it stems from his

\textsuperscript{66} Nor do I dismiss the possibility, for the scholarship is split on the subject. Walter F. Schirmer and Alain Renoir both frame book-length studies around the premise that Lydgate’s works pave the way for the next age when read within his historical context, but Derek Pearsall disputes these arguments on the basis of Lydgate’s originality. Lois Ebin returns to the view of Lydgate as innovator by suggesting he is best understood through his development of genre apart from his historical circumstances (Ebin viii-ix; Pearsall, \textit{John Lydgate} 14-15; Renoir viii; Schirmer xiii).

\textsuperscript{67} Such monastic idealism and the hope to express it through poetry are similar to the idealism of Lydgate’s laureate pose as defined by Robert J. Meyer-Lee. Both ideals assume the nobility of princely and monastic endeavors and both must deal with the inherent tensions between this assumed nobility and the political interests of the Lancastrian dynasty or Bury St. Edmunds Abbey (Meyer-Lee 41-42).
monastic affiliation. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Lydgate’s reputation as a skilled writer of verse remained intact. His religious poetry had fallen out of favor with Henry VIII’s Act of Supremacy and subsequent Tudor appropriation of Chaucer and John Gower as proto-Protestant writers. Lydgate, as a Benedictine monk, almost by default was placed in opposition as an Ur-Catholic who was thoroughly medieval. This resulting “periodization” has contributed to even later hostility toward Lydgate, including Joseph Ritson’s early nineteenth-century attack on Lydgate as a “voluminous, prosaick, and driveling monk” (Renoir 4-7; Ritson 87-88; Simpson 40-44). This assault is also telling of religious antagonism because its force falls on the word “monk.” For a criticism of Lydgate’s poetry, it is a spurious detail to raise. The connection between Lydgate’s poetry and monastic profession still needs definition. Helen Cooper’s statement that “it remains almost part of our scholarly credentials not to treat religious conviction seriously” acknowledges the continued academic tendency to stigmatize religion (xi).

Acknowledging Lydgate’s conservative values as a monk-poet is an important starting point, but we also must be careful not to reduce the “conservative” descriptor to a label. Shannon Gayk helpfully shows the complexity of Lydgate’s religious poetry by referring to his position toward affective piety as traditional:

[Traditionalism] offers an alternative to participation in a present that one cannot understand or accept. Its very incongruity with its own historical moment disrupts the status quo and blurs the boundaries between what is reactionary and what is radical. . . . [In] his insistence on the reclamation of old-fashioned models
of devotional practice, Lydgate’s appropriation of a distant past challenges the affective, and in the Monk of Bury’s eyes, subjective, influence of fifteenth-century forms of piety. In bringing these old models into the new vernacular discourse, Lydgate seeks to control the emphasis on phenomenal experience . . . by constructing a model in which traditional referential aesthetics more typical of monastic lectio and homiletics might be translated into the vernacular. (202)

For Gayk, Lydgate changes the terms of the debate on affective piety by inserting a third alternative (guided devotion in the vernacular) instead of simply affirming or denying the practice. It is a position that reflects Lydgate’s attempts to navigate his lived experiences as a Benedictine monk and as a poet who followed Geoffrey Chaucer by writing in the English vernacular. Lydgate’s reliance on traditional Benedictine values extends throughout his corpus and how these values color each work should be of continual interest.68

These pictures of Lydgate as monk-poet and abbey-poet are different from but complementary to depictions of him as Chaucerian continuator and Lancastrian poet. When steeped in his Benedictine profession, Lydgate is not dependent upon his Chaucerian and Lancastrian connections. Reverential, yes, but respect for Chaucer and the monarchy coincides with respect for St. Edmund and the Benedictine order. Lydgate’s service to his abbey is a much closer, more personal motivator. It humanizes him as he writes on behalf of individuals who interacted with him on a daily basis. The

68 We must also be cautious not to overly simplify the more liberal values of poets like Chaucer. As broadly and tolerantly as Chaucer treats his pilgrims in the Canterbury Tales, his references in the “Nun’s Priest’s Tale” to the 1381 Peasants Revolt border on a satiric treatment of the uprising’s participants (Aers 450-51).
closeness of these relationships intertwined with the spiritual calling of his profession contributed to an aura of sanctification between Lydgate and his brethren that finds some of its greatest expression in Lydgate’s Edmund works. Lydgate’s service to the spiritual and political goals of Bury St. Edmunds Abbey in its own affairs and as it interacted with the Lancastrian court and local burghal populace thus extended this aura to create sanctified communities through his poetry and ideals of monastic service.
Appendix—Geffrei Gaimar’s Chivalric Counter-Image

Geffrei Gaimar’s *Estoire des Engleis*, written in 1136–1137, is an example of a later Edmund work that reacts to the Benedictinism of earlier redactions (Grant 7). Gaimar, who appears to have been a secular cleric instead of a monk, writes in French rather than English and returns the legend to chronicle from hagiography. Like Ælfric, Gaimar is interested in good kingship, but he approaches it from the standpoint of Anglo-Norman chivalry instead of the Anglo-Saxon *comitatus* relationship (Gillingham 36-37). Additionally, while Abbo and Ælfric provide a definite commentary on the rule of King Æthelred, Gaimar’s view of kingship is more distant. His depiction of Edmund does reflect on the early rule of King Stephen of Blois (a king whose reign became marked by civil war), but Gaimar’s view of Edmund and Stephen is much more ambiguous. The redaction seems most intent on inverting Benedictine support of Stephen through ironic treatment of Edmund.

In analyzing the Edmund legend in the *Estoire*, the shift back to chronicle is the first of its features to note. Thomas Arnold comments upon two traditions for Edmund’s legend: a religious view associated with the hagiographic accounts of the Benedictines Abbo and Ælfric, and a secular view tied to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, in which Edmund fights instead of accepting martyrdom. Accounts by Asser and Ethelwerd

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69 Viewing the *Estoire* as a reaction to Benedictine values may help to explain why Lydgate consciously or unconsciously omits the most significant of Gaimar’s additions where the *Estoire* did indeed influence Lydgate’s source, Bodley 240 (McKeehan 58; Reimer 183).
briefly continued the chronicle tradition, but it ended after 975 (Arnold 1.xx; McKeehan 14). Gaimar appears to revive this tradition after more than 150 years by relying heavily on the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for his material. Often he does little more than add his own details to the base material. Gaimar’s redaction of Edmund’s life displays this method (Gillingham 45-46). Against this backdrop of chronicle versus hagiography, Gaimar appears to react to Benedictine values even at the level of genre.

With a shift of genre in mind, Gaimar’s redaction unfolds as follows. He begins with a statement introducing Edmund as a holy king who opposed the invading Danish forces. At this point, Gaimar then makes clear that Edmund met the Danes in an initial battle, clarifying the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*’s statement “in that winter King Eadmund fought against them” (*Anglo-Saxon* 2-3; Edwards, Introduction 6-7). He then omits the council scene from Abbo’s *Passio* (another of his sources) in favor of an escape scene in which Edmund attempts to bluff his way past Danish soldiers. The martyrdom scene follows in a shortened form that names Edmund’s executioner but does not include any reference to the martyr’s prayers. Gaimar’s episode then ends by glossing over Edmund’s miracles, saying, “But seeing that his life, and his history and [associated] service readings are available elsewhere, he [Gaimar] has not [written more] on this occasion because of the [present] history that he has [already] started writing” (Gaimar 160-61). This final sentence’s own awareness of chronicle versus hagiography is another mark of Gaimar’s appropriation of monastic influences. The omissions and revisions of the redaction also reflect this effort. The results coincide with the interest in chivalric values that Gaimar displays throughout the *Estoire* (Gillingham 37).
Geffrei Gamiar is a vague figure, but he appears to have been an individual unafraid of speaking against the dominant monastic and royal influences of his society. He names himself five times throughout the _Estoire_, but there are no other extant records that can be tied clearly to him so all impressions of him must be deduced from his work. The fluency Gaimar had to write in French and read the Latin and Old English of Abbo’s _Passio_ and the _Anglo-Saxon Chronicle_ indicate he was well-educated. Such an education and a flippant attitude toward monastic values in the _Estoire_ contribute to an impression of this poet as a secular cleric (Short xii-xiii). Examples of this attitude include the acceptance of courtly values such as long hair on young men (condemned elsewhere by monastic writers) and the approval of such individuals as Robert of Belleme, Hereward the Wake, Earl Hugh of Chester, and King William Rufus, all of whom monastic writers depict negatively elsewhere. Because these depictions were very widespread, Gaimar’s contrary depictions may have been deliberate efforts to combat Benedictine perspectives (Gillingham 42, 49-51, 55-56). Such an attitude toward the Benedictines also fits within the atmosphere of conflict that the order faced as the Cistercians branched off from the Benedictines in the eleventh century and as the secular clergy increasingly rose to positions of power in the twelfth century (Clark 56-58; Hermann 72; Potts 27-28).  

The absence of a recorded benefice attached to Gaimar’s name, however, obfuscates this picture of him as a secular cleric. It may be that Gaimar was never more than a clerk who only assisted a beneficed priest or that the records of Gaimar’s benefice

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70 The Cnut charters discussed in Chapter 1, both the originals and Lydgate’s translations, once again point to the ongoing antagonism between the Benedictines and secular clerics.
were simply lost.\textsuperscript{71} The absence of these records also leaves open the possibility, no matter how remote, that Gaimar was an instance of the rare individual who acquired an education in Latin through the church without then pursuing an ecclesiastical career (Orme 39, 257-58). Gaimar’s understanding of the French and Old English languages and of Danelaw traditions, as reflected in the \textit{Estoire}, suggests that he was of Norman descent but raised in England, possibly Lincolnshire (based on where the patrons Gaimar names lived). This upbringing alone is enough to account for him learning first-hand the French and Old English languages and Anglo-Saxon customs even if he never achieved or never chose to pursue his own benefice. (Short x-xi, xiii).

Scant as the information on Gaimar is, these details suggesting he was a secular cleric instead of a monk are helpful for understanding the \textit{Estoire} as a work that challenges the dominant forces in society. This challenge is even more evident when paired with what the work reveals about Gaimar’s patrons. At the conclusion of the \textit{Estoire}, Gaimar alludes to a book commissioned by Earl Robert of Gloucester, owned by Walter Espec, and loaned to Ralf fitz Gilbert as a source (Gaimar 6435-58). These men represent an interesting cross-section of the nobility of King Stephen’s reign and their loyalties. In 1138, Walter Espec would be a leader for King Stephen’s forces in the Battle of the Standard, one of the most important battles of the civil war. In contrast, Robert of Gloucester, an illegitimate son of Henry I and half-brother to Mathilda, proved to be a major opponent of Stephen from the time when they both were courtiers in Henry I’s court through Stephen’s own reign. Ralf fitz Gilbert was a member of the large Clare

\textsuperscript{71} The first of these possibilities seems incredible given how desirable and sought after well-educated priests were throughout the Middle Ages (Cox 59).
family whose members opposed Stephen at various points in time. One example is Richard fitz Gilbert who acted as an early supporter of Stephen in his succession bid. However, in the spring of 1136, at the beginning of Stephen’s reign and around the time Gaimar was beginning the *Estoire*, Stephen denied Richard’s demands for rewards. In response, Richard vowed future opposition to the King. Another presence of the Clare family appears in the person of Ranulf II Guernons, fourth earl of Chester, who supported Stephen early on but turned against the king in 1141. With the Clare family’s history of conflict with Stephen, Ralf fitz Gilbert and Gaimar in all likelihood were less sympathetic toward the King from the beginning (Crouch 25, 44-45; Gillingham 33-34; Hollister, Stacey, & Stacey 172; Short xxiv-xxx). Thus, through his associations with his patrons and own feelings toward monasticism, Gaimar was in a position where he could and might even be expected to criticize King Stephen.

Criticisms of Stephen in the *Estoire* are not overt. In fact, Gaimar is more ironic than satiric (Gillingham 57-58). Moreover, out of the 6532 lines of the *Estoire*, the account of St. Edmund forms a scant 61 lines. With such a paucity of material, it would be dangerous to read too strong a political statement into this account of Edmund. Nevertheless, Gaimar’s adaptation of the Edmund legend to his own chivalric themes is significant to the legend because it diminishes the hagiographic elements. \(^{72}\)

Casting Gaimar’s depiction of Edmund alongside some of the early events of King Stephen’s reign also adds color to his redaction even if Gaimar’s own political stance is more ironic than critical.

\(^{72}\) As alluded to above, Gaimar’s redaction is not a dead end in the later development of the legend because it influences Bodley 240 (McKeehan 58).
The scenes that Gaimar adds are reflective of his historical situation under Stephen’s reign. One example appears through Edmund’s battle with the Danes:

[Edmund] waged war with as many troops as he could muster, but never managed to win because of the numbers the Danes had. The [Danes] fought with great ferocity and emerged victorious on the battlefield. God! What a calamity it was for their lord and king Edmund, who was driven back into a stronghold where his principal place of residence was. (Gaimar 156-59)

Edmund faces inevitable losses when combating his enemies. Such inevitability seems reminiscent of the Welsh rebellion of early 1136. In April of that year, Richard fitz Gilbert de Clare was waylaid by the Welsh and slain. Two forces subsequently sent by Stephen found themselves overwhelmed by the size of this same rebellion.\textsuperscript{73} It was ended later that year when Earl Robert of Gloucester, without support from Stephen, rode into Wales to negotiate a peace that involved giving up substantial quantities of land (Crouch 54-59). It is not possible to draw single parallels between characters in this scene and those in Gaimar’s historical situation, but loose parallels appear between Edmund and Richard fitz Gilbert, the leaders of the two English armies, and Robert of Gloucester through their disparity in numbers and losses of life and land.\textsuperscript{74} These parallels are timely because March 1136 is approximately the time when Gaimar is

\textsuperscript{73} The first of these two forces was led by Baldwin fitz Gilbert, brother to Richard and, naturally, also Ralf’s relation.

\textsuperscript{74} The parallel between Robert of Gloucester and Edmund increases if one considers that Robert was one of the eldest and favorites of Henry I’s illegitimate sons and would potentially have been a contender for the throne had he not been born outside of wedlock (Hollister, Stacey, & Stacey 172; Warren 13).
thought to have begun his work on the *Estoire* (Short xii). Such parallels also could reflect a sense of futility in Stephen’s actions.

The *Estoire*’s account of the battle continues with Edmund’s capture. In reworking this scene, Gaimar also reflects the situation under Stephen through Edmund’s subtlety during his escape attempt:

The heathens pursued him [to his stronghold], and Edmund came out to meet them. The first people who met up with him took him prisoner, asking him:

‘Where’s Edmund? Tell us where he is.’ [Edmund answered] ‘That I will, and willingly so, you can be sure: for as long as I have been taking refuge here, Edmund has been here, and I have been with him. When I left, he left as well. I have no idea whether he will get out of your clutches.’ (Gaimar 158-59)

Edmund’s response shows a great deal of subtlety as he evades revealing his identity to the Danes through his veiled answers to their questions. This scene nicely puts forward Gaimar’s ironic humor and has a similar character to the political machinations of Stephen and his contemporaries. Stephen’s ascent to the throne is shrouded by his claims of Henry I naming Stephen successor from his deathbed (Crouch 30-31; Hollister, Stacey, & Stacey 72). The involvement of Stephen’s Benedictine brother, Henry Bishop of Winchester, in securing the Church’s support for Stephen’s accession likewise adds to the furtive air Stephen shares with Edmund in this scene. Similarly, Robert of Gloucester’s peace negotiations, unsupported by Stephen, seem another occasion on which such subtlety would be necessary. Gaimar does not appear to be critical of Edmund for his evasiveness so much as ironic; he goes on to say, “Now the king’s fate is in God’s hands
and in Jesus”” (Gaimar 158-59). However, the air of secrecy in the scene defines
Gaimar’s whole episode with Edmund. Similarly, Stephen had to reign chiefly through
subtlety and subterfuge because his rule was constantly challenged.

The openness of these examples leaves a great deal of room for reading different
historical figures of Gaimar’s day into Edmund’s legend, but such ambivalence marks
much of the Estoire. As a history of England, Gaimar’s work covers the reigns of many
different kings. On the whole, Gaimar is positive toward these kings, including those
such as William Rufus, of whom monastic writers are usually critical. In contrast, Cnut
and William the Conqueror, champions of monastic institutions as seen from the charters
in Chapter 1, are more ambivalently treated (Gillingham 47-48). Thus, Geffrei Gaimar’s
Estoire des Engleis appears as a work that inverts the genre and many of the monastic
values in the traditionally Benedictine St. Edmund legend as part of its own agenda to
critique King Stephen and the monastic supporters of his rule.
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